

# **Specialisms in the Special Constabulary**

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# **Introduction**

# Introduction

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Special Constables undertaking more specialised policing roles, serving in specialist teams and developing specialist skill-sets, is not an entirely new phenomenon. There has however been significant growth over recent years in the scale and breadth of such 'specialist' Special Constabulary roles. This represents an important development in the growing capability and role of the Special Constabulary, but one which has been subject to relatively limited policy, practice, or academic attention.

A benchmarking survey of all forces undertaken in early 2019 counted 1,826 Specials identified by forces in specialist roles. If each of those Special Constables represents a distinct individual (and whilst there will be some double-counting of the same individuals in multiple specialisms, the bulk probably do), then that would represent somewhere in the region of 16% of the current Specials cohort, or just under one in every six Specials.

Such attempts to count with precision the number of Specials in specialist roles presents two key challenges. In some cases there are data limitations at force level. And, as discussed further below, there are some grey areas in respect of defining what is meant by a specialist role. Whilst the research underpinning this report is not suggesting to have entirely overcome those challenges, the data collected nationally does represent the most comprehensive data picture we have ever had of specialist roles across all of the Special Constabularies of England and Wales (the forty three geographical forces and the British Transport Police).

The objectives of this report are:

- To chart the progress achieved to date across forces in the development of specialist roles and the growing

contribution of specialist Special Constables;

- To share insight on the experience of Specials in specialist roles;
- To identify 'best practice' in terms of developing, managing and leading specialist roles;
- To explore strategic perspectives, and discuss the direction of future strategy for specialist Special Constable roles;
- To make recommendations for future policy and practice.

The report is based on evidence gathered through:

- Qualitative fieldwork (interviews and focus groups) undertaken during 2018 and 2019 across fourteen different police forces involving more than forty Special Constables in specialist roles;
- Interviews conducted with twenty-three senior stakeholders across police forces in respect of their future perspectives on specialisms and the Special Constabulary;
- A national benchmarking survey completed by all police forces in respect of their progression in developing specialist roles and data in relation to the types of role and numbers in each role;
- The collection of case studies and identification of examples of interesting and innovative practice, undertaken by the IPSCJ in partnership with volunteer support from the College of Policing;
- Work undertaken in the Hertfordshire pilot project, one of the national Citizens in Policing pilots funded by the Police Transformation Fund, to develop pathways and specialisms.

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## Links with Special Constabulary strategy

The National Strategy for the Special Constabulary 2018-2023 aims to develop the role and contribution of Specials, setting out a fresh and ambitious agenda, much of which points towards the benefits of greater specialisation of role:

- Ensuring Specials 'are being focused on the areas where they can make the best possible contribution';
- Adopting a cultural perspective that Special Constabulary roles and opportunities are 'limited only by our imagination', and that 'provided that Special Constabulary officers are appropriately trained and accredited then they should be able to fulfil most, if not all the functionality of regular officers';
- A commitment to widening the tasks and role across the breadth of policing and into a range of specialisms;
- Maximising the utilisation of skills and experience that Special Constables bring;
- Developing the Special Constabulary model to reflect new and emerging policing challenges, including the 'additional complexities of crime', 'emerging demands on the service', and that 'issues such as vulnerability and safeguarding are now fundamental';
- Whilst there is a recognition that local Special Constabularies need to integrate into local force plans and to focus upon local policing priorities, there is also an identified need for a shifting in the deployment focus for the Special Constabulary nationally across forces to recognise growing awareness and prioritisation of 'vulnerability' in policing objectives (inclusive of child sexual exploitation, high risk offenders, domestic abuse, cyber-crime, serious

and organised crime, counter-terrorism, missing from home, vulnerable families, vulnerable adult abuse, concerns for safety, human trafficking and modern slavery, and mental health).

At a local, force level, many police forces also indicate that developing more specialised roles and contributions for their Specials is one of their strategic priorities for the future. There is a strategic ambition in many forces to develop beyond 'traditional', legacy models for the capability and role of the Special Constabulary, often directly linking into wider police transformational programmes.

## Future areas of focus for the Special Constabulary?

Specialist contributions by Special Constables are one of the key ways in which Special Constabularies can grow and develop their contribution to policing.

In support of the development of the national strategy, the Association of Special Constabulary Officers (ASCO) identified potential areas where the Special Constabulary can enhance its contribution in the future. These are shared below, and can be seen in several cases to have a significant resonance with key areas of specialist role development. Whilst some elements of this list such as providing resource at peak demand, and responding and detecting 'minor crime' are less linked to the growth in specialisms, those elements in the list below relating to aspects such as roads policing, fraud, cyber, CSE, public order and mental health do point to the need to develop greater specialist capability.

- Providing resources at times of peak demand;

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- Tackling violence and knife crime;
- Response and detection of ‘minor’ crimes (aspects of which currently receive limited resource and response, but which can be significant in terms of victim experience and community confidence);
- Roads policing (enhancing resources in an area of policing where resourcing has markedly reduced over the strategic timescale, and in particular in relation to enhancing visible and pro-active roads policing, preventative activity, and supporting and freeing specialist resource to focus on e.g. complex investigations);
- ANPR;
- Counter-terrorism, organised crime, human trafficking, fraud and cyber (all areas where the Special Constabulary can provide additional resource and specialist skills sets);
- Child sexual exploitation;
- Public order;
- Mental health.

Adding to that analysis, the 2018 National Citizens in Policing Benchmarking Report also identified a pattern in thinking at force level which identified three further areas for prioritisation in the development of Special Constable capability and contribution:

- Neighbourhood policing, community engagement, schools and young people engagement (recognising the importance, and recent trends of reduction in resourcing in many force contexts);
- Rural policing and engagement;
- Hate crime and engagement across diverse communities.

It will be seen in the next chapter of this report that the current specialist activity of Specials is beginning to have a good coverage (at least in

respect of practice in some forces, albeit nationally the picture is more patchy) across the bulk of these areas identified, and mostly reflecting quite a good fit between the areas of specialism developed to date, and areas identified as of high potential for growth in Special contribution in the future.

## The case for Special Constabulary specialisms

Whilst this report will present significant growth and progression of the agenda of developing specialisms across the Special Constabulary, there appears on the whole to have been little articulation of the strategic rationale for specialisms. Whilst specialisms have developed quite quickly in recent years, forces tend not to provide clarity behind the ‘why’ they are developing such roles, and ‘what success would look like’ in terms of the future impact of specialisation. There is, as discussed in the sections above, a clear strategic alignment of specialisation with national strategy, and with areas of potential future prioritisation for Special contribution. As the specialisms picture continues to grow and develop nationally, it requires a clearer strategic articulation of the ‘case’ for specialised roles and the objectives that specialisation is aiming to achieve.

To contribute to that strategic debate on the ‘case’ for specialisms, drawing across the data collected in this work, there appear to be seven key, inter-related, arguments:

- The added value delivered by Specials in specialist roles, and the alignment of that value to key areas of policing priorities and to gaps in capability locally and nationally;
- Specialisms appear to be significant in enhancing morale, engagement and

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- retention of longer-serving 'career' Specials
- Specialisms have a role in supporting change to the profile and credibility of the Special Constabulary. Specialist contributions can play a part in repositioning the Special Constabulary, shifting primary perception from Specials as being an ancillary, accompanying, less capable and relatively inexperienced additionality (and mainly in peak demand response policing contexts), through developing specialist roles where Specials bring an enhanced contribution through additional training, experience and professional specialism, which in turn can shift culture, perceptions, reputation and integration in respect of the Special Constabulary as a whole;
- Specialist roles in the Special Constabulary can draw in new skill-sets and capabilities which policing does not have, which it needs to be effective at addressing new challenges, and which it would otherwise find difficult to recruit, train, retain and afford;
- The contribution that specialisms may have in retaining skills and experience of ex-regular officers, and others employed in policing roles, after individuals have resigned or retired from their paid employment;
- The contribution that specialisms may have in attracting more 'career' Specials;
- The contribution that specialisms may have in attracting a greater diversity of individuals into the Special Constabulary, and in increasing the reach of attraction in respect of becoming a Special.

Various elements of this report will explore progress towards different aspects of this 'case' for specialisms.

In very broad terms, impact is beginning to show against the first three elements (added value; morale, engagement and retention of 'career' Specials; profile and reputation), but on the whole less so across the final four elements, all of which in effect relate to the role specialisms can play in attraction into the Specials.

## The technical challenges of defining specialisms

There is no single, clear-cut working definition of a 'specialist' Special Constable. The main focus of this report is on Specials who are either based in a specialist policing team (i.e. assigned and deployed fully or partly as part of a team and function beyond the 'core' policing contexts of response policing and neighbourhood policing), and/or who are utilising specific skill-sets and undertaking specialist functions which sit beyond those more traditional 'core' areas of Special contribution, or both.

In many cases, in practice it is clear that Specials are in a specialism, for example if they are wholly or primarily based in a specialist team such as an airport, a marine unit, or a specialist roads policing unit.

There are other cases where definitions are a little greyer. Such as where a Special has some more advanced operational training, (e.g. specialist driving qualifications, specialist mode of entry, search, public order, etc.) but broadly still functions in a response policing context. Or where Specials have developed some specialist training, for example in problem-solving or restorative practice, but are still primarily situated in neighbourhood policing. Or where Specials operate in specifically tasked specialised functional teams, but which are closely allied to response or neighbourhoods

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(such as warrant execution teams, neighbourhood task groups, etc.).

By and large, this report will steer clear of the need to draw a hard and fast definition around the concept of ‘specialism’; indeed some fluidity and flexibility may be a strength of how specialism models need to develop going forwards. Having said that, where numbers of Specials in specialisms are discussed, such figures tend to mostly exclude (where identifiable) those greyer areas, and to count cases where the definition of being in a ‘specialist’ role is clearly and fully met.

## Structure of the report

The content of this report is presented across three chapters:

- The first chapter sets out the ‘national picture’, providing a summary of current statistics, exploring areas of specialist role development and identifying best practice in managing and supporting specialist Specials. The chapter illustrates current practice by sharing a number of case studies of specialist approaches in forces;
- The following chapter summarises key themes drawn from the IPSCJ research interviews with Specials in specialist roles;
- The third chapter summarises key themes from the IPSCJ interviews with strategic stakeholders, in respect of Special Constabulary specialisation.

The report then concludes by briefly summarising some key recommendations for the future.



# **The national picture**

# The national picture

This section of the report summarises the current picture of specialist roles in the Special Constabulary across England and Wales, based upon completion of a short benchmarking survey by every force, and case studies developed with volunteer support from the College of Policing.

## A growing picture of specialist roles

Nationally, specialist roles in the Special Constabulary have developed a sizeable scale, with roles in every force, and with a quite recent expansion in nature and number of roles.

At the point that the short benchmarking surveys were completed in early 2019, forces identified 1,826 Special Constables in specialist roles.

This is up from the 1,089 figure for specialist Specials from forces in the national benchmarking exercise in 2018. Some of that shift may be accounted for by data issues and ambiguities over what roles are counted (e.g. in respect of public order, where the 2018 figure is much larger than that in 2016). Nevertheless, the figures seem to suggest some pace of growth in specialisms over the period 2018-2019 in forces. This rise is across a period where Specials numbers have fallen overall by over 10%.

Public order and roads policing continue to be the two largest areas of specialisation in terms of the headcount of Specials involved. Those two areas differ, in that most Specials specialising in roads policing will be doing so fully deployed into roads policing units, whereas the vast majority of specialist public order trained Specials will undertake those duties as one aspect of what they do, not as the whole of their role.

Specialism	Number of Specials	% of all Specialisms
Public Order	448	24.5
Roads policing	376	20.6
Search specialisms	134	7.3
Rural policing	127	7.0
Recruitment	118	6.5
Training	109	6.0
Specialist operations	94	5.1
Airport	59	3.2
Public transport (excluding BTP)	55	3.0
Cyber	32	1.8
Joint Response	32	1.8
Public protection	31	1.7
Serious and organised crime	30	1.6
Marine	23	1.3
Investigation	18	1.0
Professional Standards	14	0.8
Police dogs	12	0.7
Fraud	10	0.5
Drones	9	0.5
Horseback	8	0.4
Hate crime, cohesion, LGBT liaison	5	0.3
Negotiator	2	0.1
Other & difficult to classify	80	4.4

## Best practice in developing and managing specialist roles

The research across specialist roles for Special Constables points to some key elements of 'what works' in successful development and delivery:

### *Strategic prioritisation*

- Roles need to be led by policing priorities;

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- Roles should focus upon key areas of unmet need and demand and key gaps in capacity and capability;
  - Roles should focus on areas of policing where the nature of the Special Constable role (i.e. part-time, warranted, etc.) can bring most value;
  - The development of specialisms should be based on a medium-long term strategy for the wider development of the Special Constabulary (role, contribution and capability) as a whole;
  - Ad hoc developments, shaped by personal preferences and the like, should generally be avoided in favour of a planned, strategic approach.
- regulars in the same teams, as should role design and requirements;
  - Based on this understanding of the desired role, a clear job design should be developed and written down;
  - This should include a clear person specification, experience and skills requirement, etc.;
  - A clear training requirement should also be developed, with an accompanying training plan which addresses the resourcing and delivery of required training;
  - Issues of expectations in terms of hours, tenure and other roles should be included.

## ***Being led by the business***

- The experience across many forces is that new specialist Special Constable roles embed and integrate most successfully in teams and commands where senior regular officer leaders are supportive;
- Ideally, specialist roles should reflect this 'pull' from leads across the business, rather than a 'push' from the Special Constabulary itself, which is likely to be much less successful.

## ***Role purpose, design and requirement***

- The key starting point is to understand what role Specials are to be asked to perform. It should be clear from the outset what elements of activity are and are not included, and what outputs and objectives are key to the role;
- Wherever possible, this thinking should closely mirror the role purpose of

## ***Selection***

- All roles should be openly advertised and available for consideration across the Special Constabulary. Anything which suggests closed process, unfairness or favouritism should be avoided (this is particularly important and impactful where there are limited roles available and these are over-subscribed);
- Specials that are interested should have the opportunity for taster shifts;
- Some forces have also pioneered other methodologies to assist Specials to understand what is involved across different specialisms, for example in Merseyside which hosted an event to showcase a range of specialist opportunities;
- Recruitment to all roles should be led by the senior regular/police staff leadership of the department or team concerned, to ensure their full 'buy in' over the volunteer officers coming to serve in the teams for which they are responsible.

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## **Induction and integration**

- The initial induction is a key period for Specials, which underpins successful deployment to a specialist team. There should be a structured induction model;
- Active effort to support the Special to build relationships and to quickly gain competency in the specialist role, pays dividends in helping to ensure successful deployment into the specialism.

