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The future of initial police training: a university perspective

Abstract

A recurring issue in the initial training of police recruits in England and Wales concerns the status of student police officers. This position paper engages with debates concerning this aspect of initial police training from a university perspective by reflecting on the experiences gained over a three and a half year period of delivering a Student Officer Programme (SOP), a joint collaboration between a University Department and a UK police service. As such it should be read as a comment piece that aims primarily to stimulate debate. Although not an empirical research piece, the paper nonetheless engages with the experiences that have been borne out of the collaborative running of the SOP. The paper presents a philosophical analysis of one particular aspect of that experience, namely the tension that arises from the contradictory status of student police officers.

INTRODUCTION

There are many stakeholders who have an interest in the initial training of police officers in England and Wales. There are various governmental and professional police bodies, chief constables with significant constitutional powers, police trainers, local police authorities and the student officers themselves. There are also increasingly external stakeholders that have not traditionally had a say on such matters, such as universities and further education institutions. This paper focuses on the experiences of one particular stakeholder, a university department that engaged collaboratively with a police service based in England over a three and half year period in the design and delivery of a bespoke Student Officer Programme (SOP).

The focus and one-sided perspective adopted in the paper is deliberate. Firstly, it is not done because we feel that the other stakeholders mentioned above, and others that have not been mentioned, are in any way less important or have fewer insights into the future prospects of initial police training. It is rather that we feel most qualified to express the views that arose within the university department as a consequence of the collaborative arrangement. We very much welcome the views of other stakeholders and hope this paper will stimulate such responses.

There is also a methodological consideration informing the adoption of this one-sided perspective. It allows us to imagine educational possibilities free from the constraints of the real world of policing. We are fully aware that reality will re-impose itself upon our imaginings, just as our own imaginings and thoughts expressed here will be experienced by others as constraints on their own visions. The important point is not that we are trying to present a utopian, university vision of initial police training. Rather, we suggest that presenting a perspective free of constraints necessitates a more thorough scrutiny and justification of existing practices. By adopting this approach we resist the temptation towards concluding that nothing too radical can be achieved because of any existing

institutional forces that might be resistant to change. In short we feel at this stage that imaginative thinking is required more than an evidential piece on what does, or does not, work.

It should also be noted at the outset that whilst involvement of universities remains a relatively recent and under-developed phenomenon in England and Wales, more opportunities and significant developments have begun to emerge. This is especially true since the Police Reform Act 2002, drawing upon recommendations in Training Matters (HMIC 2002), formally acknowledged deficiencies in police training and initiated the development of a new Initial Police Learning and Development Programme (IPLDP).

IPLDP, which had been adopted by all 43 Home Office police services in England and Wales by April 2006, does not imply university involvement in any way, nor has university involvement in IPLDP been established as the norm. IPLDP was designed around 22 units of National Occupational Standards (NOS) developed by Skills for Justice (SfJ), the dedicated Sector Skills Council and Standards Setting Body for the Justice sector across the United Kingdom. Nonetheless, the Police Reform Act 2002 and the introduction of IPLDP gave the police services in England and Wales greater scope in choosing how to deliver training to new recruits, including the possibility of working with local universities in the provision of initial police training.

The SOP referred to in this paper was developed as one of five pilot schemes sanctioned by the Home Office that became an 'early adopter' in initiating the establishment of IPLDP nationally (see ALI 2005). It combined professional, academic and competency based learning, attracting an academic award in addition to the achievement of 'fully qualified police officer' status. The SOP began in September 2004 and by the end of 2007 a total of 19 intakes of students, each with approximately 30-40 student officers, had joined the programme.

