

THE BAWP GUIDE TO

working with the media

Supporting
the **gender**
AGENDA



British Association for
Women in Policing

Working with the media

In recent years the police have become one of the most scrutinised public services and it wouldn't be exaggerating to say that not a day goes by without some kind of police story appearing in the national press, on radio or television.

Many people rarely have personal contact with the police and so often their views about officers and support staff are affected by what they read, see and hear in the media – both fact and fiction. Episodes of *The Bill* influence people's opinions just as much as an article in the national newspapers.

So a professional image of a police officer in the media has benefits on many levels.

Journalists can help us earn the confidence, trust and support of the public by showing the huge variety of challenges faced by police staff every day. And media coverage can also impact on viewers' and readers' perceptions. At the moment when a member of the public thinks of a police officer, many will automatically visualise a man. But over time this could change as a result of media images.

If newspapers, news programmes and TV dramas can be persuaded to consistently show successful women in high-ranking, specialist or non-stereotypical frontline roles, these images should eventually move from the exception to the norm, and can help support women's progress in the organisation.

We all have a role to play in promoting a positive and professional image of women working in the police service - whether this involves being interviewed by a local newspaper, or challenging exclusionary language used in police-related articles or programmes.

And in general terms news stories promoting good police work can increase public confidence, provide reassurance and so reduce fear of crime. They can also help investigations – an appeal in the media can reach tens of thousands of people.

This leaflet outlines some general information about the media but is by no means an exhaustive guide – staff working in the police service should always contact their force press office for advice on issues and incidents.

General advice

Journalists are usually more than happy to help publicise appeals, events, campaigns, success stories and achievements, but they ask for a few things in return:

- Don't expect publicity for a story which is well past its sell-by date. In general reporters are interested in things that are about to happen, or have recently taken place. Old news is a contradiction in terms
- Whenever possible make sure there are people available who are willing to give media interviews about the subject you are trying to publicise
- Newspaper and television journalists are always looking for ways to help illustrate the stories they cover, and welcome suggestions on potential picture opportunities

If a press photographer asks to take your picture, or a TV crew asks to film you, carefully consider what they are asking you to do, as what can seem like a harmless request for a light-hearted shot may not come across as a very professional image and could cause you embarrassment. There is also the potential for this image to be shown again throughout your police career as press photographs and film clips are kept on file by newsrooms should they need a picture to illustrate future stories.

Remember that most forces have media guidelines, so if you are unsure about how best to handle a press enquiry or request always contact your force press officers. They will be able to provide information on how best to publicise an incident or event and give advice on preparing for a media interview.

Talking to newspaper reporters

- Make sure you know the name of the reporter and the name of the newspaper she / he is working for
- If reporters call at a busy time and it's not convenient to talk, or you aren't sure how to respond to their questions, make a note of their enquiry and tell them you will call them back. This allows

you time to check facts and gives you a chance to think through what you want to say. If you want something to appear in the press, bear in mind the reporters' deadlines

- Stick to what you know – don't be drawn into issues, investigations and operations you haven't been involved in
- Don't use police jargon, use plain English
- Never forget who you are talking to. Flippant remarks, throw-away comments and supposedly humorous asides may find their way into a press article
- Don't be drawn into 'off the record' or unattributable comments and never give out information which could compromise proceedings either relating to criminal or disciplinary matters
- Ignoring a media enquiry won't make it go away. Contact your force press office for advice. If you are releasing information which you think will generate a lot of media interest, or which may have wider implications, speak to your force press officers so that they can be ready for, and help with, follow-up enquiries from other journalists

Television and radio interviews

A television or radio interview gives you the chance to speak to thousands of people – whether it's appealing for witnesses or highlighting achievements.

Most of the points outlined in the section above ('Talking to newspaper reporters') are equally relevant when talking to broadcast journalists, but there are some extra things to bear in mind.

By taking a few minutes to prepare for an interview you will feel far more confident, calm and in control.

The basics

- Be clear in your own mind about the message you want to get across
- Have facts at your fingertips, including statistics, any particular telephone numbers you want the public to ring or addresses of websites you want them to visit.

Establish the facts and the format

- Check the interviewer's name, which organisation she / he works for and on which programme the interview will appear
- Is the interview live or pre-recorded?
- How long will it last?
- Which subjects will be covered in the interview?
- Ask what the likely questions are going to be and whether the interviewer is taking a specific line on the issue being discussed
- Is there anyone else taking part? If so, who?
- Before the interview begins, ask what the first question will be. This will give you a chance to think about what you want to say, and get the interview off to a good start

Be clear about why you are doing the interview

Are you:

- Promoting the work of your team, your force or BAWP
- Generating interest in an event or campaign
- Giving the public advice and reassurance
- Appealing for information or witnesses
- Answering criticisms

Practical preparation

- Always contact your force press office and let them know that you have been asked / are taking part in a radio or TV interview
- Make a note of the three most important points you want to include in the interview
- Consider likely questions and your response to them
- Consider using examples to illustrate your point
- Don't expect an interviewer to ask questions which suit the points you want to cover – it's up to you to get your message across
- Make sure you are aware of your force's stance on any issues you are discussing

And remember...

- Always assume a microphone or camera is switched on
- Look at the interviewer, not at the camera
- If you are being filmed in your office remove any confidential material from walls, noticeboards, screens etc
- Check your appearance

- Check what will be in the background of the shot when you are being interviewed
- Divert telephone calls and switch off your mobile and pager
- If you are being interviewed in an office, consider putting a sign on the door so there aren't any unexpected interruptions
- Don't be frightened to use your hands to express yourself
- Avoid 'police speak' – keep it clear and simple

Useful contacts

- Force press officers will always be more than happy to help with advice and information about media enquiries and interview requests
- For general advice on BAWP communications issues, contact Alison Goodwin on 07791 534980.

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