

# Becoming a police constable

A guide to joining the  
police service



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# Why join the police

Policing is one of the most varied and rewarding careers. As a police officer, you'll make a positive difference to communities by keeping people safe where they live, work and visit.

## What policing offers

- ◆ A career where no two days are the same.
- ◆ Opportunities to develop and progress in many different directions.
- ◆ Competitive salary from day one.
- ◆ Generous leave allowance.
- ◆ Excellent pension.
- ◆ Family-friendly policies.

## Who the police service needs

The service needs people with a wide range of experiences, backgrounds and perspectives.

Successful officers can problem-solve, work with others to find solutions, and adapt to meet the changing nature of crime and society.

Police officers are the first point of contact for people who are victims of crime, 24 hours a day.

The role requires individuals who care about communities, deliver outstanding service and are ready for a challenge.



# How to join

To become a police constable, you apply directly to a local force. Force websites and [joiningthepolice.co.uk](https://www.joiningthepolice.co.uk) have the most up-to-date information about current opportunities.

## Ways to join the police as a police constable

There are several ways to complete your initial training. These are known as police constable entry routes.

Having different options means people with varying backgrounds and learning preferences can find a route that suits their circumstances.

Local forces decide which routes they offer. All routes follow national standards set by the College of Policing.



## Find out which forces are recruiting near you

You can find out which forces are recruiting right now by searching by postcode on [joiningthepolice.co.uk](https://www.joiningthepolice.co.uk)

Go to postcode checker



# What to expect during training

For all routes, you're a police constable earning a salary from the day you join.

## Core training

You'll receive the same core training regardless of which force you join or programme you complete. This gives you the knowledge and skills needed to become a successful police constable.

## How training works

All routes start with an initial period of off-the-job learning. After this, training becomes mostly practical and on-the-job. You'll spend the majority of your time working with the public as part of an experienced team.

You'll join a shift pattern that includes day and night shifts, and weekends.

## Where you train

Most training takes place within your force. For some routes, forces work with external partners such as universities and other higher education institutions for off-the-job learning elements.

## Training characteristics

**Vocational:** All routes focus on preparing you for a career as a police constable through practical learning.

**Operational:** You'll go on patrol in your community as soon as practical, supported by experienced officers.

**Skills-based:** Training develops critical thinking, problem-solving and evidence-based approaches.

**Reflective:** You'll be encouraged to reflect on experiences and continually develop.



## Assessment and progression

You'll have a mix of assessments designed to reinforce learning. Throughout training, you'll build an evidence portfolio recording your skills and experience. Around two years after joining, you can be signed off as fully competent in operational duties.

### Key milestones

Milestone	Typical timeframe
Initial off-the-job learning phase	Within 5 to 6 months
Tutored patrol phase	Within 10 months
Full operational competence	Around 2 years



# Ways into policing explained

There are four main ways to join as a police constable. Forces can adapt these for specialist pathways, for example, into detective careers.



## Police constable degree apprenticeship (PCDA)

A three-year programme where you gain a fully funded degree while completing police officer training.

### Key features

- ◆ BSc (Hons) in professional policing on completion.
- ◆ Gain specialised experience in your final year (in either response, neighbourhoods, investigation, intelligence or roads policing).
- ◆ Your on-the-job learning contributes to your degree qualification.
- ◆ Off-the-job learning provided jointly by your force and a university partner.



**Best for** – People who want to gain a degree while training as a police officer.



## Degree holder entry programme (DHEP)

A two-year programme for people who already hold a degree.

### Key features

- ◆ Graduate diploma in professional policing practice on completion.
- ◆ Designed to build on critical thinking skills from previous study.
- ◆ Gain specialised experience in your final year (in either response, neighbourhoods, investigation, intelligence or roads policing).
- ◆ Condensed programme covering all training content in two years.
- ◆ Off-the-job learning provided jointly by your force and a university partner.



**Best for** – Graduates who want to use their existing degree as a foundation.



## Police constable entry programme (PCEP)

A two-year programme that can be delivered entirely by your force.

### Key features

- ◆ All core learning covered on programme.
- ◆ Substantive police constable with full operational competence at programme end.
- ◆ Option for forces to accredit with a level 5 professional policing qualification.
- ◆ More advanced development, included in the other routes, takes place on-the-job during your first year post-programme.



**Best for** – People who want to maximise learning and assessment on-the-job.



## Pre-join degree in professional policing practice (PPD)

A two or three-year degree you complete before joining a force.

### Key features

- ◆ Self-funded degree programme via UCAS.
- ◆ Covers core knowledge needed for new police constables.
- ◆ You apply to a force when ready to join. Some forces run a two-year programme for PPD holders or you may join through other routes.
- ◆ Forces can tailor your learning to account for knowledge already gained.



**Best for** – People who want to study and prepare for policing before joining a force.

## Specialist pathways

All four routes can be tailored for specialist careers. New recruits on specialist pathways cover all essential learning plus additional content in their specialism.

### Detective pathways

Forces typically offer:

- ◆ Detective degree holder entry programme
  - for degree holders
- ◆ Detective police constable entry programme
  - usually no degree required

Both involve two-year probation periods and additional post-programme learning.



# Entry requirements

## National minimum requirements

- ◆ Aged 18 or over to join (can apply from age 17).
- ◆ Competent in written and spoken English and numeracy.
- ◆ Level 2 English qualification commonly required (such as GCSE grades 9-4 or A\*-C, or Functional Skills Level 2).



Forces may set additional requirements. Check your chosen force's website for specific details.

## Route-specific requirements

Route	Qualification requirement
Police constable degree apprenticeship (PCDA)	Level 3 qualification (such as two A-Levels or equivalent) or equivalent experience
Degree holder entry programme (DHEP)	Degree
Police constable entry programme (PCEP)	Level 3 qualification (such as two A-Levels or equivalent) or equivalent experience
Professional policing degree holder (PPD)	Degree in professional policing practice



# Application process

The application process has several stages and can take some time. When you apply, you'll follow your selected force's recruitment process.

The process varies between forces. Some forces run information events about applying.

Check your chosen force's website for:

- ◆ routes currently offered
- ◆ when recruitment is open
- ◆ application process details

## Typical stages

1. **Eligibility check** – Confirm you meet basic requirements.
2. **Application form** – Submit your details and supporting information.
3. **National sift** – A situational judgement test and a behavioural styles questionnaire.
4. **Online assessment process** – a competency-based interview, a written exercise and a briefing exercise.
5. **Force interview** – Final assessment stage.
6. **Pre-employment checks** – Fitness, medical and vetting.
7. **Decision** – Contact from force to confirm if your application is successful.



# Next steps

- ✓ **Research forces** – Visit chosen force websites to see which routes they offer and when recruitment opens.
- ✓ **Check requirements** – Make sure you meet eligibility criteria for your chosen route.

- ✓ **Prepare** – Get qualifications and consider which route suits your circumstances.
- ✓ **Apply** – Follow your chosen force’s application process.

## More information and resources



[National police recruitment site](#)



[Sift and online assessment process](#)



[Discover career pathways in policing](#)



[Check if you're eligible to apply as a police constable](#)



[Explore national standards for policing roles](#)



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## About the College

We're the professional body for the police service in England and Wales.

Working together with everyone in policing, we share the skills and knowledge officers and staff need to prevent crime and keep people safe.

We set the standards in policing to build and preserve public trust and we help those in policing develop the expertise needed to meet the demands of today and prepare for the challenges of the future.

[college.police.uk](https://college.police.uk)

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