The status of student police officers and the issue of 'ownership'

In reflecting upon these experiences from a university perspective the most challenging aspects all related to the tension that arises from the contradictory status of student police officers. This contradictory status was expressed within the police as an issue of student 'ownership'. The term ownership was used in discussions concerning whether the student officers were a resource to be used by area commanders or under the control of the police trainers, and as such, a future investment that would be experienced in the short term as a drain on resources. All of the contentious issues within the collaborative arrangement were effectively reduced to this question of who 'owns' the student officers. Within this particular SOP the tension was expressed in terms of university versus police interests, but it is not unique to programmes that involve university participation. It is rather an inherent problem that arises from having trainees that are being paid a working wage without having the necessary skills and other qualities to perform the tasks they are being paid to do. We suggest that this tension can be resolved by moving towards pre-employment training programmes. This would allow for a clearer demarcation between the 'student' and 'officer' status of the trainees. They would be students up until the point

they have demonstrated the necessary qualities that will allow them to be employed operationally as serving police officers. More of this will be said below, but for the moment it is important to stress that this tension is independent of university involvement in police training. It is rather that the involvement of universities in initial police training makes this tension more transparent because universities are external to the police.

There were many positive achievements resulting from the collaborative SOP and there are many potential advantages of extending collaborative arrangements between universities and police services. There was a constructive dialogue over curriculum and assessment matters but these are not the focus of this paper. Our focus is on the development of collaborative pre-employment student officer programmes, in which the 'ownership' of student officers is transferred from the police service over to university departments. This would allow for the majority of an officer's initial police training to take place prior to employment with a police service and would provide greater clarity to the status of a student officer.

UNIVERSITY INVOLVEMENT IN THE INITIAL POLICE TRAINING OF POLICE OFFICERS IN ENGLAND AND WALES

Sir Ronnie Flanagan expresses two arguments that favour university involvement in police training in his recent Review of Policing. Firstly, it is suggested that the qualities needed of today's police officers require a kind of learning that is more commonly associated with a university education as opposed to a traditional police training school:

a more confident police service – one which emphasises individual professionalism and which is founded upon strong standards and team values . . . means we need to move away from training towards education. (Flanagan 2008: 53)

At the same time, Flanagan argues that it is time to consider bringing policing into line with other professions by placing a greater burden on those wanting to enter policing, in terms of gaining appropriate qualifications at the individual's own expense, prior to employment. He says with favourable reference to other professions that,

the individual takes responsibility for their preemployment training completing relevant degree programmes at their own expense before being eligible for employment. (Flanagan 2008: 44)

Both of these suggestions, in different ways, imply that there is a significant role for universities to play in delivering the kind of learning required of police officers today. His distinction between education and training is not necessarily helpful and is something we will question later in the paper. However, we support the tone of his conclusions and suggest universities are well placed to play an important role in providing the kind of learning today's police officers require. Whilst engaging with a university programme of study is not in itself sufficient for guaranteeing the qualities expected of a police officer, it is increasingly being recognised that such an engagement is nonetheless a necessary condition of achieving these ends. Flanagan's comments can also be seen within the

context of a gradual shift since 1945 that has seen police training in the UK move away from a militaristic style with a focus on drill, towards a more reflective, public relations focused approach. During this period the establishment of police research provided academics and the police with new understandings of the role, function and practice of the police service in the UK (Newburn and Reiner, 2007). However, the move away from a militaristic influence has been slow. For example, drill was only recently formally removed from the initial police training curriculum (HMIC, 2002). Furthermore, the involvement of universities in the provision of police education and training in the UK during the second half of the twentieth century was fairly limited, especially compared with other parts of the world. For example, Goldstein (1977: 283) refers to the ‘hundreds’ of higher education institutions offering programmes of study for ‘police personnel . . . and those aspiring to a career in policing’ in the USA. He refers to August Vollmer, who began recruiting university graduates in California in 1917, as a leader in introducing the idea of college educated police officers. In contrast, Alderson (1979) illustrates the difference between the situation in America and the UK when he refers to the failed attempt by the University of Kent in 1976 to establish a degree programme for police officers in Civil Administration. He notes that there was some opposition to the proposal from within the University of Kent, especially the student body, but overall he lays the blame for the failure to develop the programme with ‘leaders of the police service and police administrators’ (p.75). Alderson (1979: 74) concluded:

The lack of awareness in the police generally of the value of university interest, support and research is unfortunate to say the least.

