

Key Messages

- The aim of the Historic England Heritage Crime Challenge was to mobilise the potential of young people (Volunteer Police Cadets) in communities and harness their skills in support of Historic England’s Strategy.
- Over 100 cadet leaders representing 22 Forces participated in online leaders training and support and 28 cadet units from 20 Forces engaged with the project. 443 Cadets participated in training or learning activities and 284 Cadets participated in a social action project.
- There is evidence from the cadets that the action challenge achieves its key objectives, in that for the majority:
 - They felt that their awareness and understanding of heritage had increased;
 - They were confident in being able to talk to others about the protection of heritage and what they can do to help, and they had shared what they had learnt with family and friends; and
 - After the challenge they agreed that they are more likely to want to get involved in the protection of heritage in the future.
- The initiative also appeared to have opened the door for community members that are custodians of local heritage sites to work with young people benefitting from their perspective on the subject.
- Less than a third of cadets agreed that they have gained a good awareness of heritage through their education at school, highlighting that this is a useful space for youth groups to occupy.
- Considerations for future projects include: the need to strengthen the role cadets play in selecting the subject of the challenge to maximise their engagement; ensuring that the correct expertise is available; and consider how relationships and partnerships developed through challenges can be maintained longer term.

What is the “Solve It Challenge”?

The aim of the “Solve it Challenge” was to deliver youth led 'heritage crime' social action, reaching a wider and more diverse volunteer group in support of making the historic environment everyone’s business. The initiative was commissioned by Mark Harrison, Head of Heritage Crime Strategy for Historic England and is funded by Historic England’s National Capacity Building (NCB) ongoing grant funding programme. The aim was to have at least six case studies that cadets would then share through a proven peer led ‘train the trainer’ model to drive an exponential increase in the number of young people in the Volunteer Police Cadets (VPC) having the skills, knowledge, confidence and motivation to fight for, look after and make the most of their historic environment. The original ‘one year’ project began in April 2020 but was extended due to the impact of Covid-19 to March 2022.

Introduction

The purpose of this briefing paper is to explore the Heritage Crime Social Action Initiative, provide an

independent assessment of its success and discuss considerations for the future. It is based on the independent evaluation of the project that was conducted by the Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice, based at the University of Northampton.

About the Evaluation

The aim of the evaluation of the Heritage Crime Social Action Initiative was to provide an independent assessment of its success. This includes the impact of local youth-led social action, as well as to provide feedback based on evaluation evidence as to what worked well, facilitators and barriers to success and where improvements can be made in future projects. The evaluation involved a mixed method approach. This included the consideration of project statistics provided by the manager of the VPC Heritage Challenge Programme, surveys with participating cadets and the identification of two case study sites in which in-depth interviews were conducted with cadet leaders and community members and focus groups were conducted with cadets.

Overall Project Statistics

The following statistics were compiled and supplied by the manager of the VPC Heritage Challenge Programme¹.

- All 40 Police Forces in England including the British Transport Police were invited to participate in the project.
- Over 100 leaders representing 22 Forces participated in online leaders training and support.
- 28 Cadets Units representing 20 Forces engaged with the project.
- 16 Units representing all 6 regions, completed social action projects (including online) in all regions and 4 more are still in progress.
- 443 Cadets participated in training or learning activities.
- 284 Cadets participated in a social action project (including online during lockdown).
- Up to 10 Case Study Units were identified to represent a selection of social action projects to be included in the learning resources. Note – that some projects are continuing - so a final list is to be confirmed.

Key Survey Findings

52 cadets completed a survey at the end of their challenge. These cadets came from the following police forces, also listed is the type of challenge they took part in.

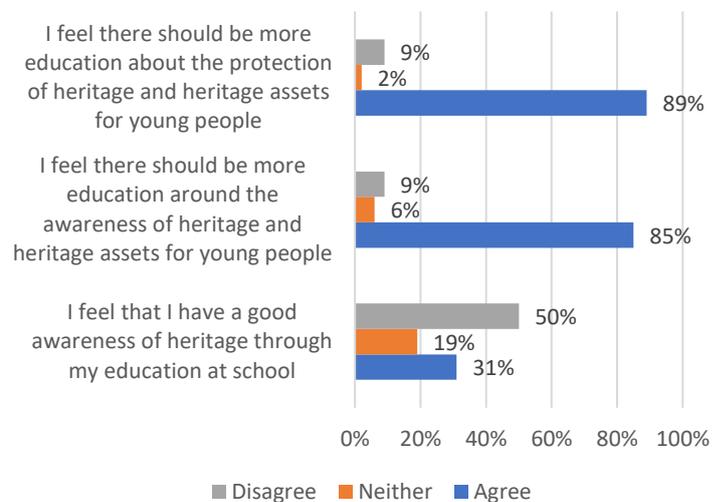
- Cambridgeshire (Peterborough) - Historical weapons & War Memorial
- Essex (Hadlow) - Churchyard clearance and heritage research
- Kent (Dover) - engaged in Heritage Walks/Patrols along coastal cliffs heritage sites/crime prevention/condition assessments
- Lancashire (Blackpool) - War Memorial
- Norfolk (Great Yarmouth) – War Memorial
- East Sussex (Wealden) – Church roof theft /research and crime prevention
- Warwickshire (North and South) – War memorial
- West Yorkshire (Leeds West) – War Memorial

¹ James Cathcart (Jan 2022) Heritage Project Managers Briefing for Evaluation “Lessons Learnt” Report. It should be

Education on Heritage and Heritage Crime

There was a high level of agreement that young people should receive more education about the protection and awareness of heritage and heritage assets, with 85% and 89% agreeing respectively. Less than a third (31%) of young people agreed that they have a good awareness of heritage through their education at school and half (50%) disagreed.

