

Press Release

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Police officers find body cameras “empowering,” new study shows

- **Independent report by London Metropolitan University shows overwhelming support for body cameras among officers**
- **Camera described as ‘best piece of kit’ by one officer**
- **Over 80% of front line officers believe cameras should be worn**

New research has revealed widespread support among front line police officers for body-worn video cameras (BWVC), with officers finding their use “empowering.”

The independent study, carried out by criminologists at London Metropolitan University, looked at officers’ attitudes towards the technology during trials with the City of London Police.

Officers were interviewed before and after the trial to identify any shifts in attitude towards the technology.

The research found that 83% of police officers feel that body cameras should be worn, with one adding that cameras are “the best piece of kit” they have used.

The report, called ‘Trialling body worn video cameras for City of London Police: Perceptions and Justice Outcomes’, published today, also found that more than 93.2% of officers believe cameras will help with evidence gathering.

Lead author Dr James Morgan, from London Metropolitan University, said: “Contrary to many assumptions regarding ‘cop culture,’ the officers surveyed and interviewed for this study were very progressive in their approaches to this new technology.

“They wanted greater accountability and oversight and believed in their own policing practice and wanted this recorded.

“The findings also point to a particular context in policing, where actions are often scrutinised with members of public armed with their own recording equipment. The participants of this study wanted their own footage to counter negative portrayals of the police which might be found on social media, having their perspective and experiences better understood by the wider public.

“Police officers were mainly positive about the technology, most notably in the hope it would reduce spurious complaints and give police the opportunity to show the pressures in which they work under.”

Another interesting finding was that officers believe the presence of a camera has a positive and calming effect on confrontational situations.

The idea of body worn cameras in policing is relatively new, with the first camera being tested in 2005.

James added: "As well as reducing complaints it was hoped that this technology would reduce the time officers spent preparing evidence for court, increase guilty pleas and contribute to a reduction of assaults on officers."

Second author, Dr Dan Silverstone who now works for Liverpool John Moores University, added: "The findings are particularly important because it addresses the stereotype that police officers often face. The cameras will play a significant role in improving police legitimacy and improving public safety."

"At the time of the study, there were issues to be addressed in ensuring that the evidence from the cameras were compatible with the Crown Prosecution Service systems. However, when these are resolved, evidence from the body worn cameras will increase the speed and success of prosecutions."

Chief Superintendent David Lawes from the City of London Police said: "We are confident that the continued use of body worn video cameras will help us build on our efforts to bring policing in the Square Mile into the 21st century, while increasing confidence in our officers and the difficult job they do."

"These cameras already play an important role in our policing, as the mere presence of this type of video can often prevent potentially volatile situations from escalating."

"Simply put, video captures events in a way that can't be represented on paper in the same detail; as one officer in this study states - video enables one to feel the emotion of an incident."

"Our officers already work in an observed environment, with the prevalence of camera phones in society, and body worn cameras allow officers to show their interpretation of an incident, while still being fully accountable for their actions."

"A broad sample of City of London Police officers took part in this study into perceptions of the impact of using body worn cameras, and this document shows the largely positive response."

The cameras used in the trial were developed by the supplier TASER, and can be attached to the breast of a police uniform.

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Notes to Editors

How many officers took part in the research?

149 officers responded to the survey. They were all City of London Police (CoLP) front-line police officers.

Methodology

Officers were interviewed about their views on body cameras before the trial, and again afterwards.

A web survey was designed and distributed to all front-line officers employed by the force. This was done prior to training and trialling of the technology. It aimed to discover the initial perceptions of this technology by officers who might utilise body worn cameras (BWVC) during the trial.

A follow up survey was carried out following the five-month trial.

In addition, qualitative interviews were conducted with 15 officers before and then 18 officers after the trial. Face to face interviews were organised at the convenience of the participants and typically took place within the Police Station. They lasted between 20 minutes and an hour. Interviews were recorded. The interview schedule was used to structure the analysis. The research ethics were informed by the consideration of London Metropolitan University Research Ethics Committee.