Despite Alderson’s hope that a similar proposal would be adopted it was not until the late 1980s that the University of East Anglia (UEA) was commissioned to examine recruit training and a comprehensive evaluation was conducted. The UEA’s report was published in 1989, emphasising partnership and quality control with recommendations including implementing a modular course structure, training for instructors, flexibility on the period of probation, enhancement of the tutor constable scheme and reorganisation of responsibilities, curriculum development and assessment. Many of these structural changes were implemented but the status and priority of training within the police service still remained questionable.

The need to professionalize the police

The creation of the Central Police Training and Development Authority in 1995 (which came to be referred to more commonly as Centrex) also signalled a growing interest in initial police training, leading to reports such as the Managed Learning Report (HMIC 1999a) and Training Matters (HMIC 2002). The Police Skills and Standards Organisation (PSSO), later replaced by Skills for Justice (SfJ), and the Police Training Inspectorate were also established at this time. Likewise, police training has increasingly been incorporated within academic frameworks across the European Union (EU), a process that is further enhanced by the Bologna process and the impact this is having in reshaping higher education within the EU. For example, the Police Academy of the Netherlands and the Norwegian Police University College already offer bachelor and/or masters awards.

Despite significant differences between nation states, there is a general trend towards the recognition that police officers need to demonstrate qualities normally associated with a university education and as Jaschke et al (2007) note, there is a move towards seeing police education and training as compatible, complementary aspects of the learning required of police officers. The developments across the EU and in particular the introduction of the European Police College (CEPOL) create an impetus towards promoting closer connections between 'police educational institutions' and universities, developing greater autonomy and independence for such institutions in the delivery of police training and ensuring 'that police educational institutions open themselves to the influence of . . . various stakeholders' (Jaschke et al 2007, p.150). This includes universities as natural partners in the development of policing as a profession.

In the early 1990s more universities became substantially involved with developing undergraduate programmes aimed at policing in the UK and following the Police Reform Act 2002 a number of police services had begun to work closely with a local university and had linked initial police training to academic awards, such as a Foundation Degree in Policing. There are many motivating factors for developing a different approach to police training and the involvement of universities in this process. Political demands for a more sensitive police service aware of cultural diversity and human rights had already given rise to an increasing number of police training programmes from the 1980s onwards (Wells, 1987; Benyon, 1987). The role of police officers as 'knowledge brokers' (Ericson and Haggerty 1997) and the extent to which police are increasingly exposed to a diverse range of criminal activities that did not pose the same threat in previous years (Lee and Punch 2006) are also significant developments. However, a primary concern relates to the extent to which the police can, and should, be seen as a profession.

Various incidents over the last couple of decades in the UK have portrayed the police in a negative light, the most high profile moments being the failed investigation into the murder of Stephen Lawrence (Macpherson 1999), [the inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié \(Laming, 2003\)](#), [the Richard Enquiry \(2004\)](#) [continued concern regarding police responses to sexual offences \(HMIC, 2007\)](#) and the 2003 undercover BBC documentary, *The Secret Policeman*. The focus on developing police officer effectiveness has intensified in light of the criticisms regarding police performance and inadequate training responses (HMIC, 2002; HMIC, 1999a; HMIC, 1999b; Norris 1992; UEA, 1987; Stephens, 1988; Fielding, 1988; Macpherson, 1999). However, it was acknowledged in Macpherson (1999) that these concerns had not been addressed effectively. Indeed, HMIC (2002) identified what it saw as continued weaknesses in initial police training, resulting in student police officers completing their training with 'significant development needs'.