## **Culture**

- Where Specials are being deployed into a specialist area in a force for the first time, there is likely to be some cultural scepticism or resistance at first. Actively involve regulars across the team in the process from the start, for example in designing the role, advertising, selection and induction processes;
- A clear leadership position supporting the Specials coming into the team, both from senior leaders in the specialist area and by regular Sergeants and Inspectors, can have a significant impact in helping to create a receptive and supportive culture.

Often, when a new specialist role is first established, there will be some degree of cultural resistance. This resistance tends to dissolve quite quickly, provided that the process is well managed, and most importantly that those Specials coming into the team are operationally safe, competent and value-adding in the role to which they have been deployed. It appears that quite quickly resistance transforms into an enthusiasm for more Specials to be brought into the specialism; something which ironically some Special Constabularies can find hard to deliver on, due to the constraints of low

numbers across the Special Constabulary as a whole.

## **Tenure and turnover**

- Particularly in contexts where there is a significant front-end training commitment (and expense), best practice reflects the need for an expectation of tenure to be set out clearly for such roles;
- Some forces have put in place mechanisms to actively prevent Specials, in what some refer to as a 'butterfly' process, passing from one specialism to another but not staying sufficiently long to provide a 'return' or leave a positive impact for that team or department.

## **Wellbeing**

- In designing the role, there should be a focus on understanding whether the role carries with it any particular elements of requirement for concern or support in terms of wellbeing (e.g. exposure to trauma, exposure to distressing imagery, etc.);
- In doing so, cognisance should be paid to what issues are identified in the same settings for regular officers or police staff, and what particular support arrangements are in place;
- Based upon this initial analysis in role, arrangements should be put in place in terms of selection, ongoing support, and supervision which reflect those particular issues.

Looking across specialist roles, there are several in which such issues appear to be particularly pertinent. For example, roads policing, the most

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substantively developed specialism nationally, can involve significant and repeated exposure to traumatic contexts such as road traffic collisions. Likewise, roles such as those discussed later in this chapter involving partnering with the ambulance service can involve a repeated high exposure to incidents of death and serious injury. Public protection roles and cyber roles can expose to contexts or imagery which is upsetting (for example, of a sexual or violent nature).

## Attraction and specialisms

As reflected above in the discussion of the ‘case’ for specialisms, several of the strategic arguments for specialisation relate to the potential for a more specialised Special Constabulary role to be more attractive in respect of:

- Attracting desired new skill sets and experience into the Special Constabulary;
- Attracting future ‘career’ Specials;
- Attracting greater diversity across the Special Constabulary;
- Attracting ex-regulars and other former police employees into the Special Constabulary.

To date, there has been relatively little progress made through the specialisms agenda to deliver against these attraction goals.

To enhance the impact on attraction of specialisation in the future, there appear to be several key elements that need to be put in place nationally and locally in forces:

- There needs to be a higher profile and more explicit celebration of the contribution of specialists, significantly increasing awareness of these opportunities;

- There needs to be a clearer building of specialisms into a wider strategy of recruitment and of workforce planning. At present whilst there is, as reflected later in this chapter, a great deal of progression of the specialisms agenda, there has been less of a systematic or strategic linkage of Special Constable specialisms into wider efforts to manage recruitment and workforce, and to target and attract future skills;
- Consideration should be given as to whether the development of particular areas of specialisation might be particularly conducive to achieving attraction goals, e.g. focusing on particular skill areas or roles that would attract ex-regulars, or which might be particularly attractive to under-represented elements of the community;
- Where specialisation forms an element of attraction and recruitment, it is important that clearer and stronger pathways are developed for Specials joining up and entering specialist roles.

## Pathways and careers

There is work underway across several forces to develop a more active model of career support for Specials, in particular those ‘career’ Specials who it is hoped will have longer volunteering careers in the Special Constabulary.

Whilst there is no data available to identify what proportion of specialist Special Constable roles are ‘career’ Specials and what proportion are regular pathway Specials (interested in a paid career as a police officer), it appears that the majority of specialist Specials are longer-in-service and are likely to be ‘career’ Specials in terms of motivations. In light of that context, efforts to manage more effectively the

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volunteering careers of long-serving Specials and their pathways through the Special Constabulary, and efforts to manage Special specialisms effectively, have a significant overlap.

A pilot project in Hertfordshire is putting in place a more active model of career management and support for Specials, and as part of that has developed a number of 'pathways' into specialist areas of policing which are fully integrated into that wider model of career management. It is still early stages in the development and evaluation of this new initiative, but early indications are promising.

## Diversity across specialist roles

There is presently only limited data in respect of the diversity of demographics of Special Constabulary specialist roles, and there is a need to improve on this with more systematic data collection across dimensions of diversity, (mirroring the need for improved data on diversity across the Special Constabulary more widely).

In respect of ethnic backgrounds, IPSCJ work in individual forces suggests numbers of BME Specials in specialisms are lower than for the cohort of Specials as a whole, but there is no overall reliable national data picture across all forces in respect of that element of diversity. There are relatively smaller numbers of specialists in some key force areas with the largest BME populations and Specials cohorts (e.g. Metropolitan, West Midlands), which will tend to pull down the overall numbers nationally, but as said the comprehensive picture of those numbers is currently not known.

In respect of gender, the benchmarking returns from forces in early 2019 report that 17.3% of

their Specials in specialisms were female. This is a slightly higher figure than the 13.6% in the 2018 benchmarking data, but still well short of the close to 30% proportion of the wider Special Constabulary who are female. Only 8.2% of Specials in roads policing are female. The figure is higher for public order, at 19.0%, search specialisms at 18.7% and rural policing at 18.9%. The highest female proportion of Specials are in public protection and safeguarding specialisms, and in investigation (both of which are broadly 50:50), and in recruitment supporting roles (just over a third are female). At the other end of the spectrum cyber has only 6.3% female, marine 4.3% female, and some specialist operational context roles, including dog section specialisms, have no female Specials reported by forces at all.

To some degree, there is an equivalency here with patterns of diversity in specialist areas of policing for regular officers. For example, in some specialisms such as firearms, roads policing and elements of specialist operations there remains very few regular female officers. In that sense, the route to progress achieving greater diversity may have parallels for both regulars and Specials. The solutions may well in part sit with consideration of the wider projection and culture of those specialist areas. There may also, as has been the case with the regular service, be a process of maturation over time in terms of how specialisms operate. For the regulars, that maturation has seen some evolution towards an (albeit slowly) improving diversity picture over time in specialisms.

There is also a sense that this diversity pattern mirrors a broader context wherein the diversity of longer-serving Specials is less than for the new-in-service cohort of Specials. For example, in terms of gender, there is a lower proportion of female Specials with five year or ten year service than there is for newly attested Specials, meaning that in basic numerical terms there are

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not that many female longer-serving Specials to engage either in leadership or in specialisms, accounting in part for the lower numbers. As such, efforts to enhance female participation in specialisms in large part need to focus on increasing the career lengths of female 'career' Specials more generally.

Clearly, the causality of that kind of pattern in the data may also run both ways. So, for example, it may be that a skewing or bias towards males being appointed to and occupying leadership and specialist opportunities results in poorer retention rates of female 'career' Specials.

There are some specific elements of the development of specialisms which can help to build and improve the diversity of Specials engaging in specialisms. These include:

- Shifting the pattern of specialisms available across forces. For example, some elements which are currently least comprehensively developed across forces (e.g. investigation, command and control, roles in respect of hate crime, community cohesion, diversity, and LGBT+ liaison and support, roles relating to partnerships, engagement and prevention, or roles relating to intelligence functions) may all be areas which would have a broader and more diverse appeal than some of the currently most developed aspects, e.g. roads policing, public order, etc.;
- Ensuring fair, open and transparent models of advertising and selecting to roles;
- Active career planning, support and management of pathways;
- Actively considering specialist role options as part of wider planning and support for Specials in respect of maternity/paternity absence;

- Considering ways of providing positive support for BME Specials, female Specials and other elements of diversity, in terms of coaching, mentoring, and being provided with 'tasters' and opportunities to engage with specialist options and experience specialist settings;
- Champion those Specials who already represent diversity in specialisms, to help project specialisation as a positive option for all Specials.

## Joint response collaboration with the ambulance service

Joint response collaborative models with the ambulance service involve one or more Specials accompanying ambulance paramedic staff in a jointly operated response vehicle. There are a growing number of forces which have adopted this approach, which is primarily aimed at reducing demand on other ambulance and police units, and improving response times to serious and injury-involving incidents.

Whilst joint response models with the ambulance service are not new, there has been a growth in the number of Special Constabularies engaging in this specialism. Forces with a joint response unit or some degree of similar arrangement include Gwent, South Wales, Hampshire, Surrey, Dyfed-Powys, Kent, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, Cumbria and Humberside.

### CASE STUDY

#### Gwent – Joint Response Unit

The Joint Response Unit (JRU) in Gwent is a collaboration between Gwent Police and the

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Welsh Ambulance Service Trust. It was introduced in 2016 with the aim for both services of working jointly to address and reduce demand on both organisations created by incidents attended by the police that required an ambulance, and vice versa. The operation consists of an ambulance service vehicle, which is staffed by a professional paramedic and by a member of the Gwent Special Constabulary.

**Training and development** - Specials on the JRU are exposed to a wide variety of calls and get to know the force area very well. Involvement in the JRU project brings new and increased skills and knowledge, particularly in more advanced elements of emergency first aid. The JRU is believed to have helped keep mid-career Specials engaged and willing to volunteer.

**Rationale** – Assessment of the JRU demonstrates that it has saved lives and prevented serious injuries. The JRU model provides an additional and focused resource, resulting in faster response times.

The JRU model helps release police officers and ambulances to attend other incidents, thereby enabling both organisations to address other demand priorities. The JRU has been seen to deliver effective initial response in cases of mental health distress.

Organisationally the collaboration has also helped more generally in building working relationships between Gwent Police and Welsh Ambulance, with improved communication.

The operations in different forces are at various stages of development, with the longest-running collaboration having been introduced in 2006. There is a broad consistency across their aims and objectives, with the idea being to attend incidents that would require both police

and a paramedic to respond and thereby reduce the pressure on police and ambulance services at times of peak demand.

The role of the Special Constable varies across operations. In a minority of areas, the Special Constable carries out the role of designated and qualified driver to respond to incidents, whereas in most cases the paramedic carries out that function. In all of the collaborations, the Special Constable exercises a responsibility to manage the scene safely, address any public order or similar issues or threats, so that the paramedic can carry out their role focused on treatment of patients quickly and safely. Some forces also highlight specific police powers, such as section 136 in respect of mental health, which the Special Constable can utilise if necessary as an important contribution to the operation.

Most of the areas with collaborative operations have a dedicated team of Special Constables who are responsible for staffing the operation. The number of Specials on the team varies between 6 and 12 in different forces. This range appears to suit the limited number of days that the collaborations are operational for each week, with most of them only being active at the weekends to address times of peak demand.

## CASE STUDY

### South Yorkshire - Operation Responder

Operation Responder in South Yorkshire involves two Special Constables working a peak-demand shift 10pm-4am in a Paramedic Car. The officers will be in the paramedic car for the full duration of the event. The focus of is on dealing with alcohol-related incidents.

**Rationale** – The Specials in South Yorkshire on Operation Responder assist in effectively



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supporting and deploying the paramedic to alcohol-related incidents, including assisting in incident contexts where the ambulance service might otherwise have to stand off awaiting police assistance.

The focus is on deploying at points of high demand, during periods where alcohol is a key factor in injuries, such as during World Cups, Mad Friday and Bank Holidays.

Operation Responder has now been running in South Yorkshire for ten years, and has acted as a blueprint for developments in other forces across the UK.

**Impact** - The outcomes of the project have included less calls from the ambulance service to the police over periods of high demand, a reduction in the number of double-crewed ambulances being deployed, and reduction in alcohol-related assaults on ambulance staff.

**Future plans** - In terms of future development, South Yorkshire Special Constabulary is exploring whether a similar model might support Fire & Rescue at points of peak demand and key periods where that service experiences problems of anti-social behavior and assault, such as Bonfire Night.

Looking across the forces engaged in delivering JRU models involving Special Constables, some areas are currently seeking to maintain their operations, whereas others are looking to scale up from pilot operations in narrower localities to cover a larger area. There is a consensus that these kinds of collaborations provide valuable support and ease demand for both police and ambulance services and therefore none of the force areas are seeking to reduce or cease their joint response operations.

As with many aspects of Special Constable specialist roles, there appears to have been relatively limited liaison across the different schemes nationally, in terms of sharing learning and approaches. Forces indicated they would welcome more opportunity to share best practice and learning across the schemes.

In terms of future development of JRU models, forces reflect opportunities to enhance future delivery through building extra training and skills to make Specials even more effective in their JRU role. In several schemes there is recognition that there could be even better coordination between police and ambulance control in terms of prioritising and tasking the joint resource.

In common with many other aspects of Specials specialist roles, there is also a recognition that in the future both better data capture and evaluation would be beneficial, to help more clearly build the value case, better understand 'what works', and make future growth in what are seen as being successful models more clearly 'evidence-based'. This needs to involve both police and ambulance data, clearer understandings of incidents attended, outcomes achieved for patients and other members of the public, and impact upon workflow and demand-management more broadly across other units.

There is also recognition in some force contexts of the need for a stronger governance model for some of the schemes, to help support their continuance and to create the right context for future development and growth.

## CASE STUDY

### Kent – Joint Response Unit

The Kent JRU is an operational unit staffed by a paramedic from the South East Coast

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Ambulance NHS Foundation Trust (SECAmb) and two officers from Kent Special Constabulary. The unit became operational in March 2018 and has answered more than 565 calls to date. It is estimated to have saved Kent Police almost £150,000 in the first year of operation. The intent is to expand on this delivery, with two purpose-built vehicles coming into operation.

The Kent JRU operates on Friday and Saturday evenings between the hours of 6.30pm and 3:30am, across Medway and Swale. The unit deploys in a marked ambulance car with additional police badging. The JRU responds to those calls that require both ambulance and police to attend. The aim being to reduce demand on other resources, and to improve quality and speed of response across incidents.

The Kent JRU attends a wide range of incidents, including alcohol-related incidents, assaults, domestic incidents, issues of concern for welfare, instances of medium and high-risk missing persons, mental health crises, incidents of assault on police or ambulance staff, road traffic collisions, issues of substance use, self harm, and suicide. This is a somewhat broader remit than some of the other schemes nationally.

The JRU is tasked by both ambulance and police control rooms, and can also self-deploy.

**Training and development** - Specials on the Kent JRU who hold standard response driving permits are permitted to drive the JRU vehicle on response after passing the SECAmb driving assessment.

