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# Understanding the reconstruction of police professionalism in the UK

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## ABSTRACT

This article begins by exploring the development of police professionalism in the UK. It considers the drivers that have shaped the direction of police professionalism in England and Wales, including the influence of professional and institutional logics. Next, it outlines the current phase of 'professionalism', examining what has influenced the adoption of the current normative framework with specific reference to the PEQF and evidenced-based approaches. It will argue that attempts to re-professionalise the police have tended to be situated between 'ideal types' of professionalism, one which favours 'professional trust and autonomy' driven by professionals themselves towards a model of organisational professionalism motivated by a desire to standardise and limit occupational autonomy. Latterly, it will argue that these 'ideal types' used to conceptualise the changing nature of police professionalism fail to account for broader reconfigurations that shape professional identities fully. Drawing mainly on the work of Noordegraaf [2016. Reconfiguring professional work: changing forms of professionalism in public services. *Administration & Society*, 48 (7), 783–810; 2020. Protective or connective professionalism? How connected professionals can (still) act as autonomous and authoritative experts. *Journal of professions and organization*] it is shown that there is a need to reconceptualise our understanding of professionalism to identify the range of factors influencing and reshaping professional identities.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## Introduction

In many countries, the complexities and challenges that the police are required to deal with have changed (NPCC 2016). Increasing demand, enhanced by social and structural inequalities, technological advances and financial constraints, means that the skills and capabilities of police officers require restructuring (McCann and Granter 2019). Continued emphasis on enhancing police legitimacy and improving police-community relations is also critical to maintaining the model of policing by consent. This is even more critical with recent calls to 'Defund the Police' in light of the George Floyd murder. To meet the requirements of this new operating environment, Policing Vision 2025 (NPCC 2016) outlined an image of the required workforce with which confident proficient professionals are able to adapt, be autonomous and knowledgeable. Accordingly, the police need to become better professionals to suit these new working conditions.

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This is not to suggest that previously the police were 'unprofessional' but Neyroud, in his review of Police Leadership and Training stated, 'the police service needs to move from being a service that acts professionally to becoming a professional service' (2011, p. 11). While 'professionalisation' is not new, there has been a tendency to 'emphasize existing or introduce at different times new occupational characteristics as evidence of professional standing' (Holdaway 2017, p. 589). The current desirable 'occupational characteristics' are strongly aligned with more traditional professions like medicine and law. It draws on a model where professions are 'organised bodies of experts who applied esoteric knowledge to particular cases and have elaborate systems of instruction and training' (Carr-Saunders and Wilson 1933, p. 17). Friedson (2001) argued that this type of professionalism, where the practitioners hold the knowledge, is essential to enhance autonomy and discretion for practitioners allowing them to retain dominance over the delivery of work. In his report, Neyroud recommended the creation of a professional body, developing a framework of accredited qualifications across the organisation, adopting a code of ethics, and developing a strong knowledge base dictated by scientific evidence. Recently, the police service in England and Wales has adopted these traits through establishing the College of Policing, graduate entry through the Police Qualifications Education Framework (PEQF), the pursuit of and the adoption of a code of ethics and a strong emphasis on the need to adopt evidence-based policing (Sherman 2013).

Whether the adoption of such a traits-based model will have the desired effect of achieving its intended outcome remains contentious. Holdaway (2017) argues this current attempt to 're-professionalise' the police assumes that they probably are a 'profession' without deconstructing the notion of what being a professional means. McCann and Granter (2019) argue the application of normative frameworks in this way misconceives the realities of contemporary emergency service work and underplays the complexities and contested meaning of 'professionalism'. Noordegraaf (2007) notes that most professions are not pure as shown in trait-based definitions, but are at best hybrid and influenced by differing institutional logics predominately, professionalisation and managerialism, and through broader social, cultural and political contexts. This means that we need to reconsider what has influenced the shape of police professionalism and whether this most recent attempt to achieve professional status for the police service in England and Wales is likely to lead to the service as desired and outlined by the recent 'professionalisation' agenda.