Views on education about heritage and the protection of heritage



What Cadets Learnt and Skills Gained

The most common answer when asked what they learnt from the challenge was an awareness of heritage crime and its prevention, and heritage protection, which was given by 23 of the 34 cadets that commented.

I feel through the Heritage Crime project I have become more confident with what heritage crime is and what I can do to protect our heritage sites.

Most commonly mentioned for those that stated a skill were presentation skills (6), teamworking (5), observation and analysis skills (4) and improvements in their confidence (4).

noted that not all units were able to give exact numbers so estimates have been included.

I think the group has gained a lot of teamwork skills as when put into separate teams, we all worked together to fulfil the assignment.

Involvement in Decision Making

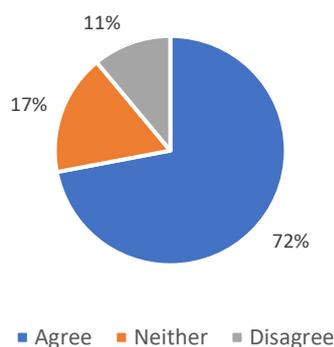
6 in 10 (62%) cadets agreed that that they felt that they played a role in the choice of subject for the challenge and 1 in 10 disagreed that they had a choice in the subject and that they were happy with the subject of the challenge. 7 in 10 agreed they were able to play a role in deciding what action they should take to address the challenge (68% agreeing).

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, choices of topic and location of projects were restricted. However, the War Memorial Trust had online materials and interactive maps suited to online learning. Churches were also available as they were easier to visit during COVID-19 restrictions due to them remaining accessible.

Future Interest

Nearly three quarters of cadets agreed (with a third strongly agreeing, 34%) that they are more likely to want to get involved in the protection of heritage crime in the future after the “challenge”.

I am more likely to want to get involved in the protection of heritage in the future after this "challenge"



Perceptions of Young People and Awareness of Volunteer Police Cadets

The projects were a way in which young people could positively engage with the community and break some stereotypes, particular amongst the older generation.

I think so often when there is interaction it's because there's vandalism and there's the

elderly PC (parish council) members muttering about the graffiti from the young teenagers who lurk about. So, I think it's nice to have some sort of positive news and interaction between older and younger people in rural places.

The community members interviewed were either totally unaware of the cadets prior to the challenges or were unaware of what they can offer and their community work.

I did a bit of reading around the Cadets. Like I say, I didn't even know they existed, so I spent a bit of time finding out about the group, where they all are, how they work and what they are actually offering.

Building Relationships and Partnership Working

Cadet leaders and community members talked about how the project strengthened/fostered relationships between the community organisations and the police and opened the door to engaging with young people.

I'm on the PCC at (church) and when we're talking about how we engage with our young people we use that as an example and say, 'We've done it once, we really ought to be looking to do more of that kind of thing', both with the Cadets but with other groups of young people within the parish.

Community members commented that the projects had been particularly successful due to key passionate personnel and having particular relationships or points of contact are really helpful in the success of projects and on-going relationships.

Giving a Fresh Perspective on Heritage Preservation through the Eyes of Young People

Stakeholders reported a fresh perspective on the security of their premises following the projects, as young people pointed out things that they hadn't seen and had now taken action.

...it had been the thing that had made them have another look at their security and look at it with fresh eyes. So, I think it was helpful to them...I think having the Cadets come and look

gave them a fresh perspective on what a stranger would see coming into their parish and what the weak points are.

The young people that participated also recognised that they were being listened to and that they were providing a fresh perspective that the community members may not have had before.

Impact of Covid-19

Covid-19 impacted the project and resulted in the extension of the project on two occasions. It meant of course that cadets could not meet in person, not meeting at all for a period of time and then meeting over Zoom or Teams. Cadets commented on the impact of Covid-19 on their ability to make progress and frustration of not being able to work as a group face to face initially. However, the evidence demonstrates that the 'challenge' could be flexible and adapted to working online when this was a necessity.

Considerations For Future Projects

- 1) It may be beneficial that cadets play a stronger role in selecting the subject(s) of the challenge(s) to maximise their engagement and to ensure that young people have opportunities to discuss what is important in terms of their heritage.
- 2) Challenges need to ensure that the correct expertise is available, and permission is sought on sites before any actions are taken.

- 3) Connection with partners were made in the projects and whilst the communication is in place for the project, opportunities for other touch points and collaboration should be developed.
- 4) It is important to recognise the role 'passion' plays in this type of subject and if it is delivered by someone that doesn't have a passion for the subject the outcome could in fact be detrimental, in terms of turning cadets off to the topic. Consideration should be given to how resources can be improved to maximise their vibrancy and ensure they are engaging. Mentoring for cadet leaders may also be beneficial from cadet leaders from other sites who are experienced in heritage.
- 5) An advantage of heritage might be that it provides a relatively 'safe' subject in which cadets can take tangible actions and experience working with partners.
- 6) The young people felt that there was a lack of education around heritage, which is perhaps not surprising given the pressures on the school curriculum, highlighting that this is a useful space for youth groups to occupy.



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