Both paramedics and Specials on the unit go through familiarisation training. SECAmb provide a first aid training input where Specials are shown the equipment that the paramedic may ask for when dealing with incidents. Kent Police then hold a similar day for the paramedics where they receive personal safety

training and learn some basic elements of law and police process. Some of the Specials on the JRU have received Method of Entry (MOE) training to allow the unit to deploy to calls where urgent access into a property is needed.

**Future plans** - The work of the JRU has been received positively across the force, with positive engagement of the Unit in attending and responding to a range of incidents.

Future ambitions include expansion to a JRU on every division in Kent.

## Mental health triage

More broadly across policing, there is a recognition of a significant increase over recent years in demand for policing relating to mental health. Overall nationally mental health is a less developed aspect of Special Constable specialism, but a handful of forces have begun to have schemes involving Specials or have plans to develop such provision in the future. Mostly, these developments relate to street triage models, in which Specials serve alongside other professionals, including from health services.

Given the scale of mental health related demand on policing, this is an aspect of specialisation which could have considerable growth in the future. As with many aspects of specialisation, there has to date been only limited research and evaluation. In terms of future development, key factors for success include the need for high levels of training for Specials involved, to ensure professionalised and appropriate response, for good provision of welfare support for Specials involved and for effective tasking of the resource.

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## CASE STUDY

### Essex- Mental Health Street Triage

A team of fifteen Special Constables support a team of six regular officers providing 16 hours per day cover for the Mental Health Street Triage Car. The two cars cover the whole force area. The officers (Specials and regulars) respond to calls for assistance from police officers (not from any other agency) where there is a likelihood of the use of Section 136 Mental Health Act powers.

The objective of the Street Triage team is where appropriate to divert away from Section 136 and from Accident and Emergency, and to provide gateway support to other services. Officers provide assistance and advice at incidents.

The cover provided by Specials on the team has been estimated to have had a value of £75,000 over the period of a year.

The Specials involved also have other roles within Essex police – when not covering Street Triage they serve in their other duties.

**Training and skills** - All officers have received additional Mental Health Act training provided by the local health service, as well as the opportunity to attend further CPD events.

In addition, all Specials in this specialism complete the three-week standard response course. Specials selected for the team have tended to also bring outside experience of mental health, ranging from supporting a family member to working in the health and social care sector. Maximising the skills and experience that the Specials bring from outside has assisted in bringing better outcomes for individuals that may be in crisis.

**Learning** - Embedding a team of Specials within a specialist team, training and equipping them to the same standard as their regular colleagues, and 'buddying them up' has led to significant savings in relation to cover during absences.

The main benefit has been in continuity of service in this very important area. This same integrated approach has been adopted within other specialist teams in Essex, such as roads policing. Regular officer short notice leave requests are often granted if one of the Specials from the team can cover.

**Rationale** - Specials bring additional skills from outside policing that can be valuable in an area such as mental health. Cost savings are delivered through covering across the team, reducing overtime. The Specials involved in the team have helped to raise the overall impact and productivity, and helped ensure a continuity of service.

## **Support to Accident and Emergency**

A less common area for specialist support from Specials is in supporting policing needs relating to Accident and Emergency. One scheme in South Yorkshire, Operation Nightingale, has focused on this area.

## CASE STUDY

### South Yorkshire - Operation Nightingale

The Special Constabulary in South Yorkshire deploys on Operation Nightingale during busy periods such as New Year's Eve, Mad Friday, and Boxing Day. The operation places at least two Specials in the A&E

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departments in each local hospital within the force area.

The deployment is managed closely with hospital authorities, working with their security teams to ensure appropriate operational parameters. The Specials serve between 9pm and 4am to cover peak demand in A&E for alcohol-related injuries and related issues of anti-social behavior and violence.

**Rationale** - Operation Nightingale has reduced demand on other policing resource during busy periods, has supported doctors and nurses and other health staff, other patients and families to be safer and to feel more secure, and has acted as a deterrent on problem behaviours in A&E departments.

## Cyber

One key strategic challenge for policing is the enormous growth of online data and activity, and associated rapid developments in new web-enabled elements of crime, victimisation and vulnerability.

A majority of forces have been developing some form of project or programme to engage volunteers in cyber-related specialist activities, and in many contexts this has included Special Constables. Some of this activity has been under the umbrella of national coordination of the CSCV (Cyber Special and Cyber Volunteer) programme, whilst many other projects have been locally designed and implemented.

Cyber-related activity covers a very wide range of different elements, ranging from quite broad (and often not technically complex) prevention and support work with victims and potential victims, to a wide range of technical-skill based

contributions in relation to system security and prevention of cyber-crime, detection and investigation.

Whilst this activity involving volunteers has begun to grow apace, it is also clear that what has currently been delivered with Specials and volunteers is just the tip of an iceberg of what is arguably required and deliverable in the future.

The business case for engaging Specials and other volunteers in respect of cyber seems very clear:

- A bulk of crime and of other police-related issues and activity now has a digital, cyber element;
- This is a massively expanding element of police remit and demand, largely outstripping traditional police organisational models to 'keep up';
- There are a range of skill areas which policing finds, and will continue to find, very difficult to recruit, train and maintain in terms of a traditional paid employee or officer model. This leaves key capability gaps that technically-skilled volunteers and Specials can form a part in filling.

## CASE STUDY

### Cyber Special Cyber Volunteer (CSCV) programme

The national Cyber Special Cyber Volunteer programme was set up in response to the demand for digital expertise in policing, to cope with lightning-fast developments in technologies and the complexities involved in understanding and dealing with digital criminality and emerging digital threats. The core mission of CSCV is embedding digital expertise into local policing.

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The vision is, working as one team, paid and voluntary, the programme can help bridge the gap between law enforcement and criminals who exploit technology to further the impact and reach of their activities. Responding to the needs of local policing in developing capability and providing tactical support to investigations,

**Rationale** - Cyber Specials and Cyber Volunteers provide key skills to help reduce crime and victimisation, help provide a better service to the public, especially the most vulnerable, increase police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy in an increasingly digitally reliant society, and develop and foster partnerships with industry, academia and other sectors.

CSCV volunteers bring a range of skills, expertise and technical capability which is extremely challenging to recruit, maintain or retain in terms of paid police roles. Just some of the examples of what volunteers bring include specific industry expertise, software development skills, CISCO specialization, ICT training capability, malware analysis, penetration testing, financial forensic investigation and dark web expertise. The current pool of cyber Specials and volunteers include those in full time employment, in roles such as software engineers, information security managers, cyber security analysts and systems architects.

Some of the examples of the work undertaken to date by CSCV include providing assistance with investigations and interviewing of suspects for highly technical cyber-enabled offences; identifying hardware and software to gather digital evidence; support obtaining best evidence, avoiding missed forensic opportunities; and assisting forensic and intelligence analysts with the management and analysis of large volume data.

## Financial investigation and economic crime

Economic crime is a major element of criminality. It is also an area where strategically, historically, the police have been recognised as having limited capability in the context of the scale of threat and criminal activity. As might be expected, given its national and international status as a leading force in respect of economic crime, the City of London has been pioneering the role of Special Constables in financial investigation.

### CASE STUDY

#### City of London - Financial Investigation Team - Money Laundering

The City of London Financial Investigation Team sits within the Economic Crime Directorate. The Money Laundering Team work with partner organisations such as the National Crime Agency and banks to protect the UK from money launderers. On average a Special Constable spends a day a week on this activity. The main tasks include the analysis of financial data, establishing money trails for funds, analysing mobile phone data and executing search warrants.

**Training** - The City of London Police Academy provides the following training:

- 3-day Financial Interviewing Course
- 5-day Counter-Fraud Technician Course. This course includes an examination at the end and a dissertation on how the information learned can be applied in the Economic Crime Division workplace. The course is accredited by the University of Portsmouth.

**Key learning points** - Training is given in fraud and in related organisational procedures, with

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both being continually updated. The Special Constable is allocated to work with a specific team for sufficient time to learn the job and then rotate to other areas within Economic Crime to gain further experience. The Special Constable is, in time, given their own tasks to complete rather than assisting in an ad hoc manner, thus building up their knowledge base, supporting their ability to progress, and maximising their contribution to the force.

**Rationale** - Unlike many regular officers the Special Constable can bring skills and experience from outside of policing, including financial background and their experience and knowledge relating to economic crime.

A Special Constable in this role was awarded Special Constable of the year for 2018 for their work with a multi-million UKP crypto currency Ponzi scheme. They also assisted with an internet-based fraud where individuals were duped out of money for non-existent goods and where the gang were given lengthy prison terms.

## Roads policing and casualty reduction

Whilst there has been a great deal of expansion in the number and nature of roles into which Specials can specialise in recent years, roads policing is by far the single most substantial element of Special Constable specialisation.

One in five Specials are fully deployed into specialist roads policing, which makes it the largest area of Special Constable specialisation by a significant margin. It has the longest history in forces and is the most widespread specialism nationally, evident in 37 forces, and 16 of those forces have ten or more Specials in the specialism. The roads policing specialism is also the aspect of Special Constable specialism which

sees most collaboration between forces, in large part driven by the fact that roads policing is a heavily collaborated aspect of policing more generally.

## CASE STUDY

### Kent – Specialist Roads Policing

The initial idea for the formation of the Roads Policing Team came from the then Chief Inspector for “traffic” at Tactical Operations who wanted to enhance local community involvement in roads policing problems using a Specials team.

At first there was some reluctance from the existing team of traffic officers, but the Specials were gradually accepted as they strived to prove that they wanted to work with the regulars and to become part of their teams.

**Training and development** – First, there were standard and advance driving courses that weren’t watered down, ensuring the requirements were the same as for regulars. The results of the courses were published, to prove no concessions had been made.

The only difference was the modular course style, rather than doing 3 or 4 weeks in one block, which would have caused problems with holiday leave for the candidates. This was made possible by full cooperation of the driver training school who have since used the same principle for the regular trainees.

Following on from the above driving courses, the head of driver training offered the advance driver accredited TPAC courses.

To continue the professionalism of the Specials Roads Policing Team the force has invested in accredited Drivers Hours and Hazchem courses. Approaches have been developed to train

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regulars and Specials together, which has further assisted in integration.

More recent developments are seeing consideration of an expansion of Specials into motorcycle teams. One Special Constable has recently completed the course and become the first Special to become an advanced police motorcyclist.

**Key learning** - Regular colleagues recognise the way the team works and the training received, and it is generally culturally accepted that there is little the Specials team cannot deal with, and recognition of equivalency of competence and training. This reflects the training and experience that the Specials have received.

One key variation across models in different forces is the degree of training provided, and linked to that the extent to which Special Constables exercise specialist driving skills. In some forces, Special Constables specialising in roads policing are exclusively in a passenger, and not a driving, role. In others, Specials have a full range of driving training and qualification akin to regulars in the same teams, and perform the role in a much more equivalent manner. There is a trend nationally towards an increase in driving qualifications and specialist driving activity of Specials in roads policing, with several forces expanding that model to their roads policing Specials in recent years. However, it remains a very mixed picture, with decision-making over access to driver training at a local, force level.

Another key variation is in models of deployment. There are two dimensions to this:

Firstly, whether Specials undertake duties on their own, or with other Specials, or only accompanying a regular roads policing officer. Clearly this aspect is directly shaped by the

above discussion on driving, as if all Specials are in a passenger-only role, the only model of deployment available is regular accompaniment. Many force models operate so that Specials are integrated into regular shifts, and the role is one of performing as an additional officer within that team. The other common model of deployment is one which sees Specials as an additional and distinctly tasked resource, undertaking particular roles or operations through that additionality, over and above the delivery of the regular team.

The second dimension of deployment relates to the nature of tasks performed. In very broad and simple terms, this fits into three main categories, which mirror the functionality across roads policing specialisms more broadly:

- Providing specialist response, primarily to road incidents;
- Undertaking operational activities such as visible patrol and enforcement activity, as part of pro-active preventative activity particularly focused on casualty reduction and tackling the 'Fatal Five';
- Broader visibility, community and prevention work, e.g. providing a roads policing presence at community events.

Whilst in the vast majority of contexts Specials will be involved in all three aspects, in some force contexts there is more emphasis within the role on the first element of Specials providing additional capacity to specialist operational response. In other forces, there is more of an emphasis on Specials providing additionality through the capacity they bring leading to the force being able to undertake more pro-active and preventative activity in respect of casualty reduction.

## CASE STUDY

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## Gloucestershire – Operation Indemnity

This Gloucestershire operation adopts a partnership, pro-active, preventative model for achieving casualty reduction of specific stretches of high-speed, high-incident trunk roads in Gloucestershire. The operation engages a high-visibility, prevention and enforcement approach, with focus mostly on pre-emptive enforcement and prevention work and less on reactive and response activity. The operation is equipped with state-of-the-art detection equipment and has received significant local coverage in press and on social media. The small team has delivered very impressive results in terms of enforcement activity and also visibility and profile. There are ambitions to further expand the operation to more trunk roads.

In some forces, such as the Gloucestershire case study example, the more pro-active preventative position taken in terms of Specials deployment reflects strategic thinking that roads policing has been slimmed down in respect of regular officer roles and that regular teams experience significant challenges of demand. This has in turn constrained the resources and time available for more pro-active casualty reduction and police visibility activity on the roads which perhaps in past times was more deliverable through a larger regular roads policing cadre, and thus Specials can fill some of the strategic gap in terms of visibility and preventative dimensions.

## CASE STUDY

### Cheshire – Roads and Crime Unit

As one of a number of examples across the country, the Cheshire team delivers Special Constables who are integrated within the

specialist roads, crime and motorway policing group.

**Training and selection** - the team has criteria that Specials joining must have more than three years of service, be independent status, and be PSD clear. Specials undertake a modified version of the 3-week motorway and fast roads package, tailored in its delivery to reflect their part-time availability, but not altered in respect of standards. Specials also receive training in drug wipe, custody intoximeter, FIT testing and hospital procedure training. Specials in the team have advanced A-B driving authorisation and can undertake TPAC observer training.

**Model of operating** – Specials on the team move ‘wholesale’ to the county-structured RPU function, and are each aligned with a dedicated ‘block’ of regular officers.

The Specials operate in such a way that they have full ‘ownership’ of workload and case files. Their role is involved in the range of activities and priorities of the team, including denying criminals the use of the roads, responding to serious and fatal collisions, dealing with stolen and cloned vehicles, supporting pursuits and tactical containment, and pro-active, preventative activity to tackle the ‘fatal 5’ of drink/drug driving, speeding, usage of mobiles whilst driving, careless/dangerous driving and not wearing seatbelts.

In terms of future developments, there is thinking in some forces of the potential Specials might bring to growing the capability to actively respond to ANPR. This is seen as a potential area for significant expansion and contribution.