To address this question of the likelihood of recent traits-based model being successful, this article begins by exploring the development of police professionalism in the UK. It considers the drivers that have shaped the direction of police professionalism in England and Wales, including the influence of professional and institutional logics. Next, it outlines the current phase of 'professionalism' examining what has influenced the adoption of the existing normative framework with specific reference to the PEQF and evidence-based approaches. It will argue that attempts to re-professionalise the police have tended to be situated between 'ideal types' of professionalism, one which favour 'professional trust and autonomy' driven by professionals themselves towards a model of organisational professionalism motivated by the desire to standardise and limit occupational autonomy. Latterly, it will argue that these 'ideal types' used to conceptualise the changing nature of police professionalism fail to account for broader reconfigurations that shape professional identities fully. Specifically, when professions have always been hybrid in nature. Drawing mainly on the work of Noordegraaf (2016, 2020), it is argued that a different analytical framework can provide a better understanding of how professions are being reconfigured through a process of restructuring, re-stratification, and relocation and why when we apply this framework, it becomes clear that trait-based attempts to return the police to professionalism are likely to have limited success. Instead, there is a need to reconceptualise our understanding of professionalism to identify what factors are influencing and reshaping professional identities.

## **Defining the police as professionals: from consensus to contractual control**

As with other occupations, the claim to the professional status of policing has a long history (Vollmer 1922). Early orthodox histories of the emergence of the professional police in the nineteenth century

suggest a marked point of departure into a more formally organised service that could stake claim to being a bureaucratic organisation holding core values to prevent and reduce crime (Reiner 2010, Fyfe 2013). The focus of the Metropolitan Police was also to provide a service model based on the idea of policing by consent, primarily because initially, police had limited powers and required public support. This notion of adding public value fits well with some of the earlier functionalist perceptions of 'professions' in society (Parsons 1939), particularly through their role in the integrative direction of social change. Indeed, orthodox historians link the drawing of police from the working classes as a key strategy to ensure a greater likelihood of acceptance from these communities (Joyce 2010). Revisionist histories of the formation of the 'new police' are highly critical of orthodox perspectives. They argue that it is perhaps too simplistic analysis and that there was no seamless transition to a more modernised force, nor do they support the 'policing by consent' narrative, claiming instead that emergence of the 'new' police beginning with the Metropolitan police in 1829 was much more controversial. Rather than crime as a focus, revisionist historians argue that the police role was 'the maintenance of order required by the capitalist class' (Reiner 2010, p. 28). Reiner argues that historically the development of the police probably falls somewhere between these two accounts. He also argues that the history of police moves towards professionalism has been impacted by a complex relationship between the police, public and the government (Reiner 2010). He outlines a distinct shift towards a different model of policing from modernity to post-modernity, specifically from the mythical 'golden era' of policing based on a model of Dixon of Dock Green as the epitome of British policing based on public trust, respect, and confidence towards a 'declining status' of police through the late 1950s and into the 1980s (Reiner 1992). This period, also referred to as the 'old professionalism' (Sklansky 2011, Fyfe 2013), is identified as a period where the core elements were central to the policing model, including a focus on crime suppression, rapid response, and pursuit of crime once it had occurred and a dominant control and command management style. Crime-fighting was the police's core domain and influential in driving their own professional identity. Their sense of mission and ability to achieve this without much community involvement was viewed as essential and creating a 'thin blue line' of police as public protectors (Reiner 1992, Sklansky 2011). This description corresponds to the characteristics by much of the sociology of profession literature, particularly those that emphasised the disappearance of the notion of trust and the development and reinforcement of protective organisational cultures (see Evetts 2006). This idea of a strong occupational identity was branded in early cultural studies of policing that identified characteristics such as isolation, racism, sense of mission and almost heroic identity (Reiner 2010). While most of these cultural studies have been discredited as, being narrowly focused as attributing a monolithic core identity to the police (Chan 1997, Charman 2017), there was evidence of a distinct form of occupation protectionism, as suggested by theorists on professions at this time (e.g. Larsons 1977). Subsequently, attempts to reduce growing levels of criminality and disorder in this manner meant a weakening of police and public relationships. This was reinforced by a declining social consensus and respect for authority and increased inequalities brought about by changing economic conditions. The acceptance of police as a legitimate state institution waned, and the growing tension between police and minority communities started to grow (Reiner 1992). An often-cited example to evidence this more conflictual relationship was the outbreak of riots in Brixton, London, between police officers and the black community, driven by the desire of the police to deal with a so-called mugging crisis through the application of controversial SUS laws (Jefferson 2012). This event marked the start of a question of police status and role through the 1980s and 1990s that became highly politicised and influenced by political parties' attempts to become the main arbiters of law and order. Despite growing evidence of the police's inability to effectively tackle crime and deal with security issues, this was continually reinforced as their primary role by successive governments throughout the 1990s and 2000s (Reiner 2010, Gilling 2014). The introduction of New Public Management regimes aimed to support police cut down on their extraneous tasks and redirect their gaze to their primary mandate to control crime. Alongside this were the growing questions about the police role and the need to reform a service

