

File Preparation Officer – Ema Garner

Question: How long have you been with SYP? / Tell us about your background.

Answer: I joined SYP in October 2007 as a Call Handler within the Force Control Room. To be honest it was a role that I was only planning on staying in for a few years as I had just moved back to Sheffield after returning from working abroad and was looking for a job in a school as my background is in Child Care. However, I really enjoyed the call handling role and felt like I was helping people, also the money and the hours suited me, as I am a bit of a night owl so working nights was perfect. As I became more experienced in the role, I started to mentor new starters joining our group, something that fulfilled the “teacher” in me. In 2012 I was successful in getting a secondment into the Call Handling Tutor Unit, this involved tutoring brand new call handlers after they received their initial training. I became a permanent call handling tutor in 2017 after assisting the team since 2012, it was a role I thoroughly enjoyed, it was varied and it involved several different responsibilities, not just the tutoring of new staff but reviewing policies and procedures used in the force control room in line with other departments in SYP and quality checking calls to ensure they were being dealt with correctly and relevant advice being provided. There were a lot of changes in the force control room during my 14 years there, in particular during the last few as a new incident recording system was introduced. I had a lot of involvement in putting together the force document on how to make use of it, which was a lot of work and involved a lot of planning and time, to ensure it was completed to a good standard. After this I began to feel that I had accomplished all I could within that role and decided a change was needed.

I enjoy doing paperwork both electronic and physical, which may sound strange, but I like to make sure things are done correctly and in line with procedure. So, after checking the jobs board and reading the role profile for File Preparation Officer I decided to apply and was successful in getting offered a Job.

Q: What’s your current role like?

A: I joined File Preparation in November 2020. Coming from a role that I knew inside out to one I had no idea about was a massive thing for me, as I like to know what I am doing. I had to accept that I wouldn’t know the File Prep role straight away and that there was a lot for me to learn. To this day I am still learning as new things crop up all the time.

The days tend to never be the same but at the same time they are, dealing with files and action plans from the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), or listening to calls in order to redact information, another day you might be chasing officers for outstanding items needed by a certain date or dealing with an urgent escalation for court the next day. When starting work at 7am we are responsible for reviewing files that are due in court that morning, these are known as remand files. These have to be dealt with and sent to CPS no later than 08.30am, which only gives you an hour and half to ensure officers have generated and uploaded all relevant paperwork required for the remand.

I work shifts, which means working on a weekend and up until 10pm. I don’t mind working on a weekend as it tends to be the best time to catch up on work as the office tends to be quieter. As above we start work at 7am on days shifts to assist the remand files, there isn’t always a file to deal with as the staff who worked after or nights the day before may have already dealt them. Once I have finished with a remand file or I haven’t been allocated one, I tend to go through the files I have

and check what is outstanding, what needs reviewing or if the target date is due and then make a plan for the day.

Q: What's your most memorable moment?

A: I have had numerous memorable moments in my almost 15yrs with SYP, but I have to say that it is the people I have worked with that are the most memorable, some of which have become close friends. The people make the job I believe, having that support and guidance from others, being able to bounce ideas off one another and discussing what might be the best option or seeking advice on something you have never dealt with. Then there is the social aspect, taking lunch breaks and popping out for coffee. They are the support you need; they know the job too, they know the pressures that come along with working within the department, you can share fears and upsets, but have a laugh and a catch up about what they have done on days off at the same time. There is a team of us who work the same or similar shift pattern and we have all built up quite a good working relationship, they are there during the weekends, so you aren't alone in the office and we can check in with one another if we have been off work or if we appear to be struggling with something.

Q: Why is now a good time to join SYP?

A: As you may be aware Police Officer and Staff recruitment is ongoing at the moment, so now is a good time to get your foot in the door. The Police Force is not just about Police Officers, there are those who run the 'backroom' and 'behind the scenes', this is us the Police staff who provide support to Officers and the Force as a whole. That is what this role is all about, supporting officers, and as we take on more officers, the necessity to take on more 'behind the scene' staff grows, as without the support we provide officers would be sat in the office instead of being out on the streets and attending to the public. All Police Staff roles come with good pay and benefits, as a File Preparation officer you will be contracted to work shifts and weekends, which means you get shift and weekend working allowances on top of your salary, which bumps up your annual income. The annual leave you get is fantastic too, and how the shifts work means to take 2 weeks off all you need to do is book 5 days of leave.

I would also say if you have considered being a Police Officer but were unsure about if it was for you or not, then this might be the job for you. You would get an understanding of how the Police work and what is expected of Police Officers, as we check their work and you would see what they deal with day to day. As part of the terms and conditions for the role there is a 2 year tenure which means you are contracted to stay in the role and can't transfer or move departments, however this isn't a bad thing as the role is not something you will learn and master in say 6 months, so it does give you time to learn the ins and outs of the Force, and may help with your decision on being an Officer or staying in the File Preparation role.

Q: What would you say to anyone considering applying?

A: As the role profile says – you will be supporting the file preparation process to achieve the objectives of ensuring cases are progressed through the court systems according to the standards agreed in the South Yorkshire effective trial management framework.

Basically, you will be reviewing and building files to go through to the courts for sentencing, the files need to be up to the national standard with all relevant documentation and evidence provided. There is a lot to learn for the role and it is not something that can be learnt and known in just a few weeks or months, so be prepared for feeling like a fish out of water initially. I have been in the role

for 16 months and I am still learning things now, it tends to be stuff that doesn't come up often so when it does, I have to ask a colleague, mentor or supervisor and learn it there and then.

So, if you are considering applying think about the following and if you can see yourself being able to fulfil the role profile:

Time management - The workload can be tough, there are various deadlines and target dates that need to be adhered to, and you may have days where you feel like you can't manage all the files you have been allocated. It is easy now for me to say, "don't panic", as I definitely did, but it's all about being able to manage those files. You need to be able to prioritise, being able to identify what needs actioning first and not letting yourself get overwhelmed as you can only do what you can. You may find one month that you have several files all due at the same time, with urgent action plans being sent and more files being allocated to you, but the month after you may find your workload has decreased. It can get stressful when it is like this, but you have the support of supervisors and your colleagues. As we work alongside the Crown Prosecution Service there are times when urgent action plans come through from them that need dealing with there and then, so being able to park what you were dealing with and pick it back up after is something you will find yourself doing often.

Attention to detail - if you have a keen eye and can spot errors/mistakes then this is for you, as you will be quality checking the work of officers/staff, ensuring it is suitable to be used in both Magistrates and Crown court, so it is important that paperwork is up to the national standard and suitable for court. At the moment, there are number of new officers going through training so have little experience of putting together a file for court, so you may find mistakes or items missing from the file and will have to provide feedback and/or liaise with them to provide guidance on what is required.

This can be a tough and challenging role, mostly when it comes to the workload and managing your own time, as I have mentioned above. You will be responsible for how you manage your work and time, this is a skill that is vital as no one else will be monitoring you target dates or deadlines, if the work isn't done then it will be down to you to explain why. As well as being able to manage you time there are a number of other aspects to consider when applying such as; being comfortable and confident to work alone, make decisions based on the information you have in front of you, able to liaise with those within the team, Police Officers and staff out at district and staff within CPS either via email or on the phone.