It also appears that there is generally little connection between Community Speedwatch and specialist Specials roads policing roles in



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most force contexts; this could also be an element considered in the future.

## CASE STUDY

### North Yorkshire – Special Roads Policing Unit

Special Constables undertake patrols and work with Roads Policing Group regular officer colleagues. The Specials support the team with road safety campaigns, such as the speed awareness week. Specials also lead on their own initiatives, based on local issues and in line with force priorities. The Specials in the Roads Policing Group (RPG) team also help organise training opportunities for newer-in-service Specials to build their competencies in roads policing.

**Training and development** - The Specials working with RPG receive fast roads training, drug recognition training and field impairment testing, laser devices, as well as specialist inputs on roads policing process and legislation.

**Learning** – The model of Specials in the team is felt to work because they have been positively integrated by RPG colleagues, with good working relationships. Social media has been used to actively celebrate the Specials contribution.

North Yorkshire Police covers a large geographical area making the base for such a secondment crucial – it needs to be central so that it is accessible to all who want to join the team.

The force has found that best practice was to hold a workshop prior to any recruitment to a secondment so that the Specials know what is involved and then make an informed decision

about whether or not it is for them, helping with ensuing commitment and retention.

**Rationale** - Within North Yorkshire and the City of York there are over 6,000 miles of roads, used every day by a variety of people for many reasons from commuting and tourism to committing crime. Policing this vast road network in North Yorkshire is a key challenge recognised in the Police and Crime Plan and so it seemed logical to get Specials involved.

In the past two years Specials in the team have stopped 1,341 vehicles, visited 38 speed check sites, reported 19 for summons, completed 15 collision reports (injury), completed 20 collision reports (non-injury), conducted 886 roadside breath tests, completed 8 roadside drugs test, completed 129 TOR's non speeding, completed 57 TOR's for speeding and seized 69 vehicles.

## **Public order**

One of the more rapidly expanding aspects of Special Constable specialist contributions is public order. In the vast majority of cases, public order is a specialism Special Constables have in addition to exercising other roles.

In terms of basic headcount of Specials involved, public order roles are the most common specialism nationally, involving 448 Specials. 28 forces report that they have public order related specialist roles, with 10 forces identifying ten or more Specials involved. As said, this represents an expanding picture, with several forces evolving their approach to public order and Specials in the past two years.

There is widespread agreement that there is a 'business case' for developing public order trained Specials and building their deployment

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across the range of public order activity in forces.

There are also some challenges which have been experienced in a number of forces:

- Challenges of achieving sufficient deployment of public order trained Specials. In some forces limited utilisation and deployment has been a feature which has undermined value from the model of using Specials in public order;
- Linked to the above, the frequency and range of public order activity in different force areas varies widely, and the reality is in some smaller or less urban force contexts there is a relatively limited picture of public order deployment overall;
- There still appear to be some cultural and process barriers at times experienced in Specials operating across force boundaries and on mutual aid.

## Child Sexual Exploitation

Recognition has grown in recent years of the extent of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), and of the need to build policing and community resources to disrupt and tackle perpetrators and to actively support and protect victims. Despite significant development of intelligence and resourcing in recent years, CSE remains an aspect where policing is 'catching up' with an emergent and significant newly recognised area of threat and harm. Several forces have identified this as an emergent aspect of policing prioritisation into which specialist Special Constable roles can make a significant contribution.

## CASE STUDY

### Nottinghamshire – Child Sexual Exploitation Disruption Team

The Nottinghamshire Police CSE Disruption Team undertakes public protection activity across the county of Nottinghamshire.

One advantage is that the Specials on the team often have a preferred availability of evenings and night shifts, which is when CSE is most prevalent.

**Training and selection** – the team encourages training, including in relevant legislation and investigatory skills and procedure.

There is a recognition that the role would particularly suit those who have some prior experience of working in the CJS, and in particular ex-public protection regular officers, or those with prior professional experience in child protection and similar fields.

**Outcomes** - The team delivers substantive, targeted interruption activity and intelligence-based activity. Specials submit public protection notices, submit intelligence, undertake arrests, and have actively seized vehicles, worked with immigration authorities, and generally disrupted related criminal and anti-social activity. The team is currently utilising new CSE Hotel Notice legislation to target hotels in Nottingham.

CSE is a relatively recently emergent area of specialisation in the Special Constabulary, with only a handful of forces having engaged in specialist roles in relation to it, although several other forces state they are considering such developments. The current more evolved examples, such as in Nottinghamshire and the case study below of Operation Labyrinth in

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GMP, could provide useful learning for future developments across other forces.

## CASE STUDY

### GMP - Operation Labyrinth – dealing with child sexual exploitation.

Based out of Ashton under Lyne police station, the GMP Operation Labyrinth is part of and takes its direction from the Phoenix team, which is a team working with partner agencies to identify children at risk. This team deals with child exploitation issues from first information to prosecution of offenders, as well as safeguarding victims.

The Operation Labyrinth element consists of two Special Constables who operate every Thursday evening in plain clothes and an unmarked car. They receive their briefing pack and CSE related support materials from the Phoenix team on the night.

A summary of the activities of the team is as follows:

- Tracking down released offenders and checking their bail conditions.
- Speaking to concerned parents.
- Speaking with potential victims who have been seen contacting known offenders.
- Issuing Child Abduction Warning Notices (CAWN's) to potential child groomers or people having inappropriate contact with children.
- Following up previous contacts for intelligence purposes.
- Visiting "hot spots" where children gather and could be targeted by grooming gangs or individuals. Provide

children with material and merchandise related to the "It's Not OK" campaign.

**Training** - A training package was delivered by members of the Phoenix team covering the background to child sexual exploitation and the processes and procedures that need to be followed when dealing with it.

**Key learning points** - The need to look at every situation with an open mind, discounting nothing. The knowledge and experience that their day jobs provide can sometimes give Specials a totally different perspective to situations that serving officers might have, being able to look at something from a very different angle. Given the nature of the role it isn't suitable for everyone, so candidate selection is important.

**Rationale** - For various reasons it was becoming difficult to resource this important role with regulars. A small number of Specials were recruited to work on the operation, initially with a regular officer. However due to their commitment and success they were asked to take over the delivery of Operation Labyrinth on a full-time basis.

Specific impacts include the prevention of continued grooming of a 14 year old girl and the resolution of a key element in a case which allowed the Phoenix Team to successfully close it. The success of the team is measured by the number of Child Abduction Warning Notices issued and interviews/visits with victims and offenders. The operation is a continued success and makes a sustained and significant contribution to the local community.

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## Public Protection

The prominence of public protection, risk of harm and vulnerability has risen in policing over recent years, refocusing to some degree from previous prioritisation of volume acquisitive crimes. There has been less of a shift in terms of development of specialist roles in the Special Constabulary than might have been expected, but several forces have developed opportunities for Specials to contribute.

Most prominent within such new specialisation models has been Specials in public protection teams that focus on the management and supervision of registered sex offenders. Specials in these teams have been recognised not only to play a significant role in helping to maximise capacity (for example, home visits need to involve two officers, and Specials operating in the teams can significantly leverage up the capacity to undertake visits), but also through skill sets, insight and experience that Specials can bring. This has particularly been the case in respect of IT skills in some force contexts, where Specials on home visits have been able to identify risks relating to IT, based upon their 'day job' experience and skill-set from outside of policing.

Public protection roles do carry challenges as a Special Constable specialism, not least in terms of wellbeing and support linked to the exposure of Specials to upsetting or unpleasant material relating to cases. This is a role which is not for every Special Constable, and best practice would point to the need for robust assessment and screening of those who wish to specialise in such work.

## Investigation

Investigation is an area of policing where specialist Special Constable roles have overall seen least development. This now appears to be beginning to change, with several forces developing initiatives to introduce Specials into investigatory contexts.

### CASE STUDY

#### Hertfordshire - Case Investigation Team pathway

Special Constables on this developmental pathway in Hertfordshire are based in the Case Investigation Team and support the investigation of volume crime. Whilst not formally a 'detective' role, Specials will utilise investigative and communication skills, supporting the investigation of crimes relating to persons in custody, including interviewing suspects, helping to conduct further enquiries and building case files to charge prisoners with offences.

**Training and selection** – Specials who are interested in joining the Special Constabulary in case investigation will complete the same initial training and undertake initial building of policing experience and competency on either a response or neighbourhood team. However, they will also be on a 'tailored pathway' which will see them completing case investigation team shifts and being inducted into how case investigation works.

Specials who join case investigation are allocated to a particular team for support, and receive coaching and mentoring. Specials receive role specific training including tier 1 suspect interview training, tier 1 witness interview training, Athena case file preparation, and out of custody disposal workshops.

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The Officer in the Case (OIC) remains a role held by regular officers, with Specials working closely to support investigations.

Eight forces have been identified as having Specials in specialist investigatory roles, but the numbers tend to be small, with one or two Specials involved. Some of these instances reflect regular officers with a background in investigation joining the Special Constabulary after retirement from the force. Some other specialist roles, for example in the Metropolitan Special Constabulary and in City of London (e.g. economic crime) also are investigatory in nature.

Essex Special Constabulary has recently launched a new substantial programme of seeking to attract Specials into investigation roles, including in more specialist crime areas. There is currently very little development of specialist Special Constable roles relating to investigation of serious crime, but some indications of plans to develop such roles in the future.

## Professional Standards

Traditionally, Professional Standards Departments have not had roles involving Special Constables. Eight forces now have officers in PSD roles (the Metropolitan Special Constabulary, City of London, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Dorset, Devon and Cornwall, North Wales and South Yorkshire).

## Operational support

There are a range of Special Constable specialisms across areas of specialist operations

and operational support. These range from search, dogs and mounted, to critical incidents, events and football roles. Many forces have specialist operational roles that Specials operate in.

### CASE STUDY

#### Hertfordshire – Operational Support Team

Specials serving in the Operational Support Team fulfil a range of duties including countywide public order deployment, support in respect of football policing, warrants and bail work. The team also supports proactive operations, including plain clothes activity, principally targeting burglars, robbers and those involved in drug and vehicle-related crimes.

Historically, there have not generally been roles for Special Constables in police dog units, although now in a small number of forces some roles are developing (chiefly Kent and Essex, with smaller involvement in Thames Valley).

### CASE STUDY

#### Kent - Dog Unit

Kent dog unit Specials are used as second crew in dog vehicles to help single crewed handlers track and deploy more effectively. The Specials can be involved as the arresting officer and exhibits officer, perform roles relating to welfare for the dog, and assist in tracking.

All Kent Specials on the dog unit are trained on the standard driving course so that they can take stress off the single crewed officer by acting as a driver for the shift.

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**Training and development** – Specials undertake regular training sessions with the dog team as well as introductory training into the team and familiarisation around dogs and tracking. They are provided with the same kit as regular officers, and are also all now being trained in a second skill to allow them to be effective in incidents such as a firearms deployment, with courses on offer including UAV courses, first responder medic, exhibits officer, and PoLSA/Incident commander runner. The concept being the Special can then perform a role if they are brought into a scene with the handler.

Other areas of specialist operations and operational support which are seeing the development of Special Constable involvement include event planning, management and command roles, roles involving vehicle recovery, and roles involving capability in the event of major incidents (for example, Operation Exodus in North Wales, in respect of flood-related evacuation)

## CASE STUDY

### Cheshire – Specialist Operational Support

Building on the strong foundations of the Cheshire Search Team model, the force has evolved a countywide operational support capability that is now multi-skilled, and makes a substantive contribution across the force area providing specialist operational support functions. The team can flex to provide considerable additional capability in operational contexts where there is a need for a surge in resource relating to major incidents, and also has the capability to lead on events and operations with its own planning and leadership capability. Well integrated with the regular

officer team and countywide capability, the team provides an exemplar of how a developed model of Specials capability can contribute across a force area. The team has had an impact, along with other specialist teams in force, in shifting regular perceptions of the Special Constabulary and its capability. In part, the establishment of the team model reflects strong and clear leadership from both regular leaders and Specials supervision, and also a commitment to professionalise and to train up Specials to a complete equivalency in relation to several aspects of operational support.

## **Drones**

One of the more recent developments of specialist roles in the Special Constabulary has related to Specials operating on specialist teams providing drone support to policing. Such a model first began at scale in Wiltshire, and now a number of other forces have drone capability being delivered by their Special Constables (including Surrey, Norfolk, Lincolnshire, and Leicestershire).

## CASE STUDY

### Wiltshire - Police Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) Pilot

Wiltshire UAV team works primarily within the Wiltshire Police county boundary, providing aerial support for the force in a variety of situations, from frontline policing contexts such as missing persons and high profile events to complex firearms incidents. Occasionally pilots have been deployed to other forces to support in complex operations.

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**Training** - Volunteer special constables complete an external training course to allow them to qualify as drone pilots. The course involves over 16 hours of online learning, two days flight school at Moreton in Marsh Fire College using the simulation areas they have set up, flight assessments and written knowledge assessments.

**Key learning** – There are significant benefits of utilising the skills and interest of the Special Constabulary. The project has been a success through the support of the wider force and the investment in equipment and materials to ensure the team could become operational.

The development of the team was supported by a Special Constable with an interest in aviation and a Special who has expertise in governance to develop and drive service delivery.

The team has been established so that the Specials can support the force in delivering through a 24/7 on call system. By investing and developing volunteer Specials it has led to a flexible, skilled workforce who are delivering significant activity and outcomes.

**Rationale** - Initially USAG was a trial, developed and established by the Special Constabulary. As it was being trialled by Special Constables it did not detract away from any core policing roles.

Very few forces were using the technology at the time and therefore it was a risk as to whether it would be beneficial in a small force.

The flexibility in hours is key in the provision of an on-call service, and due to the diversity of the Specials on the unit, some working shifts and some working 9-5, it allows for a good service provision to the force.

There have been a number of successful contributions made by the team, ranging from high risk missing people being located on occasions where other searches have proved negative, increased officer safety at public order events and also to firearms officers on operations and spontaneous incidents. There are very few departments now within the Wiltshire force that have not had a drone involved in operations and deployments.

Evidence from drone footage is now being used to show coroners footage of fatal road collisions and aid in scene investigation.

Building on the strong start to this project, keeping pace with technology is paramount and staff are being trained in different models of drones, all of which have their own benefits. Collaboration with other aviation groups such as military and other forces is also being considered. Future development is also planned to see an increasing number of trained pilots to enhance service provision to the force.

## Rural policing

An important element of the growth of specialist roles in the Special Constabulary has been in respect of rural policing.

Slightly over half of forces, 23, have specialist Specials roles in rural teams or specialist units, with 127 Specials being identified in such roles.

