College of Policing | Leadership Standards Performance

College of Policing
PO Box 58323
London
NW1W 9HG
[redacted]

Mr Jame Bennett
HM Senior Coroner for Herefordshire
Coroner's Office,
Gardner Hall,
Venns Lane,
Hereford,
HR1 1DT
[redacted]

10 August 2026

Preventing Future Deaths Report – Alan Hirst

Dear Mr Bennett

Thank you for your report dated 27 July 2026 concerning the tragic death of Alan Hirst. We extend our sincere condolences to his family and all those affected.

We have carefully considered the concerns set out within the Prevention of Future Deaths Report insofar as they relate to Police Search Adviser (PolSA) training and national search capability.

Concern 1: Whether police forces are unable to provide 24/7 PolSA coverage due to insufficient training provision

The College of Policing delivers the national Police Search Adviser (PolSA) training programme on behalf of UK policing. The programme currently provides four PolSA courses per year, equating to approximately 100 training places annually.

Training requirements are identified through an annual bidding process in which police forces submit their forecast demand for training places for the forthcoming financial year.

Having reviewed the training requests received from West Mercia Police over the previous five years, all requested PolSA training places have ultimately been made available by the College of Policing. In some years, additional places were offered at a later stage and were not subsequently taken up by the force.

The College keeps national demand under regular review and has demonstrated its ability to increase capacity where operational requirements justify additional provision. For example, during periods of increased demand the College has delivered additional courses beyond the standard annual programme.

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The College's review suggests that access to national PoISA training places has generally been available where forces have identified and communicated a training requirement, although wider factors may also influence local PoISA availability and resilience.

In considering the concern regarding the provision of 24/7 Police Search Adviser (PoISA) coverage, it is important to recognise that the availability of a PoISA at any given time is influenced by a range of factors beyond the number of officers trained nationally. These include local workforce planning, resilience arrangements, duty management and the prioritisation of operational resources. Information available to the Police National Search Centre indicates that a number of police forces of comparable size, and in some cases smaller than West Mercia Police, currently maintain arrangements that provide 24-hour PoISA availability. This would suggest that the ability to provide continuous PoISA coverage is not determined solely by the number of training places available nationally, or the overall number of trained advisers within a force, but also by how those resources are structured and deployed locally.

In addition, in 2024 the College introduced the Initial Missing Person Search Adviser (IMPSA) programme. This provides forces with an additional means of developing search capability and resilience for missing person investigations by training larger numbers of officers in the initial management and search considerations associated with missing person enquiries.

Concern 2: Prioritisation of training for forces with the greatest need.

The allocation of PoISA training places is informed by information provided by forces through the annual bidding process.

The College actively considers factors such as anticipated operational demand, major events, anticipated retirements, reductions in existing capability and other identified risks when allocating training places.

Where forces identify an urgent operational requirement for additional PoISA capacity, the College is able to take such information into account when determining allocations and planning future course provision.

The College therefore has mechanisms in place to prioritise training provision where forces identify a particular operational need and communicate that requirement through the established processes.

Conclusion

The College of Policing recognises the importance of maintaining an effective national Police Search Adviser (PoISA) capability to support high-risk missing person investigations. While our review indicates that national training provision remains available to forces that identify a requirement, we acknowledge the concerns raised by the Coroner and will continue to work with

police forces and national policing leads to ensure that capability, resilience and training arrangements remain appropriate to operational demand.

Having reviewed the concerns raised by the Coroner, we are satisfied that:

- national PoISA training provision remains available to forces that identify a training requirement;
- there are established mechanisms through which forces can communicate urgent or emerging training needs;
- training allocations can be prioritised according to operational demand and identified risks; and
- additional resilience is available through the Initial Missing Person Search Adviser (IMPSA) programme.

The College has engaged directly with West Mercia Police to review current resilience and capacity arrangements, to identify any immediate and longer-term training requirements, and explore opportunities to strengthen the availability of suitably qualified search advisers. Our shared aim is to ensure that forces are best placed to respond effectively to future high-risk missing person investigations and that any emerging gaps in capability are addressed in a timely and proportionate manner.

Yours sincerely,

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Chief Executive Officer
College of Policing

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