

National Evaluation of Police Cadets: Value of Cadet's to Young People

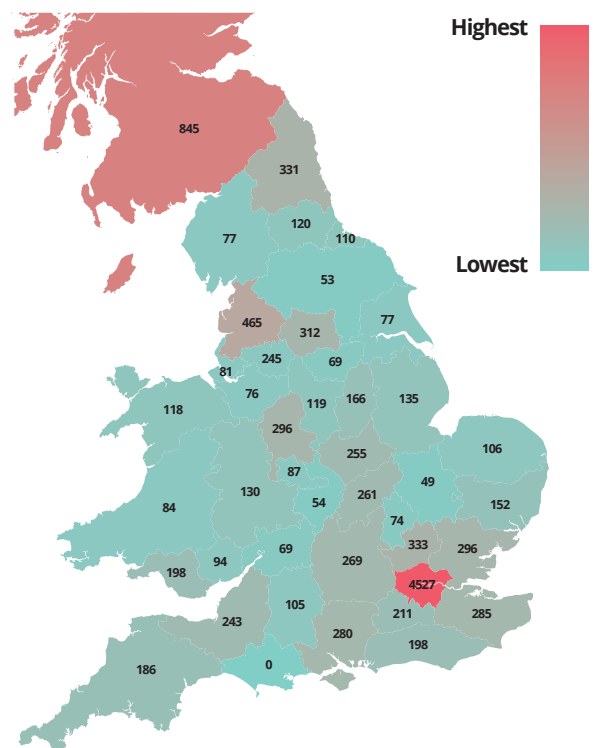
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Introduction

The Volunteer Police Cadets (VPC) is a national police uniformed youth group for 13 to 18-year olds. There are approximately 12,300 police cadets in the UK, with nearly all forces having cadet schemes. The VPC aims to promote a practical understanding of policing amongst young people, support local policing priorities through volunteering, give young people a chance to be heard and inspire young people to participate positively in their communities. These aims resonate with government strategy to work with young people to reduce their risk of becoming offenders or victims and build positive relations between the police and young people. There has been little research to date on the impact of the VPC, therefore, a national evaluation was conducted to establish its impact whilst also identifying challenges it faces.



The intention of this short paper is to highlight the value of the VPC to young people by drawing on the national evaluation, which includes a survey of 1,166 cadets, a survey of 413 cadet leaders, 11 focus groups with cadets and 11 semi-structured interviews with cadet leads in forces.

Enjoyment and Pride

The evidence that demonstrates how the VPC is experienced positively by young people is very strong. Nearly all cadets (98%) agreed that they feel proud to be a police cadet (with 82% strongly agreeing) and 97% agreed that they enjoyed being a police cadet (with 81% strongly agreeing). They were also likely to recommend it to other young people, with 70% indicating that they were 'very' likely to and a further 27% indicating that they were 'fairly' likely to.

Citizenship, helping the Community and Volunteering

Overall, the evidence suggests that being a cadet promotes positive citizenship and social responsibility. Around two-thirds (69%) of cadets strongly agreed that the VPC had a positive impact on their feelings of social responsibility, with a further 28% tending to agree. Cadets were very positive about community work and volunteering where they were able to mix with others and the public more generally. Some young people had committed many hours to volunteering to aid good causes in the community, which was underpinned by the improved sense of confidence young people had gained through being a cadet.

“My communication has got a lot better, I would say. We are doing a lot of volunteering in the public, so we are interacting a lot with people, like doing bag packing and stuff like that. It’s just made me better at talking to people I don’t know and given me more confidence.”