viewed as losing public support due to a series of scandals, mishaps, and errors by the police, for example, the Stephen Lawrence case (MacPherson 1999). Cockcroft (2015) states that this construction of police culture adversely impacted the police as it has primarily focused on the negative aspects of working practices and was used as a further justification for managerial reforms imposed upon policing at the time.

## Managerial professionalism

Later interpretations of professionalism discuss the influence of neo-liberalism and the perceived failure of the social democratic welfare model of the 1950s and 1960s, where public services were constructed on a model of bureaucratic professionalism. Managerial frameworks offered a range of techniques to improve productivity, efficiency, effectiveness, and value-for-money. Techniques included organisational and workforce restructuring to improve productivity and enact cultural changes through a commitment to customers and improving the quality of services (Pollitt 1993, Clarke et al 1994). The resulting emergence of New Public Management in the public sector rectified and brought the public sector in line with private sector organisations.

For policing initially, the government in the UK remained relatively autonomous and seemingly immune from these public sector reforms (McLaughlin and Murji 1997). This was primarily due to the perceived requirement of law and order to quell potential conflict during a time of growing unemployment and due to the governments' desire to manage social unrest (Savage 2007), but in the background; there was a slow deconstruction of police work (McLaughlin and Murji 1997). Like in other sectors, police, even as early as 1983, started to face financial scrutiny (Martin 2003). Over the next 20 years, New Public Management was viewed as shaping police priorities, structures and management and seen influential in how 'police professionalism' has developed. This description of the impact of NPM fits well with Evetts (2011) and Fournier's (1999) propositions around the way that professionalism has been used as a disciplinary tool and also has led to a shift from occupational toward organisational values, leading to a move from professionals as self-regulated to regulated. Evetts believes 'professionalism' delivered in this way has played 'a role in attempts to rationalize, reorganize, contain and control the work and the practitioners' (Evetts 2011 p. 411). Cockcroft (2015) argues that directed activity and performance management infrastructure eroded police discretion. He suggests that while there has been an impression of skills improvement through the introduction of managerial frames these have served to 'de-professionalise' those on the front-line. This is confirmed by Bacon (2019). He suggests attempts to standardise processes from the above have led to a vacuum in the inability of officers to effectively use their discretion and autonomy even when operating across less visible space, like out on patrol. Bacon argues that there is a gap between supervisors and they require to deal with scrutiny processes meaning that the actual regulation of front-line practitioners some without the appropriate skills to deal (poor leadership, lack of knowledge and inappropriate decisions) with complex cases was missing. This in line with the notion of abstract policing developed by Terpstra et al (2019), which contends that more formalised systems of management and procedures have led to the internal distance between officers in different roles and in between ranks.

## Re-professionalizing the police: the drive for knowledge and education

Policing 2025 published by National Police Chiefs Council in 2016 (NPCC 2016) set out a vision for the police service over the next 10 years. Embedded within this strategy was the recognition of the need for workforce transformation to ensure that the police service can cope with changing demands

Workforce transformation is the professional approach by which the service develops and supports a workforce capability designed for the future, sufficiently agile and representative to provide the skills and capabilities we need for twenty-first century policing. It's about developing a modern, adaptable workforce that is responsive to change. (College of Policing 2018)

This transformation included a range of initiatives to introduce a more flexible and adaptable police service. Policies outlined changes to recruitment, pay and performance structures, the valuing of staff skills and expertise, increased emphasis on education and the requirement to be a graduate professional for recruits, increasing leadership and management capability and enhancing and supporting digital capabilities (Home Affairs Select Committee 2018). To support this, the College of Policing (CoP) have pushed the agenda for enhancing staff knowledge and expertise particularly through the adoption of evidence-based policing and the creation of a knowledge-based service and the development of the police educational qualifications framework (PEQF), where policing becomes a graduate profession. This has also come with an emphasis on a new code of ethics and national standards.