## CASE STUDY

### Hertfordshire – Rural Specialists

Hertfordshire Rural Special Constables are dedicated to the needs of rural communities,

# The national picture

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with an understanding of rural issues and the countryside.

Rural Specials are trained in understanding and dealing with a wide range of issues including heritage crime, hare coursing investigating, fly tipping, poaching, plant and heavy machinery thefts and wildlife offences. Specials have the opportunity to undertake further specialist training and development, including driving 4x4 vehicles and riding quad bikes, mentoring from a rural officer, and undertaking a rural crime awareness course.

The models for rural policing specialism vary widely between forces; and as with many areas of Specials specialism, there has been relatively little sharing of learning and best practice across forces. In some forces, rural specialists may in effect be largely akin to neighbourhood policing roles with a rural context. In others, there is a much greater sense of specialisation, with training in a range of different rural-specific aspects such as wildlife crime.

Broadly, there seems a consensus that such roles suit Specials who bring some experience or specific skill set relating to rural affairs. Often, the police service is experienced by people in rural areas as being relatively unknowledgeable about aspects such as farming. Having Specials who bring personal experience and credibility in respect of such aspects can make a big difference in the effectiveness of rural engagement.

## **CASE STUDY**

### **Devon and Cornwall: Rural Engagement Officer in Rural Engagement Team**

The role of Specials within the Rural Engagement Team (RET) is to assist in the delivery of the Devon and Cornwall Rural Policing Strategy and provide the best policing

response and service for those issues identified as causing risk, harm and vulnerability within the rural communities of Devon, enhancing connectivity to those communities and support to the local policing teams with emerging threats in the rural crime arena.

Activities that Specials engage with in the team focus on engagement with members of the community living and working in rural areas, intelligence-driven patrols (Green Routes), supporting neighbourhood teams in identifying rural community priorities, and providing high visibility patrol and reassurance within rural communities.

The Specials help in promoting membership of Watch Schemes and Community Messaging, as well as supporting rural crime surgeries and events. Special Constables work with appropriate partners to tackle crime and vulnerability including establishing rural crime initiatives in the National Parks in the force area.

***Training and development*** – The role involves a range of specialist training and support to help build the expertise of the Specials engaged. This includes ongoing awareness and technical input on rural crime issues, wildlife crime awareness, poaching crime awareness, livestock movements awareness, and animal rights extremism awareness. Specials are supported in developing expertise in livestock identification, equine and animal by-product awareness, and firearms licensing awareness.

Specials receive 4x4 off road driving training, heritage crime awareness training, and ongoing monthly CPD/awareness training by the regular Rural Crime Officer.

***Key learning*** - The Rural Engagement Team works closely with the Specials road policing team which has allowed it to contribute to a



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wider theme of rural issues such as livestock RTC in the National Parks and other issues related to identified rural community problems, such as raves, fly tipping, poaching, and speeding.

The more the team engages and works in rural policing, the more it is identifying future training needs and future opportunities for operations.

Identifying Specials with knowledge, skill and personal interest in rural affairs has allowed the team to be successful ('round pegs in round holes').

**Rationale** - The Rural Engagement Team is an integral part of delivering preventative policing in response to the NPCC priorities outlined in the national rural crime strategy within Devon and Cornwall. The Specials form a core of officers with additional specialist knowledge and flexibility to be able to support local policing in reducing threat, risk and harm within rural communities. Knowledge in rural policing does not form part of fundamental officer training. The RET is able to uplift and enhance rural crime knowledge to officers across the county. Officers in the RET tend to have additional rural-related skills which they are able to contribute to policing rural crime which isn't usually found in the mainstream. Officers who have specialised in working in the RET have a genuine interest and passion in this field of policing which can be channelled to a specific policing purpose.

The Specials have established a Force Intranet site, working with the rural crime officer, to display best practice across the force. They have helped establish a training programme to enhance rural crime knowledge. And they have established intelligence-driven 'Green Route' patrols to support local communities.

Future plans focus on expanding the team, identifying new officers to offer better coverage across the county. And also to provide regular 'Green Route' patrols to more sectors, and to increase community engagement.

There seems to be considerable scope in the future for a further expansion of specialist Special Constable roles into rural policing. It appears to be an accessible and successfully executed specialism in a number of forces, and forms an attractive role to some 'career' Specials, especially those who have an interest or experience in rural affairs. Rural policing is also an area of policing where there is recognition strategically nationally of a resource challenge, particularly in respect of relatively low regular officer numbers covering very large and remote geographical areas and the commensurate challenges of achieving community engagement and pro-active models of policing.

## Specials on horseback

Whilst there are occasional examples of Specials fully qualifying as Mounted Officers (e.g. at present an officer with TVP), the reality is this is relatively rare, in large part because of the significant up-front training commitment, but also because of the need for significant flexibility and availability for duty to meet operational demand patterns and to justify investment.

What has begun to grow in several forces nationally, sometimes involving Police Support Volunteers and sometimes Special Constables, is a model of volunteers on horseback; these volunteers do not fill the same niche as mounted sections (e.g. in respect of public

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order) but primarily involve deployments in rural areas where the purpose is visibility, community engagement, intelligence building and reassurance.

## CASE STUDY

### Dyfed-Powys - Special Constables on horseback

Dyfed-Powys Police has recently launched its mounted Special Constabulary, following the success of a similar scheme in Norfolk.

The key aim is to increase visibility in rural communities, and to enhance community engagement, helping establish better connections with local farms, residents and businesses. Specials on horseback are able to patrol in places that it is difficult to access by vehicles, which can increase visibility and reassurance particularly for farming communities.

The project looks to proactively patrol farms, rural spaces and rural road networks, to identify fly tipping sites, to identify hare coursing/badger baiting sites, to identify sites of illegal incursion of horses onto land, to patrol car parks/parking areas in rural beauty spots, to carry out high visibility patrols to provide reassurance, and to develop community engagement and submit intelligence.

***Development and management of the project*** – The horses wear crested high visibility coats, and have been given the opportunity to get used to their new kit and the sound of the police radio.

A management plan for the project has been developed, which covers issues of health and safety, care of the horses, and deployment.

There has only been very limited evaluation of such initiatives, and most are relatively recent in terms of their operation. One key question would relate to the relative efficacy of PSV and Special based models.

Volunteers on horseback have shown that they can form a useful part of the rural policing toolkit. Policing in rural contexts on horseback can literally take Specials to parts of the rural community which would not be possible to visibly police by car, but figuratively policing on horseback can also reach out to rural communities in a different way to the police being solely vehicle-based. Many people in rural areas have an association or interest with horses, and it can help in stimulating engagement and communication.

## **Marine Specials**

One specific element of operational policing which has seen the development of specialist roles in several forces is marine units. Nine forces report that they have specialist Special Constables in marine units or teams, amounting to 23 Specials in total (including the Metropolitan Special Constabulary, Cumbria, Dorset, Devon and Cornwall, Essex, Hampshire, Humberside, Kent and Norfolk).

## CASE STUDY

### Kent - Marine & Search Unit

As part of recent cost saving measures the force has restructured the regular Marine team into a dual role Search and Marine team, encompassing the majority of the forces UAV (Drone) capability as well as marine capability. The Specials involved with the team are included in part of that transformation.

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Specials are utilised to either independently patrol internal waterways, tackling anti-social behaviour and areas such as rod licensing and bi-law enforcement. Specials also work closely with partner agencies, a good example being the Environment Agency. Specials also proactively patrol and develop sole operations to tackle issues raised and engage with local user group forums.

Regular officers are now enquiring to return as Specials within the team. Last year one regular officer, who was also one of the Unit's trainers, has returned following retirement as a Special and now contributes to training the Special contingent.

Specials also crew the larger boats on tidal waterways, to help achieve minimum crewing, and practically assisting regular officer wellbeing in respect of holiday and rest days.

Specials have the same kit as regular officers.

The team is also developing the search capability by training with KSAR (Kent Search and Rescue) to obtain qualification in Lowland Search Technicians, which as well as giving a good overview on search could potentially in the future allow joint working with KSAR and hopefully independent cold case review.

Future developments include the training on UAV deployment, helping the force to be a deployable asset at busy periods as a 'second skill' to the Specials primary marine role.

**Training and development** - All of the Specials on the team are given the opportunity to develop boat skills and qualifications as part of their role. Specials training has included RYA L2 Powerboat, RYA Day Skippers, VHF Radio, Sea-survival, and swift water rescue techniques.

## CASE STUDY

### Norfolk - BroadsBeat

The Norfolk Broads Beat team is a marine-based unit covering the Norfolk Broads. The team equips with a 4x4 with trailer carrying a boat or rib. The Specials can launch and have necessary qualifications to skipper the boat. Alongside policing Norfolk waterways they have been called upon to support some events 'at sea' in other constabularies. The BroadsBeat model delivers a range of different policing outcomes – in part, it provides a visible deterrent and enforcement presence. The team also focuses on community engagement, building trust, relationships and intelligence across the Broads community.

### **Airport Specials**

The development of Specials within airport policing has been a relatively recent phenomenon in most forces, but has now grown significantly to have Specials active in Bristol (Avon and Somerset), Heathrow (the Metropolitan Special Constabulary), Stansted (Essex), Birmingham International (West Midlands), John Lennon (Merseyside), Gatwick (Sussex and Surrey, as a joint venture), Luton (Bedfordshire) and Doncaster (South Yorkshire). In total 59 Specials from 8 forces were recorded by forces as now being active in the airport setting.

The above list contains seven of the largest ten airports in England and Wales (by passenger volumes), with the exceptions being Newcastle, East Midlands, and (by far the largest without a Specials presence, as the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest airport in the UK) Manchester.

# The national picture

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## CASE STUDY

### Avon and Somerset – Bristol Airport Police Unit

The Bristol Airport Police Unit is a specialist team of uniformed officers who work at the airport 24/7 to keep it safe and secure for passengers and staff. In late 2006 it was decided to include members of the Special Constabulary into this team.

The Special Constables in the team have the same level of enhanced security clearance and training as their regular colleagues, including authority for driving police vehicles on the airfield apron, although they do not carry Taser due to the current national policy.

The airport is a unique working environment. In addition to the usual duties and offences normally encountered by the police, there is specialised aviation legislation to enforce. When combined with the volume and variety of passengers (close to nine million during 2018) that pass through the airport on a daily basis, it provides a challenging setting. The Specials endeavour to support peaks in normal demand and around known events, such as national and international and sporting events, as well as on Thursday and Friday evenings during the 'Stag and Hen Season' when extra attention is required in the bar areas and at departure gates.

There is also a great deal of partnership working with the UK Border Force and other agencies.

Specials working at the airport are constantly aware of the terrorist and insider threats, especially during foot and mobile patrols.

Specials also help in roads policing in the vicinity of the airport and in policing public transport routes to and from the airport.

The IPSCJ has visited a number of the airport teams nationally. This specific research project is ongoing, and to date the Institute has interviewed Specials serving in five of the seven airports, and the leads for the airport teams, again at five of the airports. From our research so far, some key themes emerge:

- The roles are very positively experienced by Specials. The interviews with Special Constables in airport roles have been almost universally positive, reflecting good deployment across a range of interesting and worthwhile tasks, feeling valued and well integrated and supported within the wider team, and having good opportunities to develop;
- The regular officer leads of teams have also spoken positively about the Specials role and contribution;
- In some contexts, there is an interest in further growth of Special numbers and contribution;
- The airport seems to provide a mix of a 'neighbourhood' type policing context, in which strong relationships and engagement can be attained across the airport community, alongside the opportunity to participate in some specialist operational activity;
- Overall, whilst there are exceptions, the role tends to be more attractive to older and longer-served Specials, and those in the role envision themselves staying in role for the foreseeable future, perhaps seeing out their service to retirement.

Different sizes of airports provide a different context for the specialist Specials. To some degree, larger airports provide greater opportunities across a diversity of tasks. However, there are also some clear commonalities of role, which involves some relatively 'standard' police operational contexts (e.g. shop theft, and drink-related behaviour)

# The national picture

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alongside some more specialist elements such as airside patrol and driving and security related aspects.

## Recruitment and training specialisms

One of the largest areas by volume of Special Constables specialisation, but often one which is somewhat neglected, is in supporting recruitment and training of Specials. Thirteen forces have roles for Specials directly in supporting or managing Specials recruitment processes, and twenty-four have roles relating to delivering Specials training. This aspect of specialisation has a long history in some force contexts, but has grown rapidly in recent years. This seems to be in response to a context where regular officer and staff roles in HR and learning and development have shrunk in number, and been diverted in attention towards an upswing in regular officer recruitment volumes, meaning that resources can be a limiting factor in Specials recruitment, initial training and ongoing development and CPD without some direct resource being provided by Specials themselves.

Models vary across forces, and in the vast majority this is the nature of specialisms which Specials perform for part of their hours, alongside other duties. There are also variations in the level of specific training involved; in some force contexts Specials have undertaken specialist training in HR and assessment processes, been trained and accredited as trainers (for example, South Yorkshire is developing a qualified IL4SC trainer cohort), and been trained in areas that they are then training (for example, the Kent model which has evolved a number of Specials roles as trainers in specific policing skills, who then train both Specials and regulars). Some Specials are also bringing 'day job' skills and wider experience and qualification to such roles; for example, again citing South

Yorkshire, Specials who have developed and delivered training models for Special Constables leaders.

## Other emerging specialisms

There are a number of other areas where specialist roles are beginning to be developed in some forces, including:

- Roles supporting wellbeing of Specials, and Specials being trained and operating as TRIM practitioners;
- Tasking and planning, for example in Kent, Specials are starting to integrate with the force's tasking and planning functionality, normally officers who are on restricted duties, and they are assisting with Brexit preparations and general tasking work;
- Roles in respect of hate crime, community cohesion, diversity, and LGBT+ liaison and support (e.g. Dyfed-Powys)
- Restorative justice (e.g. Avon and Somerset);
- Language specialisms (e.g. Derbyshire);
- Family liaison, Coroner's Court liaison, and similar functions;
- Roles relating to licensing.

## Areas of policing where specialisms are less developed

Several of the sections earlier in this chapter have pointed to areas of policing where there is a strong potential for further growth in specialisms. The prospects for future growth feel quite positive across most of the specialist areas covered in this report, with few that currently represent a 'saturation point' in terms

# The national picture

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of Specials involvement and adding value. Apart from roads policing (37 forces), public order (28 forces), rural policing (23 forces), and Specials in training roles (24 forces), a majority of forces do not currently participate in the other specialisms outlined in this report. In a majority of cases where forces do have specialisms developed, they are currently on a small scale. The interviews (discussed in a subsequent chapter) with senior and strategic stakeholders identified widespread views that there was “still a long way that we can go” in developing and growing specialisms.