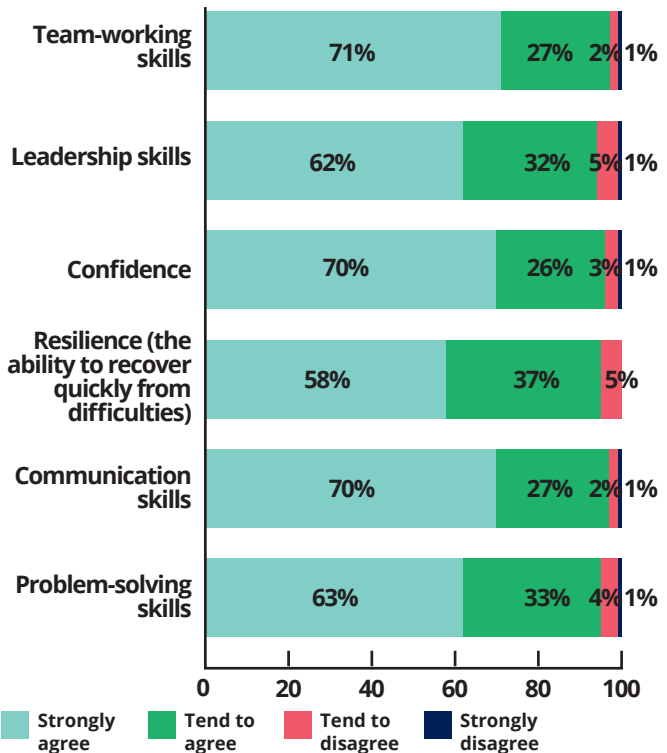
The top suggestion from cadets for improving the scheme was to increase opportunities to work in the community, reflecting their commitment to volunteering.

Skills Acquisition and Confidence

There were a host of skills and abilities that were highlighted as being positively impacted through participation in the cadets. Young people described the Cadet’s programme as offering ‘life skills’ such as first aid, team work, independence alongside specific awards such as Duke of Edinburgh.

“We get to learn a lot of life skills through the Cadets and it’s really good for us... Because if you see normal people who don’t do Cadets, if something happened they would know nothing about first aid or anything.”

The figure to the right shows the agreement was high amongst cadets that responded to the survey that the scheme had a positive impact on skills, confidence and resilience.



Transitions

In the focus groups cadets talked about the scheme offering them new and valuable experiences which were perceived as proving beneficial evidence to enhance their CV’s and prospects of employment.

“I thought that if I joined and I had Police Cadets on my CV, it would give me more a chance of getting in than someone who didn’t have it, so I thought even if I finish Police Cadets and I think, “The Police isn’t for me”, I’ve still got it on my CV and it’s still something that I’ve done.”

The evidence suggests that the cadets positively impact the career aspirations of young people, especially those who are interested in a future career in policing. Around three-quarters (73%) of survey participants were interested in a future career in policing. Nearly all cadets (98%) agreed that

their cadet unit is achieving the aim of promoting an understanding of policing, with 77% strongly agreeing.

"I have a greater understanding of the way the police do their job and this is very interesting and I feel I would like to pursue a career in the police force."

Views of, and Relationship, with the Police

The results show that the VPC had a positive effect on young people's knowledge and perceptions of the police. Importantly, 45% of cadets indicated that being a police cadet has changed their perception of the police a lot, with a further 41% indicating that it had changed their perception a little. This impact to the perception of policing was positive, with young people commenting how being a cadet had fostered or strengthened the respect they had for the police.

"Most of my family don't like police and even my nana jokes and calls me a pig whenever she sees me, but because I grew up with that perspective of not liking police I didn't like them, however joining police cadets has changed my mind completely and I fully respect the police and wish to become a police officer in the future."

Most cadets (93%) agreed the police are helpful and friendly towards young people and there were many comments that suggest how participation in the cadets had made young people aware of police efforts to engage with young people and their strategies to help young people in need. Overall, young people had positive views of the police, which participation in the VPC strengthened but more importantly for those young people who previously had negative views of the police, the VPC was instrumental to changing such attitudes.

"Yes, because before that I didn't really like police forces because I used to be in a gang in which had lot of police involved and they arrested my friends but as I joined police cadets my life changed instantly and my view of police and now I understand that the police force are just trying to help young people like us to not make bad mistakes."

Positively Impacting Young People's Behaviour or Attitudes

Being a cadet supported young people to regulate their behaviour and exercise a higher degree of self-control. Cadets described how they had become calmer and more respectful of others because they were a cadet. It was suggested that the rules and ethos created within the cadet environment was translated by young people into their everyday lives, having a positive effect within school, home and community domains.