RESISTANCE TO UNIVERSITY INVOLVEMENT

Despite moves towards greater university involvement in police training there remain serious doubters within the police. There are three main arguments against university involvement in police training that we wish to consider here. All three were expressed at some point within the SOP as an issue of 'ownership'. The first relates to the distinction

between education and training. There is an argument against universities owning the initial police training curriculum because it will never be appropriate, given the practical needs of student officers and the academic nature of university education. A second argument concerns the question of who owns the right to discipline student officers. More specifically, there is a concern that university departments lack the required means of providing a sufficiently disciplined setting, given the hierarchical culture of police work and the laissez faire attitude of liberal educational study programmes. Thirdly, there is a question over what should take priority in the management of student police officers; their educational needs or their deployment as an operational resource. There is a view that universities lack the flexibility and professional judgement to accommodate policing needs, given the operational duties of a serving police officer and the protected learning requirements of academic study.

On education and training

The first form of resistance relates to the distinction between education and training within liberal education (see Peters 1966) that is used from both academic and policing perspectives to challenge the involvement of universities in initial police training. From an educational perspective, it is argued that training falls below what universities should be engaged in and that the learning involved in police training is far too practical to count as academic. From a policing perspective, there is a suggestion that police officers have nothing to gain from what universities are qualified to offer. Indeed there is a concern that incorporating all police training within academic institutions is not necessary and could potentially exclude a viable candidate from joining the police because of unnecessary educational barriers. It is even suggested that a thinking police officer could be considered a danger as it would lead to a lack of discipline and an unhealthy questioning of police authority and hierarchical structures. The issue of discipline is considered below but for the moment we need to consider the significance and relevance of the liberal distinction between education and training, in particular as it applies to initial police training.

The first point to note is that the distinction between education and training is conceptual. It does not resemble what actually happens in universities. The idea of a university education as something that is good in itself does not exist today, if it ever did. Taught programmes in universities have moved increasingly towards being useful and applied enterprises, in contrast to the kind of defence of academic tenure made by O'Hear (1988) in which he favourably identified academics as having a unique role in society only to the extent that they are engaged in useless activities.

Rose (1982) made a similar point in relation to the nature of academic research. He challenged opposition to policy research being conducted in universities and the view that such research was too practical and not 'pure' enough. Rose (1982) also noted at the time of writing that there existed important differences between governmental departments, which are organised around and 'named after problems in society', and academic departments, which are organised and 'named after intellectual disciplines' (p.201). However, he acknowledged and supported the extent to which this was beginning to

change and 26 years on academic departments are increasingly named in relation to social problems, along the lines of traditional governmental departments. It is simply not tenable to persist with the view that universities only do education that is good in itself without any immediately obvious practical benefits. University graduates and prospective employers expect academic programmes to provide skills as well as knowledge.

Furthermore, the arguments concerning the distinction between education and training are not unique to policing. Similar views could be made with regard to any academic programme of study in which there are clearly defined learning outcomes that are dictated by non-educational concerns. For example, from a purely educational perspective universities should resist all social, economic and/or political demands placed upon them. Nonetheless, we recognise that increasingly academic programmes are required to demonstrate the employment opportunities of those completing the qualification, how the programme promotes a widening of participation leading to a more diverse body of students and how the programme meets specific socially and politically defined targets such as environmental concerns. We accept that university programmes provide academic development alongside other, non-educational needs. So why should the training requirements of police officers be a barrier to developing a university programme of study that can achieve these training needs, whilst at the same time achieving other objectives? As White (2006) notes, combining skills based and academic learning is less problematic in other areas such as medicine, education and engineering. Likewise, despite Beckley's (2004, p.1) claim that 'it has finally been established that the profession of policing is competency based', there are surely other qualities that police officers need to demonstrate today.