There are some aspects of policing that have seen lesser development of specialist roles than others, the most notable being:

- Investigation (as discussed earlier in this chapter, investigation amounts to a sizeable operational aspect of policing, and one where there are presently relatively few specialist roles);
- Command and control, including control rooms and related activity;
- Roles in respect of hate crime, community cohesion, diversity, and LGBT+ liaison and support;
- Roles relating to partnership, engagement and prevention, e.g. integrated offender management, youth offending, school liaison, community safety, crime prevention, etc. (Albeit there is a quite substantial crossover with Specials also being leaders for the Volunteer Police Cadets);
- Intelligence functions.

## Skilling up in response and neighbourhood policing

Alongside the development of specialist roles across the full range of policing functions, forces

also recognise the importance of Specials continuing contribution in terms of response policing, and neighbourhood policing. As discussed in the later chapter about the perspectives of strategic stakeholders, there are concerns that a growing development of specialisms may risk diverting from the core foundational contribution of the Specials to policing in terms of response and neighbourhoods.

Several forces have begun to develop models to reflect the importance of response and neighbourhood policing, with the aim of ‘skilling’ up Specials in those core aspects of policing, and most importantly recognising the skilled and specialist nature of core policing and the potential for Specials to have a developmental pathway within them, rather than needing to move to other areas of policing to specialise.

One developing example of this links to the Hertfordshire Career Pathways project, which is developing a pathway for response, and a pathway for neighbourhood policing

### CASE STUDY

#### Hertfordshire Response Pathway

As one key element of the Hertfordshire career pathways pilot project, the force has developed a ‘Response Pathway, reflecting a model of developing Specials progression and specialist skills-base within the mainstream response policing environment.

In part the developmental pathway looks to create a more structured pathway through initial competency developmental, with active mentoring from a regular officer, and steers those Specials who wish to and are able to develop towards becoming response drivers,

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and developing other driving qualifications. Beyond driving, the pathway focuses on a much broader range of development training and activities, including workshops covering managing missing persons, critical incident awareness, golden hour principles, case file handovers, additional training on force systems, and intoximeter training. Those Specials on the response pathway will also have opportunities to undertake ad hoc shifts and have other experiential insights into areas of policing such as domestic abuse investigation, safeguarding, and case investigation teams, to help broaden their experience and understanding.

Another example in North Yorkshire, where the force has been developing a 'Beat Officer' specialism.

## CASE STUDY

### North Yorkshire – Beat Officer specialism

The Beat Officer Special Constable model in North Yorkshire aligns a small team of Specials, who will focus on developing specialist skills and delivery in support of regular colleagues and PCSOs within neighbourhood teams. The Specials focus on supporting community problem-solving, enhancing engagement with communities, increasing visibility, and complementing the powers of PCSOs.

Another related project which is looking to develop specialised and skilled up capability within core neighbourhood policing is the Essex 'Parish Specials' scheme.

# **Special Constable experiences of being in specialist roles**



# Experiences of specialisms

This chapter provides an overview of key themes from interviews and focus groups conducted by the IPSCJ with over forty Special Constables who are currently in specialist roles, across a number of forces. The focus groups and interviews explored the nature of their specialist roles and contribution, their journeys into specialisms and more generally through the Special Constabulary, their perspectives of the experience and their ambitions and views in respect of the future.

This chapter provides a brief summary of key themes identified from this work.

## Reignited passion as a Special Constable

The first theme identified in the analysis related to how being in a specialist role reignited passion for their role as a Special. For some Specials who had served for many years, being in a specialist unit alongside standard duties as a Special increased interest in the role, creating an opportunity to support the police in a different way, to undertake new and interesting activities, and to experience new policing teams and contexts. For many, being involved in a specialist team prevented them leaving the service, thus linking specialist opportunities directly with retention.

**“I think if that opportunity hadn’t been there I might have bumbled on for a little bit. But then I would have probably lost interest because it wouldn’t have appealed to me; I’d have got bored with it.”** Roads Police Unit, Special Constable

**“I was at the point, I was literally coming up to my 11-year point and I was questioning whether I needed to stay in or not... it was at the point where I was thinking, is now the**

**time to stop and call it a day... I’m definitely pro-Special again.”** Airport policing team, Special Sergeant

Being in a specialist role helped to expose Specials to new and challenging areas of policing, outside of the ‘norm’, as well as offering an insight into the work of partner agencies.

**“[Other Specials involved in the specialism have] been shocked by it but, ‘I really, really liked that shift, it really opened up my eyes to what the emergency services is all about’. Some of these people have been in five, ten years.”** Joint Response Unit, Special Constable

**“It has been fascinating to become an insider and to see how this part of policing works. It’s been a new challenge and I have loved every minute of it.”** Roads Policing Unit, Special Constable

Overall, the opportunity for Specials to be involved in specialist units has helped to consolidate their feelings of belonging within the force, with a strong connection to the work and colleagues, and sometimes leading to a greater appreciation of the work of the police service as a whole.

**“This role plays to my strengths, to my experience in my paid work. Safeguarding is what I do and it is my passion. The opportunity in the past year to do this, which I am very grateful for, it has given me another chance to do that, in a different way, from the other side of the fence in a way, but the principles are all the same. The team has welcomed what I bring and made me feel a part of them and what they do.”** Public Protection Specialist, Special Sergeant

**“For many of our Special Constables on the team, it has probably reinvigorated them in**

# Experiences of specialisms

**their commitment to the Specials and it has given them something really positive to be part of and to feel proud of. That has been a real positive success for the Special Constabulary.”** Joint Response Unit, Special Constable

## Development and getting more out of being in a specialist role

Specialist Specials described how they felt they had improved development opportunities and greater enjoyment from being in a specialist role, getting more out of the experience and finding specialist roles more worthwhile in terms of the value that they felt they were bringing to policing

**“For me, myself, I get much more out of doing this. I feel trusted, it’s a bigger job to do, and I feel like I get more done. On area [not in the specialist role] there’s such a lot we can’t do, you’re a Special so you can’t do this and you can’t do that, they see us as not being able to do stuff. Here, well it’s just not like that at all. They believe in me.”** Roads Policing Unit, Special Constable

**“I struggle getting any hours in and I enjoy the JRU more so if I have to choose one or two shifts a month I will purposely choose JRU because I get more from it and I enjoy it more.”** Joint Response Unit, Special Constable

**“Ten years I had nothing, no training, nothing. Nobody cared. Now I have had nearly four weeks dedicated training in nine months.”** Roads Policing Unit, Special Constable

For many Specials there was a sense of building on their broader policing skills in response and

neighbourhood settings, and bringing those skill-sets into their new specialist settings.

**“I think it’s one of those things, because I’ve done Neighbourhood and Response it kind of fits in quite nicely because you can flit between the two. Whereas if you are new in service I think you’d probably start getting a bit lost.”** Airport policing team, Special Sergeant

There was a lot of consensus across the interviews about being in a specialist role as a natural progression for some longer-serving Specials, who after many years in core policing roles such as response and neighbourhood felt they were at a stage to specialise effectively, and to bring significant core policing experience as a foundation into their new roles.

**“I guess probably ten years into policing I thought there’s an opportunity for me to go and specialise in something rather than be a jack of all trades. I actually at the time thought I would like to go and master in something or try a bit more of a single subject matter expert in that field.”** Roads Police Unit, Special Constable

**“Very much similar to how the regs works, for more experienced, time-served Specials there needs to be that something else, or we won’t stay.”** Rural Policing, Special Constable

**“We do prioritise career Specials and I think we are right to do so. This type of role fits longer-servers like me like a glove, with us there is the return on training and it keeps us interested.”** Roads Police Unit, Special Inspector

Reflecting this, many wished to see specialisms focussed towards longer-serving ‘career’ Specials. Such individuals were suggested to represent greater ‘return on investment’ for the

# Experiences of specialisms

Special Constabulary, as they would likely continue to contribute many hours over a longer period.

**"...ultimately most people I find that want to go into a specialist role are a career Special. They've no intention of joining the police [in a paid capacity as a regular officer], they've probably got no intention of leaving, so they are going to do this for the next five or ten years. So whatever that course costs - £500, £1000, whatever - in terms of return on investment, you are going to get massive payback from it. Because if I was in my mid 30s and they trained me now, I'd probably do this until I'm 50 so you'd get 15 years out of me."** Roads Policing Unit, Special Constable

**"It's an ideal placement for an old-timer like me. They love having Specials here who have a lot of experience in the bag, as they know they can trust us and a lot of the time can leave us to it and they know I'm not going anywhere else so they can invest in me and train me."** Airport Policing Team, Special Constable

Many such 'career' Specials felt that being a specialised Special Constable had enabled them to gain new skills and abilities as well as widening their insight into new aspects of not only policing but also often the work of partner agencies too.

**"I think everybody on the team would say they have learned about the Paramedic world a lot better than they did before and have learned some medical skills as well. There are things you pick up simply by doing a shift with a Paramedic and seeing how they work. So, I would say there are a few soft skills that are developed subconsciously as well, that we don't know we have learned."** Joint Response Unit, Special Constable

**"It's [being a non-specialist Special Constable] kind of the same every time. With the specialist units, the things are so much better. We might go to an unexplained death on the Motorway and you can see all the Road Crash Investigation, all the Court process. You just get to see a much wider aspect and it never feels the same."** Roads Policing Unit, Special Constable

## Changing relationships with regular officers

Specials in specialisms recognised a changing relationship with regular officers through being in a specialist role; that in a specialised role, the views of regular officers shifted and created a more inclusive environment which made Specials feel more valued.

**"...I'll be honest with you, I don't think I've ever been accepted into a team as much as I have there. From the 'You are only here stealing my overtime'. Absolutely none of it, they're [regular officers] really welcoming and they're so friendly it's unbelievable."** Airport policing team, Special Sergeant

**"It's the most accepted I have ever been."** Airport policing team, Special Constable

**"So in my opinion this is the best placement in the whole force. The regulars treat us the same, we're trained the same, and we can get on with it and get out there and do the job. I love it."** Roads Policing Unit, Special Sergeant

This changed attitude was related to how being in a specialist position helped to define their role and purpose to regular officers, which supported strengthened relationships. It also reflected the specific skills and training that Specials in the specialist settings had, which in many cases directly mirrored the training of regulars. Being in a specialised role for some

# Experiences of specialisms

had fostered better integration with the regular teams, with an enhanced level of personal relationships developing.

**“And [regular officers] can see that we’ve got some clear purpose and that we perhaps know something that they don’t. That’s the perception because we are a specialist unit.”**

Joint Response Unit, Special Constable

**“The PCs and my Specials get on very well. The Specials get invited to the teams’ Christmas do’s. And they are friends and they work together quite well. It is an integrated organisation.”**

Special Chief Inspector

Some Specials in specialist roles were recognised as having important niche knowledge or skill sets beyond those possessed by regular colleagues, and thus were viewed as being valued and pivotal support to regular officers. This was critical in relation to new threats, such as cyber-crime, where regular officers did not necessarily have the expertise to verify technical terminology.

**“So the interview trained officers, which I’m not, did the actual interview but I was sitting in a room next to it and listening in and basically live verifying that whatever that person said made sense or didn’t make sense.”**

Cyber specialist, Special Constable

**“Then the world has turned on its head, and the regs are asking us about it, backing off and letting us answer the questions.”**

Licensing specialist, Special Inspector

However, this more positive, integrated experience was not universal. For some Specials in specialist teams they still expressed feeling relatively distant with their regular counterparts, which limited their experiences of belonging. It is clear that there remains a mixed

picture on integration in some specialist contexts, with some cultural barriers remaining.

**“In terms my Special colleagues, the ones that I know, absolutely. The wider management team, never met them. Never met the [specialist team] Sergeant, never met the [specialist team] Inspector, although [they] did send me a nice e-mail.”**

Rural policing team, Special Sergeant

Overall, a key thread within the reported changes in the relationships between Specials and regular officers was due to Specials not being seen as a threat and being a valued support to operations and incidents, offering important expertise and knowledge to better respond to tasks in hand.

**“For the officers [regulars] they see we’re a big help, yes we are that extra pair of hands but its more than that. It’s also important we’re seen as additional, not replacing, and I think we have achieved that in this team very well’. Us being here makes their lives better. We take things off them. We never pretend to replace them, which categorically we don’t and never will.”**

Specialist Operations Unit, Special Sergeant

**“We are not in any way looking to take work overtime or the special skills away from the Regulars, we’re there to support them and help them out... It’s working alongside them and supporting them, rather than them seeing it as, ‘Specials are getting this; Specials are getting that’.”**

Roads policing unit, Special Constable

# Experiences of specialisms

## Being too specialist

Particularly for Specials who specialise in the same element of specialist policing for a lengthier period of time, there were concerns of some Specials becoming “too specialised”, risking de-skilling across the wider policing skills set. It was recognised that a similar picture exists for specialist regular officers who occupy specialist roles for long periods. This was something that the Specials who operated at a more strategic level were conscious of and were taking steps to prevent.

**“Because of the JRU, I have concerns that they de-skill in their regular [general] policing duties because there is actually very little policing to do on the JRU. They don’t actually get involved in processes that they would have done if they were on response or doing neighbourhood policing.”** Joint Response Unit, Special Inspector

## Ruptures from the wider Special Constabulary

There were dangers identified of specialist roles leading to a ‘rupturing’ of identities across the Specials, and of creating a degree of separation and division at times within the Special Constabulary.

There was a perception that being a specialist or being involved in a specialist team was more interesting, and exciting, than other Special Constabulary duties, and that while this was seen as a potential motivation for people to volunteer their time, it also created a risk to relationships within the Special Constabulary due to potential resentment from others. The accounts reveal an unintended consequence of specialist roles by creating *special* Specials,

rather than *specialist* Specials, within the Special Constabulary and thereby causing at times some division and even resentment. Those in specialist roles were often also oriented into a context where there was increased recognition, with some specialisms being singled out repeatedly in forces for the extra value the specialism brought, in some cases being the recipients of repeated award nominations. One specialist Special talked about the “front cover status” that his specialism had within the force; whenever the Specials were discussed or marketed, the specialism concerned was “front and centre”, despite only involving four Specials out of the overall Special Constabulary of almost three hundred officers.

**“...they don’t get the press or coverage that the JRU might get, so I would say there is a low-level rumbling resentment amongst those who are not on the JRU...”** Joint Response Unit, Special Constable

**“There is a danger. Of course we want to shout from the roof tops about this. I think some people, some of our Specials, feel somewhat ignored and second-best. Let’s shout out about this one small team again and again and again, and let’s ignore what everybody else is achieving when they’re in.”** Operational Support Specialist, Special Constable

Some Specials talked of the dangers of “Gucci” roles in specialisms, drawing the eye and interest of Specials away from other critical areas of contribution and role.