## **Education and knowledge as key attributes of a profession**

The police service has had a long-established relationship with education (Wood and Tong 2009). The formation of partnerships with Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) has been increasingly prevalent since the late 1990s. Although several commentators have identified the challenges officers, who undertake qualifications, while in service or who develop research expertise, have faced from colleagues and supervisors in the past (Hallenberg and Cockcroft 2017, Norman and Williams 2016). Norman and Williams (2016) argue university experience for individual police officers gave them a sense of personal achievement and the ability to be reflective, but on returning to the organisation, they felt inhibited and unable to put knowledge into practice.

The establishment of the College of the Policing in 2012 provided the impetus to extend and formalise educational partnerships at a national level (Tong and Hallenberg 2018). The rise in police-academic partnerships has meant greater recognition of academically produced knowledge as potentially useful in supporting and making decisions about what practice or approach is more likely to impact crime and victims (Goode and Lumsden 2018). There is an increasing acceptance that academic education and an emphasis on life-long learning are critical to ensure the police are equipped to deal with the changing dynamics of complex societies (Blakemore and Simpson 2010).

The PEQF has the potential to re-assert police officers as moral agents- and provide the desired relation autonomy and authority required to conduct their duties. Embedding understandings of social sciences and the police role in society is useful knowledge beyond a focus simply on rational, technical, and narrowly defined what works agendas (Christopher 2015, Fleming and Rhodes 2018, Williams et al. 2019). A good example is the Police Now initiative. This graduate entry programme encourages recruitment to reflect on contribution to the communities they police as a key assessment has had some success (Wood 2019, Tong and Hallenberg 2018). Those going through the role of District Ward Officer felt more connected to communities than other police officers not on the programme and more attuned to procedural justice and ensuring everyone they came across was treated with the same approach (Yesberg and Dawson 2017). Wood (2019) argues that by building partnerships with HEIs where there is a genuine collaboration struck between developing knowledge and theory that can be embedded to create socially reflective practice leading to the creation of better officers.

Whether the potential of the PEQF leads to these substantial changes is still relatively unknown. Some initial assessments suggest one barrier here may be the standardised approach being taken by the CoP in their approach to the development of a national curriculum which could recreate a situation where process over practice is embedded as the norm. This gap needs to be addressed if there is any hope of success for higher education programmes. Hough and Stanko (2020) argue that the PEQF needs to strike the right balance between developing the correct skills within new officers and grounding this in theoretical knowledge. Knowing how to act needs to be backed up by the why this is the case. They also stress the need to have a clear idea and understate what a good officer looks like and suggests this might vary depending on context and location. One size may not fit all.

This resonates with debates about the implementations of evidence-based practice being incorporated into the curriculum and within the police as a profession. Evidence-based policing is viewed

as critically important in the professionalising process whereby officers make decisions based on 'scientifically' proved methods and practices (Sherman 2013). Concerns have been raised that what constitutes evidence-based practice has been too narrowly defined and based on a scientific notion of what works (Williams and Cockcroft 2018; Wood et al. 2018). While the CoP have extended their definition of what constitutes evidence, including a varied range of methodological approaches and types of knowledge, there are still concerns that front-line practitioners are absent from creating knowledge (Williams and Cockcroft 2018). As a result, critics argue that evidence-based practice is not being embraced across all sections of the workforce, meaning there are continued challenges to its implementation (Fleming and Rhodes 2018). Goode and Lumsden (2018) suggest the 'Macdonaldization' process through the introduction of NPM remains a legacy and reality for forces, meaning that despite changing service realities and governance structures, there is still a sense that research or evidence generated needs to contribute towards strategic priorities and unless it can demonstrate what works in measurable ways it is discounted. Grundhus's empirical analysis of knowledge regimes in the Norwegian police on two different types of crime units, suggests that what knowledge is valued is dependent on the way it is individually enacted and received. Whether it adheres to other forms of knowledge, including experiential knowledge, is also relevant. She argues that placing more value on rational, quantitative forms of data guided by NPM imperatives serves to reinforce more traditional cultural police values where experiential knowledge or intuition and hunches are reinforced or drawn upon as a form of resistance at attempts to implement 'abstract, analytical forms of knowledge' seen as coming from management. This means that occupational versus organisational views of what makes a 'professional' service are potentially reinforced. These barriers to implementing academic reforms into policing are not new and the cultural wars of front-line opposition from management oppositions are commonly highlighted (Reussi-Ianni and Ianni 1983, Cockcroft 2015).

