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GRADUATE POLICE OFFICERS: RELEASING THE POTENTIAL FOR PRE-EMPLOYMENT UNIVERSITY PROGRAMMES FOR ASPIRING OFFICERS

The introduction of IPLDP (Initial Police Learning and Development Programme) provided Chief Constables with the opportunity to deliver initial police training through established police training approaches or involve other organisations. Since the 1970s there have been attempts by universities in the UK to engage with police services in the design and delivery of educational programmes for police officers. A variety of curriculums and new partnerships have evolved but there is little evidence of the contribution of these developments or whether these 'new' approaches differ significantly from traditional training regimes. There remains resistance from some quarters towards involving universities in the learning and development of police officers manifested by the Government's lead that situates the essential learning requirements of a police officer below higher education level. This article suggests that policing is at a crossroads and needs to decide now if it wants to be seen as a profession.

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In Sir Ronnie Flanagan's *Review of Policing* it is suggested that the qualities required of today's police officers reflect educational rather than training needs (2008: 53). Flanagan also argues that the police should follow other professions by placing the 'responsibility for their pre-employment training' and gaining of the necessary 'eligibility for employment' on the individual and at their own expense. These suggestions point to the potential for a significant role for universities in delivering professional policing programmes for aspiring police officers. Whereas such involvement of universities remains a relatively recent and under-developed phenomenon in England and Wales, opportunities and developments have begun to emerge. This is especially true since the Police Reform Act 2002, which draws upon recommendations in *Training Matters* (HMIC, 2002) in formally acknowledging deficiencies in police training and initiating the development of a new Initial Police Learning and Development Programme (IPLDP). IPLDP is integrated into the initial police training provision for all of the 43 Home Office police services in England and Wales. Training

provision can be delivered by a variety of providers including the police service, and private and public sector organisations. As a result of the introduction of IPLDP there has been a range of different approaches of police training across the country, with some police services engaging with universities, colleges and others providing 'in-house' training. There is little research evidence available assessing different approaches to initial police learning programmes or indeed any strategy to measure the medium- to long-term impact of these different arrangements.

Proposals for graduate police officers are not warmly received everywhere and the long tradition of 'learning by doing' retains high status within some policing circles. The art and craft of police work is presented as a typology and explanation of how police officers learn and work (Tong & Bowling, 2006). The emphasis on 'intuition' as opposed to 'science' is one that has dominated police decision making at the lowest ranks (e.g. police constable) (Bayley & Bittner, 1989). This approach to police work has been informed by the craft model of learning characterised by learning and gaining experience in the workplace, seen as preferred to alternatives because it is perceived as cheap (officers working while they are learning), relevant (learning by doing) and real (dealing with actual crimes rather than role play). It is further underpinned within police culture as it is characterised by resistance to learning and change (e.g. 'forget what you learn in the classroom, it's the workplace that matters') and an affinity with a sense of mission and action (Reiner, 2000). Despite some senior police officers vocally supporting more educationally orientated provisions for trainee police officers, the well-established resistance to learning outside the workplace still remains in some quarters (Flanagan, 2008; Wood & Tong, 2009).

Inevitably, recognition of the complexity of the police task is explicitly linked to debates around the professional status of policing or otherwise. If police work is seen as an activity not requiring

substantive levels of knowledge to perform key tasks, this will inevitably lead to a lack of recognition in terms of professional status. This is not to reject workplace learning; on the contrary, workplace learning represents a crucial component of the learning process for police officers. The argument made here is that workplace learning must be accompanied by clear educational principles, a transparent learning structure and sufficient depth of knowledge on the part of the trainee. The authors of this article argue that the work of police officers does require professional recognition but also the comprehensive educational and vocational infrastructure enjoyed by other professions. The real issue at stake is how learning on the job is measured and to what degree. It establishes what we expect police officers to know and be able to do, and at present it appears that we do not expect very much.

This does not necessarily mean that university degrees in themselves are the answer. There are a number of countries around the world that have graduate entry arrangements for police officers and there is evidence to suggest that graduate entry police officers do bring some benefits. Roberg and Bonn (2004: 473–5) have drawn on research in the USA arguing that officers with degrees were less authoritarian, more 'conducive' to the use of police discretion, with 'greater acceptance' of minorities, 'more professional and ethical in their behaviour', had fewer complaints and less disciplinary action against them. Foster (1999: 381) argues that '..good educational qualifications and professional policing are linked and may be crucial to discouraging the least desirable and potentially damaging aspects of police/public interaction and police malpractice'. However, our point here is not to make the case for degree programmes *per se* but rather to make the case for 'policing programmes'. This is an important point to the extent that such programmes necessitate a real consideration of the types of knowledge, understanding, skills attitudes and behaviours (KUSAB)

an officer needs to have and, more importantly, needs to demonstrate. In today's complex world, surely such qualities easily equate to university undergraduate degree levels.

There are other arguments supporting greater involvement of universities in developing new police officers, especially on programmes that need to be completed prior to employment with a police service. For example, such pre-employment programmes overcome the problem of trainee police officers being seen as a 'resource' as opposed to an 'investment' (Wood & Tong, 2009). Pre-employment programmes allow for the emphasis to be placed on 'investment' (preparation for the future) as opposed to 'resource' (to be used immediately). Likewise, the economic downturn and the budgetary savings required of police services will inevitably require police managers to consider all costs to the organisation, with cut backs to protect front-line services. It is here that Flanagan's suggestions may have considerable appeal for police leaders. Whereas in the past there has been reluctance to change police training fundamentally (particularly with regard to payment of salaries to probationary officers and the length of training), the current economic conditions may offer an opportunity for educational institutions to prepare aspiring police officers through blended programmes with curriculums that are vocationally relevant and educationally rigorous. The costs of training would be part funded by students (consistent with other professions) without the need to pay a salary. Further advantages include university resources, research capacity and a learning environment that provides support for the learner over a longer period of time rather than through intensive police training models.

However, these considerations are merely added bonuses. The crucial point is that if policing is to be taken seriously as a profession then we need to be much more demanding in what we expect from police officers. And if prospective police officers can

demonstrate that they have the required attributes then they will be providing evidence of learning that equates to university degree programmes. These proposals are not new and other public services have used this model providing a critical basis for professional status and recognition. The challenge for universities and police services, if they wish to pursue this avenue, is to develop programmes with sufficient police recognition and professional relevance with a comprehensive curriculum and robust assessment. Critically though, it is hard to see this happening to the degree required if we continue to set the learning requirements of a police officer so low.

The argument for pre-employment training of police officers does not just point to improvements in the education of police officers. The involvement of universities in developing policing programmes provides opportunities for professionalisation in all aspects of police work. Universities can tailor programmes to meet the needs of professions, and the involvement of police services in developing programmes with universities in the future is crucial in delivering effective provisions. Resistance to learning outside the workplace represents a disservice to the police and will only hold back any claims to professional status. The pressure on police services to deliver training in a short intensive period with trainees on substantial salaries might become the decisive factor given the current economic conditions. However, it is the notion of a professional police that should be the primary motivating factor here. To this end, Flanagan's suggestions are not only timely but also the only credible proposal for an aspiring profession.

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