**“One thing that I’d like to say about specialist teams is that if there’s too many then your main bread and butter policing suffers because everyone wants to join Gucci team, even if it’s sometimes for wrong reasons.”** Joint Response Unit, Special Constable

# Experiences of specialisms

**“It is the sexy, shiny, boy’s toys of police work.”** Roads Policing Unit, Special Constable

**“It does attract the petrol-heads.”** Roads Policing Unit, Special Constable

## Wellbeing and support

Specials reflected on the specific challenges experienced in specialist contexts, in particular that the roles exposed them to a greater profile of traumatic incidents, or exposed them to material which was difficult or upsetting.

**“And it was the smell, it will never go away from me, never. When I smell burnt toast, I am straight back. Back in that moment. You are experiencing someone’s death. It hasn’t affected me, I think you couldn’t do this, this work, if it did. You have to stay professional. You have to be able to cope. We all have our ways of coping. It isn’t for everybody, it really isn’t.”** Roads Policing Unit, Special Constable

**“To be honest you’d be worried if you weren’t upset reading some of the case files or hearing from the regs about some of what the offenders have done.”** Public Protection Unit, Special Constable

Specials presented a mixed picture in terms of experiences of support. Some felt that they received support that was sufficient and very much equivalent to regular colleagues, whilst some felt that Specials were not supported in the same way.

**“Everything they get, we get.”** Specialist Operations Unit, Special Constable

**“I don’t think we are as good at that as we need to be. There is support but it’s nothing like the same as the rest of the team [regular officers] receive. We are sometimes the forgotten ones.”** Public Protection Unit, Special Constable

For some Specials, the absence of equivalent support structures pointed to concerns about expanding specialist roles, given what might happen if there was a complaint or injury.

**“I see what other force RPU’s are doing, and I worry. What happens after that high-speed collision during a pursuit? Or when that pedestrian walks out in front of you and is knocked down and you’re facing court. The regs have a lot of support, the Fed at their back. I think we need to look very closely at what we don’t have. You can lose your job, your liberty, your home. It’s a serious business.”** Roads Policing Unit, Special Constable

## Specialist training

There were many very positive accounts of the training received by specialist Special Constables; with many contrasting to a near-absence of CPD otherwise available across the Special Constabulary.

**“Chalk and cheese. The training for this has been brilliant. Before coming here, I went for years with no training at all.”** Roads Policing Unit, Special Constable

**“It has been some of the best training I’ve ever had.”** Roads Policing Unit, Special Constable

Where training provided was of a clear equivalency, this was key in achieving positive

# Experiences of specialisms

integration and credibility for the Specials in the specialist team.

**“The one thing that makes it work is our training is exactly the same.”** Roads Policing Unit, Special Constable

**“The [regular] Inspector has been brilliant... making sure we all get the same training.”** Public Protection Specialist, Special Constable

Whilst the additional and specialist training received by specialist Specials was a major attractor to roles, and fundamental to the benefits delivered through roles, there were gaps identified in the experience of specialist training.

Some interviews presented a picture that training in many instances was one-off at the beginning and rarely as part of an ongoing and staged training programme over time. It was recognised that this was not enough to remain effective, compromising the potential of specialists as well as their long-term proficiency.

**“It was only provided to the original team. So, any new Specials that have joined since, as far as I am aware, have not received that additional training. We only ever received the one training course.”** Joint Response Unit, Special Constable

**“...we had an induction day and then we had further training day as well on top of that, so we’ve had two training days in essence really, which is not enough.”** Airport policing team, Special Sergeant

Some challenges in respect of training were identified in terms of it being ‘regular centric’, not reflecting and flexing to the other commitments of the ‘day job’, and part-time nature of Specials, and thus for some reducing the ability to participate.

**“It’s about thinking outside of the box again, isn’t it. We train weekdays because, well because they always have, and its always been ok that way when it’s the regs.”** Roads Policing Unit, Special Constable

**“The training has to be the same. Anything less and we’re just Specials who can’t be trusted again. That’s all right, but that doesn’t stop some changes in when its delivered, whether its broken up a bit to match up on when we can be free, as we have day jobs.”** Roads Policing Unit, Special Constable

**“Courses lasting three weeks may be fine if you’re someone who is paid and it’s your job, your full-time job. We can do the course, but we do need some flexibility, as most of us can’t just take a month off.”** Roads Policing Unit, Special Constable

In addition, often Specials were required to navigate barriers created by gatekeepers to training materials and courses.

**“...there are courses on the intranet which I can do... but that means me taking up a day or two days off work, because they are Monday to Friday. And generally speaking, every time I apply for one of those, they reply saying, ‘It’s not for Specials’. And I go, ‘But I’m an RPU Special and this is a competency for RPU’. You get, ‘Right, okay, can you send that to an Inspector’. Then you have to go and find an Inspector and convince them... And so it can be a bit tiresome. I just think it’s a crying shame because actually they could get so much more out of us.”** Roads Policing Unit, Special Constable

Whilst there were better relationships with regular counterparts as part of specialised units, deficiencies in training provisions compared

# Experiences of specialisms

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with training for regular officers for Specials were seen to present significant levels of risk to credibility and ability to do the job.

**“The regulars will get advanced first aid, really advanced first aid. We will get an invite but it’s normally mid-week when I’m working. It does happen where you will go somewhere when somebody is missing an arm! If there was just that push – I know it costs a bit – but they would get the training in at the weekend and do a special course on specialist first aid or, not so much the process stuff because it doesn’t really matter if I get the process wrong. I will get told off. Or somebody might get away with something, which is bad. But, with first aid, you could kill somebody by doing the wrong thing or not doing anything, that is a concern.”** Roads policing unit, Special Constable

**working in child protection, child safeguarding. It’s great to be able to apply that experience in a different way and to see how the other side of it all works.”** Public Protection Unit, Special Constable

As one example of the challenges experienced in skills transfer, the cyber infrastructure of the police was perceived as dated in comparison to what some specialist Specials were accustomed to working with in their day jobs. Issues of access and security also posed challenges to the underlying concept of drawing in external skills and expertise.

**“...you can’t take data out of the network and you can’t take programmes into the network. And that comes up every once and again, that as a data scientist I’m used to having all those nice tools out there that I can use to trawl through terabytes of data but I can’t use them here because I can’t get the programmes in and I can’t take the data out...”** Cyber specialist, Special Constable

## Transferring skills and knowledge

There were challenges perceived in terms of the concept of Specials bringing their specialist skills and experience from outside of policing. Despite these challenges, there was clear recognition that there were benefits of the transfer of skills and experience already being seen in specialist contexts, and significant ambitions that more could be achieved in the future.

**“I think what I take from the Police to my day job and from my day job to the Police is very interesting. You don’t actually know how it feels until you try. You can take your skills back and forth and that’s the beauty of that role.”** Cyber specialist, Special Constable  
**“For the first time myself as a Special, in this role I’m using the skills I have from outside of policing. That twenty years of experience**



# **Strategic Perspectives on Specialist Specials**

# Strategic perspectives

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Constabulary. The interviewees included Special Chief Officers, CiP Managers and CiP portfolio leads in forces (both regular leaders and senior police staff), policy leads working on the Specials or CiP agenda at regional or national level, and other senior police leaders. In total 23 interviews were conducted, in late 2018 and early 2019.

## 'Limited only by our imagination'?

There was a consistency across the vast majority of the strategic interviews that policing should be 'ambitious' in developing specialist roles and opportunities for Specials.

In many cases this reflected quite significant recent growth in the interviewees own forces of specialist roles, and some quite ambitious plans for the near-future to further expand upon that. Most of the interviews reflected an expectation that, both in their own force and nationally, specialisms in the Special Constabulary would grow further.

**"We've lots of ideas [for the future]. We've always been a leading force on this, and we will continue to be. I can see a time where a majority of our Specials are in specialisms, or at least have some specialist training and operational role."**

**"I am a very strong supporter [of specialist Specials]. The sky is the limit. We intend to be very ambitious on this."**

Part of such thinking, echoing the language in the Special Constabulary National Strategy, is that there should be no false or artificial ceiling placed upon what roles Specials could potentially play and which teams they can contribute to. Broadly there was a consensus

that in principle, excluding firearms, there was no area of policing that should not be considered.

**"My ACC has made very clear a Special can do anything. Not firearms but that is a national debate, anything else."**

**"Nothing is out of bounds."**

Senior stakeholders could see some key constraining factors to the further and ongoing expansion of specialisms. These broadly sat in three categories:

- Cultural resistance, especially from specialist officers and their leaders in areas of policing that have not had a history of Specials serving in their teams and contexts;
- Basic constraints of numbers and competing demands (discussed in more detail below);
- Limitations to thinking, which tend to assume Specials may not be suited to certain specialist teams or areas, (often in reality despite the same specialist areas already being taken forward, with some success, in other forces).

**"There can be resistance. What we have found is some of those who have been the most 'anti' at first, you look again twelve months later and they are your biggest supporters. There's one sergeant, he was 'Specials in my team over my dead body' at the time when we first started, now he is complaining he can't have more."**

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## Predicted areas for future development

Discussing what areas they could see for future development, many saw continuing development of some of the aspects which have already evolved significantly, particularly in respect of roads policing and public order.

In respect of roads policing, there was a broad expectation that over time forces would continue a movement towards (the practice already seen in some forces) where Specials are more highly trained in terms of elements such as driving, albeit with caveats that there were felt to be cultural and resourcing barriers to that journey in some forces.

It was also felt that roads policing has overall been less than generously resourced over recent years, and that this has resulted in a model with fewer regulars, which is primarily reactive, and sometimes “prioritised to only the most pressing jobs”. One line of thinking is that Specials can help create more pro-active and preventative capacity; with one element mentioned several times being that ANPR is often an under-utilised resource.

**“It may be harking back to the good old days, but twenty five years ago when I was starting out, we had massively more in roads policing. In this force now, what’s left is a rump. It’s a fast roads policing, reactive, specialist team. Which don’t get me wrong, they are brilliant, absolutely first-class at what they do. What they do though, it’s only 5%, 10%, of what’s needed, what roads policing could do. There is a big opening for the Special Constabulary in filling that gap.”**

**“ANPR is to me that single, largest under-utilised resource that we have in policing. That is where I would put my Special Constable resource, as much of it as I**

**physically could, specialist deployed pro-active Specials team focused on ANPR hits. Criminals off the road, intelligence-led, high-visibility policing, it achieves on all of that.”**

In respect of public order, there was a sense that it was a specialist area which suited the Specials model, and that there was a strong business case, with costs and demands of training balancing favourably against the value from trained and deployed Specials.

**“The business case for public order and Specials is a no brainer to me. We have seen a massive return on the training outlay, it seems to work very well with the Specials themselves, and it has been a big help with some major pressure points for demand.”**

Beyond those current aspects of development, the four main other areas viewed as high potential for future growth were:

- Cyber;
- Vulnerable people; public protection, domestic abuse, safeguarding, CSE and similar roles;
- Investigation;
- Rural.

Reflecting on that, the first three areas (plus public order and roads policing) might have been predicted as being seen as high potential areas. Certainly, cyber, vulnerability and investigation have been identified quite consistently in wider policing strategic documents in terms of future workforce challenges. Rural is perhaps more surprising in this list, and has been less foregrounded than the others in policy debates about future areas of development for the Special Constabulary.

# Strategic perspectives

## The high value of specialist roles and contribution

Reflecting the enthusiasm for future growth in specialist roles for Specials, there was a widespread sense that such roles provided “good value”, and represented a positive extension of the contribution of Specials to the force.

**“Usually we’re good at agreeing on nothing in policing, aren’t we. But I can’t think of anyone who doesn’t think there is a good thing here, about seeing Specials specialise and spread out across policing.”**

**“The future return on investment for the Special Constabulary? I see a lot of that’s in specialised areas. In many ways, I’ll be honest with you, they suit my Specials better than the more conventional ways we’ve deployed in the past.”**

**“This is the future. We need to be led by force need, demand, policing priorities. Get away from lazy tropes of who Specials were [and] what they used to do and not do. ‘When I was a lad, Specials would never have done that’. Well, maybe not. Put all that behind us, move on. This is 21<sup>st</sup> century, post-austerity, technology revolution, policing. Online fraud, CSE. The new future is as much if not more in specialist as it is in response. Just follow the value, the hours we get, the training they have, contribution they make.”**

There was little dissension from that view. There were reflections that generally there had been little robust evaluation, to properly identify and quantify value. And where there were slightly more mixed views in respect of value, generally that related to management issues in respect of specialisms (e.g. perceptions of some Specials

only staying for short periods after expensive training outlay), rather than wider value per se.

**“Yes, done well, it gives us value. Like many things in life, only worth doing if it’s done properly. Sometimes in the past, putting our hands up, we know we haven’t done that. Specials who we’ve spent thousands on training and they have stayed a few weeks. The butterflies who like to touch into every specialism going. Specials put into teams but what we want them to do isn’t right, it hasn’t gelled, and then they’ve come back.”**

## Professionalisation

There was similarly a strong consensus across interviews that specialisms helped in a wider sense of developing the professionalism of the Special Constabulary; in particular where forces have managed the process so as to achieve full equivalency of specialist training and qualification.

There were interesting arguments from some that actually some specialist settings were easier to develop a higher (and more regular-like) degree of professional capability than is the case for generic response policing. The argument being that the scope and range of response policing is immense, and thus always brings a challenge in terms of part-time officers gaining and keeping up-to-date their experience across such a wide variety of tasks, and the ability to achieve CPD to cover changes and developments in practice. Whereas in some specialist contexts, such as roads policing, the flow of work and the experience of issues might actually be a little less broad and more focused than for response, which may assist part-timers in developing a greater equivalency and

# Strategic perspectives

professionalisation of skills set across that somewhat more focused practice over time.

**“Take specialist roads policing. Yes, there is a specific additional need for training. Equipping them with driving skills, and with a more in depth knowledge of traffic law, high speed traffic safety. Having done both, I would argue though that that breadth of incidents RPU attends is, by and large, much less than for ordinary response officers. RPU tends to do the same types of things over and over again, response its anything over the radio. For a part-timer, who wants to develop into a professional, wants to really grow and excel at what they do, a setting such as RPU may be more attractive.”**

## Ex-regulars

There were ambitions that in the future specialist roles in the Special Constabulary could assist in attracting ex-regular officers, and thus reducing the wastage of policing skills and experience out of the service. However, there was also a view that little had yet really progressed in that regard, and that at present the growth of specialisms to date has had very little impact on recruiting ex-regulars.