This suggests new ways of advancing police professionalism through the PEQF, and evidence-based practice is likely to be only one strategy required aiding the embeddedness of new knowledge. As Nutley et al. (2007) explain, literature on knowledge adoption and learning within organisations suggests a need to embed knowledge accumulation across organisations rather than just an individual practitioner level. To create environments, where research is embedded, it needs to be incorporated into teams, through organisations, and at an intra-organisational level. Failure to do this will reinforce findings by Williams et al (2019) that rather than enable a broader definition of what constitutes knowledge the way that evidence-based practice had been implemented suggest a reductionist view which could potentially limit the goals of the current 'professionalisation agenda'. More worryingly and referring to the notion of abstract policing, this led to a distancing between the public and the police, meaning re-establishing traditional professional values of 'trust' and discretion once valued more difficult. Like previous reforms, this suggests a gap between organisational and professional values, with professional values being side-lined in favour of organisational priorities. However, viewing the changing nature of professionalism simply in this way ignores broader influences. For example, Clarke and Newman (1997, p. 75) argued that 'the process of managerialisation has not resulted in simple patterns of institutional change, but complex and uneven alignments of managerialism and bureau-professionalism'. They suggest that this has happened because of broader societal and economic configurations that may have led to the dominance of particular models or 'ideal types' of professionalism. However, reverting to attempts to restore these ideal types using trait-based strategies might be insufficient to regain professional status.

### **Reconstructing notions of professionalism a new analytical framework**

Noordegraaf (2016, p. 5) argues that attempting to understand shifts in professionalism through new liberalism and their subsequent attacks on public service professions is useful but insufficient to understand the current context. He claims that it presents a simplistic dichotomy that separates

professionals and managers and organisational and professional logics. He suggests that too much emphasis gets placed on the political and organisational context as an explanatory tool. He argues that this has meant a misunderstanding of why changes to professionalism have occurred. His argument is that while these frameworks might cause or shape work, they too are driven by something else.

What it means to work as a public professional has always been hybrid, but more importantly, what it means to work as professional and to regulate professional fields in flexible capitalist economies, transnational spaces, and digital realities has become especially unclear and contested. This means there are even more reasons to reframe understandings of professional work. (Noordegraaf 2016, p. 789)

He suggests that workplaces have become more unstable because of minor career certainly, fragmented educational opportunities with simultaneous deskilling and upskilling of specialist expertise. Demands are multiple and come from numerous customers with different needs. Services are required at local, regional, national, and transnational levels and personnel are exposed to new risks in virtual and real environments. Any failings are also open to criticism through increased media exposure and public visibility. Because of this environment, Noordegraaf supports the need to examine the reorganisation, re-stratification, and relocation of professional work. Additionally, he suggests that altering our understanding of professionals allows us to interpret professional experience better and create new understandings of professionalism.

Drawing on these ideas allows us to reframe or reinterpret the changing nature and influences that have impacted police professionalism in recent years. The remainder of this article applies these three different organising principles developed by Noordegraaf (2016) to take us beyond simplistic dichotomies of professional versus managerial logics to help us understand the implications for police and the subsequent repercussions of these different interpretations for the current professionalisation agenda.

