


Safety catch



Officers in John's force should have two day's officer safety training a year, which equates to twelve hours in total, in line with ACPO recommendations. He says they are lucky if they receive one day. A Federation survey highlights the gaps in safety training.

Tina Orr-Munro reports

 Faced with a gun man, a knife-wielding robber or a potential terrorist attack, it is essential a police officer has undergone crucial safety training.

However, Federation research finds some forces are leaving police officers without basic preparation for such situations.

John, not his real name, has been involved in officer safety training for five years. He estimates that at one time 30 per cent of officers in his force had not received any safety training for two years or more and were no longer 'qualified' to use their equipment.

'That was the worst point. Now it is closer to 15 per cent,' he says.

He adds that the problem lies with chief officers. 'A database flags up officers who are outside qualification and they need to take some responsibility for ensuring they receive refresher training, but the problem is it just isn't a priority for chief officers. They don't take it seriously. HMIC isn't interested either. This year their priority is first aid, not officer safety training.'

Another problem is the lack of trainers. In John's force there are just a handful of instructors to more than 1500 officers.

'It can take up to three months for officers to get on a course and for those who have had no training for over two years or more, they have to go on a two day refresher course which takes even longer,' he says.

But, as John points out, his experience is by no means unique. Unfortunately, this worrying state of affairs is repeated in many other forces.

A recent Federation survey has revealed that officer safety training has fallen victim to the postcode lottery syndrome that has afflicted driver training, with some officers receiving as little as four hours instruction while colleagues elsewhere have completed as many as 21 hours of training.

Eighty per cent of forces responded to the investigation into officer safety training undertaken by the Police Federation of England and Wales.

It found that although on average officers receive the

ACPO-recommended 12 hours of safety training, this masked wide variations from force to force.

In ten forces, officers received less than ten hours training. Nine forces gave officers more than the recommended 12 hours of training with one force devoting 24 hours to officer safety. One force, which the Federation declined to name, gives its officers just five hours to learn all they need to keep themselves safe while on the streets.

Paul Davis, secretary of the operational policing sub-committee, said the figures show forces are not giving officer safety enough priority. 'We do have a national standard that ACPO asks forces to adhere to, but that is clearly not happening around the country.'

'Unbelievably officer training is still viewed as an abstraction, but we would argue that this a core policing function and the appropriate amount of training time must be allocated to it.'

In addition to the length of time devoted to training, the survey also questioned forces on what quality train-

ing they offered. Again wide variations were revealed across the country.

Fifteen modules form the national training package available to forces to use, but the number of modules actually taught over year was, on average, 12 which again hides the true picture with some areas offering just four of 15 modules and others offering all 15.

The reason for this, says Mr Davis, is that force trainers are given the training package and allowed to choose which elements they intend to teach.

'It is a case of "here is the training package" it is up to individual force trainers to decide which parts they then use,' says Mr Davis.

In general, all forces train officers in the use of baton and incapacitants. Unarmed defence training and handcuffing also heavily featured in their training, the survey found.

But in some forces baton training and instruction on using incapacitants took less than two hours while officers in other forces received 16

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hours of tuition in their use.

Not all forces could supply details on the time devoted to their OST programme. Use of force, conflict management, medical implications, communication, search use of force and report writing were also taught in some areas in addition to the four most commonly taught modules.

However, crucial areas were neglected. The survey revealed custody, edged weapons, concealed weapons and side-handled batons were among the least taught modules in officer safety training.

Mr Davis says the delivery of training has not kept pace with changes in equipment or situations officers are increasingly finding themselves in and the figures do not bode well for future changes in safety equipment.

'We have to ask if this is the right kind of training. Very little is taught regarding the use of leg restraints or arm restraints. And what if the use of Taser is extended, are forces prepared to devote the necessary time to train officers properly in its use?'

Although the research was unable to determine a correlation between level of assaults and quality of training, Mr Davis says that if officers don't know how to use their equipment properly

they may not use it at all.

'Proper training gives officers the confidence to use their equipment. It is as simple as that. Without it, officers may choose not to use the equipment they have and put themselves at risk.'

The survey results for chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) training were equally worrying. Fewer forces gave details of their CBRN training, but the survey found that on average officers received 21 hours of CBRN training a year.

Little detail was forthcoming on CBRN with only six forces revealing the content of their courses, such as protective equipment, decontamination and degradation.

Training for police support units (PSU) fared slightly better with officers receiving an average of 29 hours of PSU training annually. PSU content covers common minimum standards (CMS), mutual aid support, tactics and baton use. However there were similar complaints about the lack of training time revealed in the survey, along with poor equipment and facilities.

The Federation believes the answer to improving officer training could lie in introducing performance measurement as one of the ways of making sure forces are allocating the appropriate



Police officers need top-notch training for a potential terrorist attack

time and courses to safety training.

Mr Davis urges HMIC to make better use of the statistics currently available.

'We collate figures for the HMIC on complaints against police officers and assaults and then they do nothing with them. There needs to be a response to these figures, we need to look behind them and see if there are any implications for officer safety training. We need to introduce some kind of performance measure, specific to training.

'I would also urge officers to fill out use of force and dangerous occurrence forms to help trainers decide what kind of training is needed.'

ACPO Guidance on training could also be update regularly, says Mr Davis.

'The ACPO firearms manual is continually updated. Why can't the same be done for the officer safety manual?'

The Federation says that in the light of the survey's findings, it will continue to push for forces to adhere to the 12 hours of officer safety training.

As Mr Davis says, 'This is such an important area of policing we need to get it right. We owe it to officers to make sure they are properly trained in the full use of their equipment. It might save their life one day.'



Taser could be extended to all officers but will training keep up?

Survey results:

- 34 forces returned the questionnaires.
- Probationer training in the use of baton and incapacitants took place in all forces (excluding the Met) normally at stage three of their training.
- 59 per cent also taught unarmed defence training and handcuffing.
- On average, six hours were spent on baton use, five hours was spent on incapacitants, four hours was spent on UDT and handcuffing.
- The average number of modules over a year is 12.
- Average number of trainers was 41, although this was skewed by the Met's figures. Two forces had just three trainers.
- 58 per cent of forces leave it to force trainers to initiate individual officer's training
- Refresher training was provided by all forces within 18 months of the initial instruction. Most force train operational officers every year or every six months.
- One force had a 100 per cent record in giving officers refresher training in 2003/4. Another force managed to retrain less than half of its officers in the same period.