Being a cadet helped some young people to keep out of trouble, giving them a positive alternative to that which was offered within their local community. As well as providing a positive space for young people, the programme offered important knowledge related to issues such as drug use and county lines enabling cadets to make more informed and responsible choices in their lives.

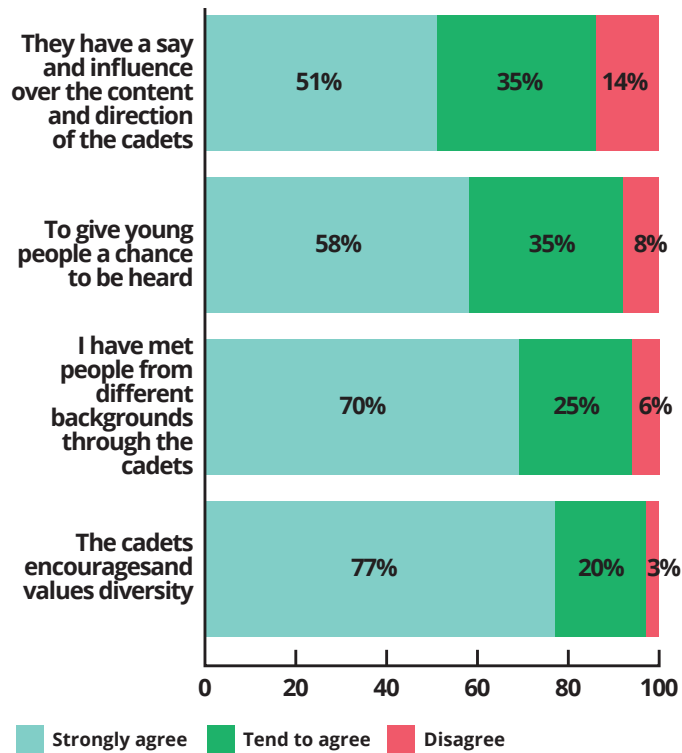
"I think Cadets has kept us away from the people who are troublemakers around the area. So other people our age are smoking and stuff like that. But through Cadets it's kept us away from that and really seeing the dangers of smoking and taking drugs and all this, it's really helped us realise what the consequences are if you are taking drugs or possession of drugs or selling drugs or so on."

There was anecdotal evidence of cases where involvement in the cadets has enabled young people to move away from negative pathways such as criminal behaviour.

“We’ve got a young lad at [location redacted] who was engaged in low-level criminal behaviour. He was known to the youth offending team and to the neighbourhood policing team. He joined the cadets and has now changed his life around. He now volunteers for everything. He’s no longer in trouble, and his younger brother has just joined as well.”

Perceptions of having a Voice, Friendship and Diversity

A key aim of the VPC is to support young people to be heard and around 9-in-10 agreed that the VPC was achieving this aim, with 58% strongly agreeing. Being a cadet for many young people promoted a sense of belonging within a diverse group of young people. Nearly all young people (97%) agreed that they had made new friends through the cadets, with 81% strongly agreeing. A promising feature within the VPC was the diversity within units, with nearly all (95%) cadets agreeing that they had met people from different backgrounds (with 70% strongly agreeing) and 97% agreeing that the cadets encourages diversity (with 77% strongly agreeing).



Summary

Overall, the evidence suggests that the VPC programme makes a positive difference to young people who participate. Most young people enjoy police cadets, having new experiences and making new friends. They are very positive about working with the community and a key suggestion of cadets was to increase opportunities to volunteer. They feel that they have gained valuable skills and the scheme is very beneficial in terms of their future trajectory especially for those looking for a career in policing. In addition, there is anecdotal evidence from cadets, cadet leaders and strategic leads as to the profound impact the scheme can have on individuals who are involved in, or on the fringes of, criminal or anti-social behaviour. This report highlights the benefits of the VPC to young people, please see the full report for the wider benefits of the VPC, for example to policing and society, as well as challenges facing the scheme.