

The Scottish Police College

Decision making made easy



“Some subject matter can be very dry and unexciting when it’s presented in a traditional way,” he says. “But I’d say that an interactive whiteboard could be used to improve any kind of lesson where there’s a danger of this, because of its very nature. The whiteboard engages the audience, and that’s half the battle when you’re trying to get your message across to your students.”

Sergeant Ross Allan,
Trainer Scottish Police College.

Probationers at the Scottish Police College are gaining a valuable insight into policing major incidents, thanks to an innovative training course and the use of SMART Board™ interactive whiteboards.

The Scottish Police College was founded more than 50 years ago with the aim of training officers from all of the police forces in Scotland in a single central location. With a campus built around Tulliallan Castle in Fife, it provides training from probationer to command level, and

every recruit to the police service in Scotland attends the College soon after joining.

In recent years the College has embraced the latest developments in technology to support and enhance its educational programmes with senior management deciding to invest in SMART Board interactive whiteboards, as well as arranging training for the College’s own trainers.

The officer examining maps and photographs of a large housing estate has a difficult decision to make. A gas explosion has left a number of people injured; with colleagues already on the scene, paramedics and fire crews on the way and the danger of further explosions, the officer has to work with the other emergency services to put a safety cordon in place and plan the evacuation routes for residents.

Having examined the options with other members of the team, the officer draws a cordon around the affected area on the detailed map displayed on the SMART Board interactive whiteboard, along with evacuation routes and rendezvous points. Ten minutes later, a second group of officers are looking at the same map, and making their decisions as the operation escalates.

This is the type of scenario facing officers on the Reconviction course at Tulliallan Scottish Police College, and while their decisions may be theoretical, many of the case studies they are examining replicate the type of incident they will encounter during their policing career.

The course uses SMART Board interactive whiteboards to display the details of a major incident, and enable officers – all probationers with around 12 months service – to learn more about the planning and responses required in such situations.

Reconviction was launched over two years ago, as part of an overall redesign of probationer training at Tulliallan. Having completed the 15-week Initial Stage Training course and spent a year out on Division, probationers return to the College for the two-week Reconviction course, aimed at providing additional skills and learning for constables as well as testing the policing knowledge they already have.

The course is a combination of tailor-made personal development for officers and a series of assessment-based sessions on subjects such as crime, general police duties and roads policing. Constables also revisit the SECAPRA problem-solving approach as well as undertaking the major incident case study. Trainer Sergeant Ross Allan believes it is in this environment that the SMART Boards have been most effective.

“Being able to use the SMART Boards to display maps and aerial photographs has transformed the way the scenarios are run” says Sgt Allan, who finishes a three-year secondment to the College this year, having been actively involved in the Reconviction course. “Their interactive nature means trainees can mark directly onto what is displayed on the board. Previously we had to use laminated maps; this was a bit clumsy to say the least, and created a lot of clutter on desktops. It’s a bit awkward trying



to display an A4-sized map to the entire class and show where you've marked your cordons and so on, but with the SMART Board it's really easy and clear.

"It's the area where the SMART Boards really come into their own for us. The College has created various scenarios, and the SMART Boards seemed to be the ideal medium for delivering them."

During the sessions trainees are given tasks as the simulated incident escalates, and have to make the same kind of judgements and decisions that are made in policing real incidents.

Officers on the course are divided up into different groups, and each group uses different coloured pens to mark their choices on the detailed maps and photographs on the SMART Board interactive whiteboards display.

"The Microsoft® PowerPoint® presentation displays maps, aerial photographs and other information about the incident area, and the trainees can come out and make their marks for everyone to see and comment on," says Sgt Allan.

"In the current climate in which the police are operating, especially in the aftermath of the 7/7 bombings in London in 2005, this kind of exercise has become extremely important.

Officers on the scene need to have a very clear knowledge not only of their own roles in event of a major incident and how they will have to respond, but also of the roles of their colleagues and senior officers. The Reconviction course very much stresses the importance of this to the trainees."

"It's like any new technology," says Sgt Allan. "You have to get in there and actually use it, play around with it and find out for yourself what it can do. There's no substitute for that. Once you've used it for a while, it gets easier all the time."

So far, the SMART Boards have mainly been used with the Reconviction programme and also for accessing the internet for whole-class demonstrations. Apart from using Microsoft PowerPoint for the presentations, the College has also developed its own software package for simulating major incidents, which creates the scenarios for the trainees.