As officers were discussing potentially sensitive behaviour of their colleagues protecting the anonymity of interviewees was of paramount importance and therefore names were not attached to any written notes or tables of analysis.

Although 148 officers answered the survey delivered prior to trialling the technology, a small number of respondents did not answer each question. For some of these questions there were only 141, 144 or 145 responses. For the survey delivered after the trial 149 officers responded, with all survey items receiving 149 responses.

All of the questions concerning attitudes and expectation towards BWVC were asked in a format where officers were required to choose from one of the following five responses: completely agree; somewhat agree; neither agree nor disagree; somewhat disagree; completely disagree.

Summary of results

Before the trial it was found that:

- 83.1% of officers agreed that BWVCs should be worn by all front-line police officers
- 79.1% of officers agreed that all officers, regardless of their role, should wear BWVCs while on duty
- 71% of officers believed that police community support officers should wear BWVCs
- 43.2% of officers believed that BWVCs should be compulsory
- 50% of officers believe that the technology will help reduce crime and anti-social behaviour
- 87.8% of officers believe that the cameras will increase the chance of conviction following an incident
- 87.2% of officers agreed that the technology will help identify criminals
- 95.3% of officers agreed that BWVCs will help gather evidence

- 66.9% of officers believe the cameras will reduce the number of complaints against officers
- 44.6% of officers believe the cameras will help train new recruits
- 55.9% of officers thought the cameras would improve police/public relations
- 36.6% of officers thought the cameras will make the police feel safer
- 49.7% of officers believe the BWVCs will improve the behaviour of the public who interact with officers

After the trial it was found that:

- 83.9% of officers agreed that BWVCs should be worn by all front-line police officers
- 79.2% of officers agreed that all officers, regardless of their role, should wear BWVCs while on duty
- 83.8% of officers believed that police community support officers should wear BWVCs
- 58.4% of officers believed that BWVCs should be compulsory
- 43.6% of officers believe that the technology will help reduce crime and anti-social behaviour
- 85.3% of officers believe that the cameras will increase the chance of conviction following an incident
- 88% of officers agreed that the technology will help identify criminals
- 93.2% of officers agreed that BWVCs will help gather evidence
- 61% of officers believe the cameras will reduce the number of complaints against officers
- 44.3% of officers believe the cameras will help train new recruits
- 62.5% of officers thought the cameras would improve police/public relations
- 32.9% of officers thought the cameras will make the police feel safer
- 32.9% of officers believe the BWVCs will improve the behaviour of the public who interact with officers

Available for Interview

- Dr James Morgan is a lecturer in Criminology at London Metropolitan University. For an interview with Dr James Morgan, please contact Charlotte White on 020 7133 2467 or 07776 492 349 or c.white1@londonmet.ac.uk.
- Chief Superintendent David Lawes is the head of City of London Police's uniformed policing directorate, which covers all aspects of uniformed policing including response, community engagement, licensing, specialist skills, and more. For an interview with Ch Spt Lawes on this topic, please contact John Ellul on 020 7601 2015 or 07803 305391 or john.ellul@city-of-london.pnn.police.uk.

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About London Metropolitan University

London Metropolitan University has been providing education to people from all backgrounds since 1848, with the creation of the Metropolitan Evening Classes for Working Men. Six schools teach cutting-edge, relevant courses across the arts, sciences, business, law and humanities. Accelerator – London Met’s specialist business incubator – helps graduates get their enterprises up and running and was named among the Top Five ‘Most Active’ accelerators in Europe in 2015, highlighting its contribution to London’s booming start-up industry.

London Met is home to world-leading academics who regularly give expert comment to the media. The University scored well in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework, being ranked 4th in the country for Area Studies and performing strongly in Education and Social Studies.

The University is strongly focused on employability. In 2016, London Met recorded its highest ever graduate employment score, with 95% of all 2015/16 graduates in work or further study six months after graduation.

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