'Policing' and 'Police Studies' as academic subjects

The opposition to having 'policing' or 'police studies' within universities on the grounds that they are not proper academic subjects is not dissimilar to the criticisms that other subjects have faced previously. Indeed many subjects taught in universities today had been criticised as unsuitable for university education at some point in history. In the 19th century objections were made against including science within universities on the grounds that it was too technical (see Tappan 1994 [1851]). Likewise Goodson (1996) notes the struggle that took place to establish geography as a subject in the early part of the twentieth century and how towards the latter part of the twentieth century geographers rejected moves towards establishing environmental studies as a viable subject matter. Policing and police studies have emerged largely, but not exclusively, from criminology, which itself struggled into existence out of sociology, which itself developed from philosophy.

A more useful understanding of the relationship between competency based skills and academic learning is provided by Grint (2007) in an analysis of the learning requirements underpinning leadership qualities. The qualities Grint (2007) associates with leaders are apt for police officers, given the extent to which police officers work largely unsupervised and the extent to which they are often in situations in which they must take a lead.

Grint (2007) notes the Socratic character of the learning style appropriate for leaders, which is 'less about what you know – what you have already learned – and more about the ability to learn' (p.233). Grint (2007) goes on to consider the problem solving dimension of learning within a leadership context with reference to the categories of problem solving identified by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The first category relates to skills and competencies (*techné*) and the second relates to a kind of academic, specialist knowledge and understanding (*episteme*). However, Grint (2007) emphasises the importance of the third category identified by Aristotle, that of *phronesis*. This translates into a kind of 'practical wisdom' defined by Grint (2007, p.237) as 'entirely context dependent' and as 'ethically practical action'. Practical wisdom is not achieved in place of '*techné*' and '*episteme*'; instead, Grint (2007, p.238) stresses that 'all three elements are critical':

the attainment of justice requires *phronesis*, the wisdom to understand what needs to be done in a particular situation, not just the skills and techniques to arrest the offender . . . nor even just the knowledge of the law (Grint 2007, p.238).

The issue of police discipline

A second argument against university involvement in initial police training concerns a tension between the emphasis within university education upon students taking responsibility for their own learning and the extent to which initial police training has tended to be highly controlled and directed. HMIC (2002) noted that despite criticisms of traditional police training methods, classroom-based, didactic teaching remained dominant. Short, intensive periods of training have been favoured by the police with little time for reflection and/or independent study. The onus has remained on tutors providing answers for police students with little expectation of them taking responsibility for their own learning.

Conti and Nolan III's (2005) characterisation of 'greedy' or 'total' institutions describes features commonly found within initial police training programmes. The institutional training traditionally given to police officers has tended to be established around a single authority where students experience 'batch living', and the training has tended to be organised around a highly planned and structured schedule, which is perceived through a kind of 'treatment' mentality. In short, Conti and Nolan III (2005) suggest that despite the rhetoric of supporting adult learning, officers are not trusted to study in their own time, to find things out themselves or challenge established authorities. Rather than co-ordinated training reflecting trainees' needs, using a range of supporting learning methods over a reasonable period of time, training has tended to remain in blocks.

There are important aspects of a police officer's work that require discipline. However, given the degree to which police work is largely unsupervised (Reiner 2000), at some point we need to trust that officers will be self-disciplined. It is surely better to discover that someone is not trustworthy whilst they are still a student officer, rather than three or four years down the line when they are fully operational officers. Any benefits that

accrue from a highly planned, busy learning schedule are offset by the cost of not allowing student officers the time and space to develop the necessary level of self-discipline required of a serving police officer.

The police have moved away from residential training and there would appear to be a move towards shorter periods of classroom based study. There is also a shift towards placing greater emphasis upon students learning on-line and as such taking more responsibility for their own learning. However, these moves would appear to be motivated primarily by financial, rather than educational, considerations and it is not clear how students will be supported on such programmes.