**“We need to stop losing our talent, experience, training, when people up sticks and leave the profession in their early fifties. If we can start thinking very differently about this [specialisms], it could be one part of a solution.”**

## Worries over loss of capacity in response and neighbourhoods

The most fundamental misgiving about specialisms was the risk that further

development of specialist roles diverts Specials capacity from core policing areas of response and neighbourhood. In particular in respect of response policing that is a loss which is seen as a major concern at a time when resources are stretched and the Special contribution is often seen as crucial, including at moments of peak demand.

**“I would love to do this [specialist roles in the Special Constabulary] more. I also need to have the numbers on district to be Sergeants, to train the new ones, and to deliver on the visible policing presence that the district commander wants to see.”**  
**“I know you could argue, think that it’s a good problem to have. In the past, it hasn’t felt always in my career that we as Specials have been valued. Now that we are developing new [specialist] roles, our area commanders are growing very worried that they’re about to lose what we bring to them. They’re worried we’re going to take their Specials away, and they have become, with the [reduction in regular] numbers, reliant on them.”**

This problem is in reality exacerbated by the significant fall in numbers of Specials seen in most forces over the past seven years (averaging at a near halving of numbers nationally); this, connected with many Special Constabularies being ‘young in service’ in their experience profile, can mean that there are increasingly very few qualified, independent Specials to go around, which can make something of a stark choice between response capacity and resourcing individuals into more specialist contexts.

**“If I had the four hundred and something we used to have, specialisms would be great. With less than half that, it isn’t possible to do this at the moment except on this small scale.”**

# Strategic perspectives

**“Our Special Constabulary has become so small, we now need to be realistic how thinly we can spread over more and more areas.”**

**“With less than forty independent Specials, my hands are tied.”**

## New and different skills

There were seen to be big opportunities for specialisms in the Special Constabulary to be one route by which new and different skill sets can be attracted into policing.

Whilst cyber is the aspect most people have most readily in mind for this, the same idea applies to a range of other areas and skills.

**“It’s great doing what we are with our current Specials. Now, who else can we draw into this? Direct entry. Active search and recruit.”**

## Problems in delivering specialist roles

There was a lot of recognition that current models of managing specialisms have often not been perfect. In particular, the strategic interviews pointed to several aspects where they felt improvement still needed to be made:

- The need for the development of specialisms to be ‘business-led’; driven by a pull from team and function leads who wish to have Specials in their teams, rather than a ‘push’ from the Special Constabulary itself;

- The need to undertake recruiting into roles fairly and properly, to have structured expectations of tenure and contribution, and to have clarity over training requirements;
- The whole organisation needs to understand and support the change of Specials becoming involved in specialist roles, both practically and culturally – several interviews talked of aspects of the force, such as HR, or stores, or training, exercising a resistance even when business leads in the specialist areas themselves were supportive and leading;
- There was recognition that some aspects of the specialisms agenda need careful communication, particularly to the wider public, e.g. positive developments of Specials in roles supporting serious crime investigation can very readily be misconstrued by media and others to paint a negative picture of a Special being an SIO on a murder case, and related dialogue of ‘policing on the cheap’ or ‘lowering of standards’.

## Diversity

There were concerns – consistent with the data shared earlier in this report – that those in specialist roles are not particularly diverse; with perceptions that they tended to be predominantly White British and to be male. This was appreciated to be in large part reflective of the wider picture of the Special Constabulary more broadly, and in particular for longer-serving ‘career’ Specials from whom specialist roles primarily draw.

**“I do worry that the Specials who are taking this up, they are all white men of a certain age. It isn’t our finest hour from a diversity viewpoint, however well it’s working in**

# Strategic perspectives

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other respects. I am not sure what to do about that.”

## Thinking more widely across ‘Citizens in Policing’

Several of those interviewed had broader Citizens in Policing briefs, entailing other elements such as PSV and Cadets alongside the Special Constabulary. There were some feelings that the development of specialist roles in the Special Constabulary has happened somewhat in isolation to that wider CiP picture, and that in some cases specialist contributions into policing could also be driven and developed through PSV roles, as they may often not require warranted powers.

**“Sometimes the Special Constabulary is an island when it doesn’t need to be. If you look at cyber, for example, yes there are opportunities to develop cyber Specials, but also many opportunities for other types of volunteering, partnering with businesses. It doesn’t always need a warrant card. Some people are put off by all the training and everything else about Special Constables.”**

# Recommendations



# Recommendations

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Specialised roles clearly offer something new and additional to what has traditionally been available in the Special Constabulary. Specials in specialist roles were positive about these developments, which had reignited their passion for the role, and for some kept them in role.

This final section of the report considers recommendations for the future of specialist contribution by the Special Constabulary.

The findings of this report present in many ways a very positive picture:

- Outlining significant progress across many forces in the development of specialist training and roles,
- Reflecting the current sizeable scale of specialisms, with over 1,800 Specials in different specialist roles, and contributions across a very wide range of different policing specialisms;
- Overall, there are many positives in respect of Specials experiences of being in specialisms, in particular a reigniting of passion for being a Special, improved development, greater enjoyment, better cultural integration and improved relationships with regular colleagues;
- Reflecting a consistency of strategic support and ambition for specialist Specials.

## **Focusing specialist activity**

There is a huge positive in the range and diversity of specialist Special Constable roles developing across forces nationally. This should be encouraged to continue.

Whilst continuing to support this diversity and spread of contributions, it is important also that there is some greater strategic prioritising at force level of those areas which are most promising in terms of delivering impact for policing priorities, and some focusing of areas for initial support and coordination at national level.

### **Recommendation One:**

That forces, as part of their strategic planning, each identify specialist areas of policing where a Special contribution would most effectively contribute to their local policing priorities, and their wider force strategy of workforce and capability development.

### **Recommendation Two:**

Nationally, a small number of specialisms (where it is felt that there is both maximum likely impact, and maximum potential for the greatest number of forces to engage) could be identified and prioritised for national support, including helping to identify, shape and share 'best practice', helping to coordinate impact assessment and evaluation, helping forces to implement and evolve their models and championing the delivery of outcomes.

Such a list of prioritised areas for specialisation, reflecting strategic perspectives shared in the previous chapter, might include:

- Roads policing;
- Public order;
- Cyber;
- Vulnerability, public protection, CSE, domestic abuse, and related areas;
- Investigation;
- Rural.

# Recommendations

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## Realising the future ambition

There is considerable potential for specialisms across the Special Constabulary to be much larger and wider in scope, and to deliver much more for policing. Achieving this will require:

- An addressing of the wider strategic issues of Special Constabulary headcount reduction and the relatively young-in-service profile of Specials, both of which will otherwise tend to be constraining factors;
- A clearer strategic direction and plan, both in forces and nationally. At present a lot of development is somewhat ad hoc, without a strategically planned approach;
- A greater recognition and emphasis – given the significant scale of specialist contribution from Specials, it is relatively rarely championed and spotlighted either by forces or nationally.

There is a potentially reinforcing, virtuous cycle in relation to Specials cohort size and maturity, on the one hand, and specialisms, on the other. Increases in headcount and maturity of cohort produce a less constrained environment in which to develop and scale specialist roles. Increases in specialist roles can be an attractor in terms of recruitment of more ‘career’ Specials, and are an important factor for many Specials in terms of decisions to continue volunteering, contributing to improved retention. Both elements then drive an ongoing cycle of increased headcount and improved maturity of cohort.

Linked to this, both building headcount and particularly maturity of cohort, and building

specialisms, rely on the attraction and retention of more ‘career’ Specials.

## Recommendation Three:

The national Special Constabulary action plan manages ‘career’ Special attraction, pathways and retention, and specialist development, as a joint programme of work. And that this workstream is then closely allied to other workstreams, particularly attraction and recruitment of Specials.

## Managing pathways

Leading and managing future models of specialisation needs to form part of a wider consideration of how pathways through the Special Constabulary are shaped and supported. Specialisms play a crucial role for many Specials in terms of decisions not to leave.

To maximise the overall impact of the Special Constabulary, and drive improvements in retention, participation and outcomes, requires a more planned, structured, resourced and supported model for Special Constable careers. There is considerable merit in models, such as in Hertfordshire, which are looking to develop end-to-end pathways for Specials, helping to shape and support throughout the whole of their volunteering careers, and in so doing helping to improve faster and better managed pathways into specialist opportunities for many medium-longer serving Specials.

## Recommendation Four

To provide support and coordination at national level, identifying ‘best practice’ in respect of ‘career’ Special pathways, and producing a

# Recommendations

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framework or guidance to support forces in developing enhanced pathways for longer-serving Specials locally. This then needs to integrate the critical contribution specialist opportunities can play for many longer-serving Specials in retaining their engagement.

## Addressing culture

There remain pockets of cultural resistance to Specials performing more specialist roles. Specials in specialisms is still, at least at scale, relatively new in policing, and most new developments in policing experience a considerable cultural lag, in terms of some regular officers understanding and accepting change.

Four key elements which may help to shift the culture are:

- Ensure that specialist roles in teams have the 'buy in', and the overt and clear leadership, of the regular supervision of those teams. Where that is not in place, it is very much more likely that cultural problems will ensue;
- Engage regulars in specialist teams when there are plans to introduce or increase elements of Special involvement;
- Ensure equivalency of training and standards – as soon as a Special in a specialist setting can be seen as 'less trained', 'less capable', or worse of all 'less safe', then this will feed into negative cultural narratives;
- Champion and spotlight what Specials are achieving in specialist teams. There is a great deal that is positive about the current contribution of specialist Specials, but as reflected above those positive communications are not

particularly high profile in forces. The danger is that without a more pro-active positive messaging of contribution, all that is seen is the occasional negative narrative (and inevitably with over 1,800 Specials in specialisms, there will from time to time be negatives of poor performance, poor integration and commitment, or poor conduct, in the same way there would be looking across a similar population of regulars or of police staff in such roles).

## Recommendation Five:

Nationally, put in place a planned and systematic approach to identifying and championing the contribution of specialist Specials.

## Recommendation Six

'Best practice' guidance should be developed nationally, including guidance that supports forces in how best to achieve regular supervisor and officer 'buy in' and cultural integration.

## Training

Training of Specials in specialist roles should be a priority as specialised roles and functions are created. More training opportunities for Specials to participate in, ideally alongside regular counterparts, should be created. Ultimately, if Specials will be required to respond and work in specialised contexts, the organisation has a responsibility to take measures to protect the Special, the organisation and the individuals it serves. The best way to do this is to achieve parity of training wherever possible.

# Recommendations

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## **Recommendation Seven:**

'Best practice' guidance should be developed nationally, including guidance that addresses the need for a planned and robust approach to training, and the advantages of achieving full equivalency of training and qualification.

## **Wellbeing**

Strategic and policy leads must consider the potential risks of Specials undertaking roles that expose them to traumatic situations, more frequently and at greater intensity, providing appropriate support to maintain the wellbeing of Specials.

## **Recommendation Eight:**

'Best practice' guidance should be developed nationally, including guidance in the importance of supporting Special Constable wellbeing, managing access to support, and ensuring adequate screening/pre-assessment and preparation for those roles which are particularly significant in terms of extent of exposure to trauma, e.g. severe road collision exposure, exposure to child pornography, etc.

## **National coordination and learning**

For the development of specialisms in the Special Constabulary to grow and thrive, it will be necessary to develop a clearer leadership and stronger coordination at national level.

Key elements which could be achieved at national level include:

- Helping to share best practice, create a hub of practice advice for specialisms, and host events to help forces come together and learn from one another.
- Linked to the above, a sharing and stimulating of innovation. There could be more of a national role in identifying opportunities for further development of specialist contribution, in particular around the areas singled out for an ambition for expansion reflected earlier in this report (roads, public order, cyber, vulnerability and rural), but also across all areas of specialism;
- A clearer leadership and championing of the growing specialisms agenda for the Special Constabulary at national level.

## **Recommendation Nine:**

A national online hub of material should be developed for specialist Special Constable roles, designed to be an accessible and supportive online resource for those in forces leading on the development and delivery of specialisms.

## **Recommendation Ten:**

The national workstream focused on this agenda through the national Specials action plan could create a national development plan for specialisms, including identifying the scope and focus of national leadership and support, and what roles and resource might be required nationally to support future developments.

## **Recommendation Eleven:**

The national workstream could identify links to other key NPCC portfolios, APCC leads, College

# Recommendations

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leads, and other national policy and practice leads and forums, where the development of specialist Specials could usefully be engaged and on the policy and practice development agenda. Initially, this could again link to portfolios of roads policing, public order, cyber, vulnerability and public protection, investigation and rural. But there are other clear areas of national portfolios or national groups which could also usefully be engaged, e.g. the airport policing national meeting structures.

## **Avoiding neglect of core response and neighbourhood policing**

Even in a future world where specialist roles and contribution have seen considerable further expansion, the primary capability and contribution of the Special Constabulary will still be focused on core aspects of response and neighbourhood policing. A number of forces are exploring how to develop, up-skill and reprioritise the Special contribution to neighbourhood policing and in response. An important part of that should be a recognition that Specials can grow their careers, specialist skill sets, experience and contribution within response and neighbourhood, as well as by moving into other specialist areas of policing. Some of the most helpful thinking seems to be in those forces who are beginning to frame longer-serving Specials in response and neighbourhood as being on a specialist pathway in response and neighbourhood, rather than seeing a complete dichotomy between core policing and specialisms.

It will also be important to remain conscious of how Specials who are not given the opportunity of being involved with specialised roles respond, and whether any resentment or division is created. An unintended consequence that

should be considered has been the cultural formation of *special* Specials, which if left unchecked has the potential to fragment the collective of the Special Constabulary.

### **Recommendation Twelve:**

National work could be undertaken to help identify, support and develop 'best practice' in relation to specialist skill development and practice specialism for longer-serving Specials within response policing and within neighbourhood policing.

## **Ongoing research**

This report represents a first key product in what is an ongoing process of research and evaluation across specialist roles in the Special Constabulary. As specialist roles continue to grow and evolve for Specials, it is important that evaluation and understandings of 'what works' is embedded in such developments in the future.

### **Recommendation Thirteen:**

An 'Evidencing Plan' should be developed nationally. This Plan could identify key gaps in data and knowledge, identify evaluation priorities, and propose an action plan for developing future research, data and evaluation activity.

Such a Plan would assist in achieving a coordinated and managed approach to future data, research and evaluation activity. It could also assist in identifying funding and resource for such work.

# Recommendations

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## Value

This report recognises that more needs to be done to identify, capture and understand the 'value' of specialist Special contributions.

### **Recommendation Fourteen:**

Consideration should be given to how to better identify, understand and capture 'value' from specialist Special Constable contributions and how this can be integrated into ongoing phases of work to develop a Value Framework across the Special Constabulary.



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