

College Bursary Scheme

Detective Constable Holly Bluck, West Midlands Police
BSc in Forensic Psychology, Open University



Holly has worked for West Midlands Police for over 10 years and had been out of education since taking her GCSEs. Holly received a College bursary in 2018 and also received an award from the **Honourable Society of Knights of the Round Table**.

Why did you decide to apply for a College of Policing bursary?

Before starting my degree, I hadn't undertaken any formal education since my GCSEs. I had already started my degree in forensic psychology when I became aware of the College bursary. I didn't expect my bursary application to be successful and had convinced myself that funding would be given to candidates studying at Masters or PhD levels, or only those of senior ranks.

I found it reassuring that the bursary came from the College of Policing and, being part of the policing family, I could make my application based on some of my real work experience on sensitive topics.

How has your course been so far?

Doing my degree is the best thing I've ever done. My course has been brilliant and I've found the module contents really interesting. Forensic psychology really addresses debate and issues relevant to policing. As I have progressed through the degree modules, I have found myself linking theories and approaches to my work reviewing cases. I believe that I have found what is referred to as my 'academic voice' which has given me the skills to communicate what I need in a structured and concise way.

What parts of the course have you enjoyed?

I have really enjoyed focusing on the consequences of trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder and stress-related disorder which has helped me to understand how officers are susceptible to the negative effects of trauma. In my opinion, as officers we are exposed to the level of trauma that can cause mental ill-health and unfortunately the consequences of this can manifest long after the initial stressor.

What parts have you found challenging?

From a purely academic perspective, research methods and statistical analysis have been a challenge. This is largely due to the fact that it is new to me and, having been out of education for some time, I have had to face the dreaded maths. Having said that, I have coped very well and I now find myself with a far better applied methodical approach to problem solving and reasoning.

How will your studies benefit your work and policing?

My studies have impacted substantially on my work and confidence. My day-to-day responsibilities include the review of domestic homicide and child murder cases and through these reviews, I am responsible for identifying learning and driving change through force recommendations.

Academic study has helped me to foster skills which allow me to produce professional and structured documents and to think critically and analytically about a range of relevant policing materials and consider outcomes on a more strategic level than I had previously.

What difference has receiving a College bursary made to you?

In short, receiving a bursary has financially assisted me in achieving a dream and, once realised, I cannot say where my future will take me. And that is very exciting.

How do you balance studying and your work?

I have to be disciplined and allocate time for study each week whilst also building in regular study days. I may take a day's leave from work or ask my parents to have my child so that I can immerse myself in the materials. Importantly, it's beneficial to have study objectives and make plans for the allocated study time from which to work.

I'm very conscious that all available free time is actually study time. This includes the 20 minutes I may take to eat lunch and so I've mastered eating and reading simultaneously but also the half an hour before bed and every Sunday evening, without fail and regardless of the latest Netflix series.

What perception did you have of further education before starting your course?

My perception of further education was that it wasn't attainable whilst I was working full time. I didn't understand the nature and pace of part-time learning. However now I appreciate that universities have adapted to accommodate students who are working whilst studying, and they have courses enabling study at a slower pace. Many universities now offer Masters and PhD courses as a part-time and distance option which can be completed around work.

What advice would you give to a colleague considering further study?

I would recommend to first, decide if it is really what you want? By this I mean, are you ready to press pause on the social aspects of your life in order to achieve academic success and are you willing to dedicate the time to study? Second, are you ready to make the financial commitment? If you can answer positively to both of these then I suggest attending university open days or exploring distance online learning.

Furthermore, don't allow yourself to be put off by having been out of education for some time or that perhaps you didn't achieve what could have been your personal best at school. Certainly don't let others persuade you against academic study but, be realistic about the pathway you want to pursue.

If you have any questions about the scheme or need further information, contact [**BursaryScheme@college.pnn.police.uk**](mailto:BursaryScheme@college.pnn.police.uk)