The student officer as a resource perspective

A third argument against university involvement comes from the perspective that sees all training as an unwelcome abstraction from real police work. Even it is acknowledged as a necessary requirement, there are pressures to keep the time allocated to training to a minimum with an emphasis on getting trainees back to the workplace as quickly as possible (Hufton and Buswell, 2000). Whilst this is understandable from an operational needs perspective, it is also indicative of a difficulty to take the training and education of officers seriously within an organisation that is largely defined by its operational targets; hence the resistance to changing police training, particularly with regards to adopting principles of life long learning (NCF, 1997). Indeed this is evidenced specifically in relation to police trainers who have no recognised career pathway to follow as a trainer. It is difficult to see how the professionalization of policing can occur without incurring what will always be seen as too heavy an abstraction from police duties, from a police operations perspective.

One approach to overcome this dilemma is to suggest more 'on the job' training away from classroom based learning. From this perspective, classroom based learning is portrayed as irrelevant in contrast to the 'real police work' to be learned on the streets (Bayley and Bittner, 1989; Fielding, 1988; Young, 1991). It is quite correctly argued that acknowledging the need for police officers to be more reflective and adept at problem solving (Birzer, 2003; Bayley and Bittner, 1989; Neyroud and Beckley, 2001; Foster, 1999) does not necessarily advocate classroom over workplace learning. Likewise, the well-documented shortcomings historically of experienced cops advising recruits to forget what they learned in formal class-room training in favour of what they can learn in practice (Bayley and Bittner, 1989; Chan 2003) are not reflective of an inherent weakness in workplace learning. Rather, they reflect historically the specific inadequacies of poor quality mentoring processes. There have been a number of studies that have considered the usefulness of tutor constables in police training (UEA, 1987; Fielding, 1988; Stradling and Harper, 1988; Holdaway and Barron 1997; Haberfield, 2002; Chan, 2003) and within IPLDP emphasis has been placed on the need to introduce and strengthen the role of Professional Development Units (PDU).

There are undoubtedly opportunities for student officers to learn and develop within PDUs, providing the PDU is professional and is given the space to provide recruits with

the required level of protection and support. 'On the job' training has to be well thought through and controlled in order to ensure recruits are learning and not simply being used as 'cannon fodder'. In other words, if learning on the job is taken seriously it does not overcome the problem of abstraction, nor does it overcome the problem of 'ownership' discussed earlier in this piece. If anything, it adds to the problem because it involves the officers with a tutoring responsibility within the PDU to also be at least partially abstracted from normal duties. Furthermore, the acknowledgement that students can learn on the job should not be taken to mean that they cannot learn in the classroom too. We should not fall into an either/or approach to police training and need to recognise that both classroom and workplace learning are of benefit to the student. It is important that PDUs are an integral part of the student officer's learning and that the workplace learning conducted within the PDUs is incorporated into the overall aims of the study programme. It needs to be recognised that learning takes place in the classroom and on area, rather than simply seeing the PDU as the place where knowledge gained in the classroom is applied.

Importantly though, the questions of where and how an officer learns best can only be considered seriously if there is the time and space to implement what arises from the answers to these questions. This will never be the case so long as student officers are first and foremost a resource to be used.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There are many questions that need to be considered within the development of the initial training of police officers. There needs to be a balance between the different kinds of learning required of officers as identified by Grint (2007). Likewise, the concerns raised by Conti and Nolan III (2005) of avoiding the traits of a greedy institution are important if we are to ensure student officers develop a sense of responsibility and ownership of their own learning. There are many questions to be considered concerning what student officers need to learn and where best they should learn it. However, matters of curriculum cannot be addressed in a meaningful way unless the prior matter of resolving the status of student officers is resolved.

The police are first and foremost an operational institution and against such a background it will always be too easy to prioritise short term operational needs over longer term institutional learning requirements. In many respects this is what we want and expect from our police services. The only way to satisfy the learning requirements of police employees is to externalise their training and education. For initial police training this means pre-employment programmes in which the status of the student officer becomes much clearer. Without this move, changes to curriculum, the re-balancing of skills and knowledge, where student officers are taught etc., will all have limited impact, so long as learning remains a secondary issue for those who have primary responsibility for providing it.

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