## Reorganisation

While managerial logics demanded a particular focus on cost efficiency, effectiveness and quality, external forces have demanded a simultaneous need to reorganise professional work. This includes external and internal pressures, for example, new expectations and demands that require new ways of working or thinking. Police work, like other public sector organisations, is increasingly connected and requires multi-professional responses. Most prominent demands for police services have increased significantly in recent years (College of Policing 2015) and police work increasingly involves understanding new, diverse, and complex problems which they are expected to resolve (McCann and Granter 2019). Recent requirements to suddenly police in a public health crisis (Covid 19) are a prime example of the potential threat policing might face. This is illustrated in the National Policing Curriculum, which includes core learning incorporating organisational values such as the codes of ethics and ethnicity and diversity and ensuring public safety, protecting vulnerable people, preventing and reducing crime, maximising information and intelligence, conducting investigations and supporting victims (College of Policing 2020). To meet these often-contradictory needs, there is a requirement to work with other partners, including other emergency services. Working collaboratively is not new for police organisations and has been a key government strategy for several years. For example, the establishment of Crime and Disorder Partnership introduced by New Labour in 1998 demanded that police service work collaboratively with health, education and third sector agencies to resolve local problems of crime and disorder. What has accelerated has been the positioning of public services as the key responders to societal problems (Cockcroft 2019), in particular, since the advent of neo-liberalism, the state has often positioned itself as the regulator of welfare, social and criminal justice provision rather than the provider putting increasing pressure on public services to take responsibility for growing inequalities. Moreover, for policing, cut-backs in other services like social care and health mean increased pressure on police resources and



frustration when police felt their attempts to help were not reciprocated by a partner agency or they felt partner agencies were not fulfilling their end of the bargain (Caveney et al. 2020).

Collaborative working can have its advantages and break down barriers between agencies meaning better outcomes for service users. It can also lead to inter-professional learning or 'communities of practice' (Wenger 1998). At the same time, interagency working can be challenging. In a study of collaborative working between police and social work in the investigation of child protection, professionals had concerns over the establishment of joint units and the potential for the blurring of professional identities. The overlap of roles and responsibilities in multi-disciplinary teams caused uncertainty for staff whose co-location was determined by pragmatic planning or budget cuts (Garrett 2004). On the other hand, sharing building space and casework routines potentially facilitates workers' reflection on their professional values (Frost & Robinson, 2007).

As well as having to work beyond their own professional domains, Noordegraaf (2016) argues that public sector organisations increasingly face new risks when services are provided, mainly when there is concern about possible errors or failings in professional action. For the police service, frequent scandals have raised public and media concerns over their actions or even inactions. Resolutions to these concerns have often focused on restoring the democratic characteristics of the police service, either through new legislation to place a control on police powers (PACE being a key example here) or the development of new independent forms of accountability intended to increase legitimacy. Gilling (2014) charts how successive UK governments have slowly realised or emphasised the devolved nature of responsibility and democratic processes within policing by introducing new governance structures such as the introduction of Police and Crime Commissions, taking over accountability for managing local police services. The Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and the development of a professional body are examples of what Holdaway (2017) classifies as a loosely coupled system of regulation that has emerged to replace previous centralised forms of control. However, it does not necessarily lead to a system of governance that shapes common professional goals. As emphasised by Holdaway, priorities set by CoP, are not necessarily viewed as important at a local level by a PCC. On the other hand, regulatory bodies like the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue (HMICS 2020) might perceive PCCs as not meeting standards and require a force to take remedial actions to ensure they adhere to national standards.

Policing has increasingly involved a changing dynamic with the 'publics' that they police. The growing use of technology and social media has also raised new dilemmas for police where actions are immediately exposed to public scrutiny. Actions can be recorded using camera phones of the citizen journalist or police-owned body-worn cameras, and shared. These new forms of surveillance have moved police from being low visibility to a high visibility occupation (Sandhu and Haggerty 2017). While previously, the police were the ones with the surveillance capabilities, the rise in technology has led to an altered dynamic for the police. This is not just a way of capturing police action but is increasingly used by citizens to scrutinise and analyse police conduct (Brown 2016). As noted by Sandhu and Haggerty (2017, p. 17) these forms of 'counter-power' (Castells 2007, p. 239 cited in Sandhu and Haggerty) or 'synoptic power' (Mathieson 1997) are increasingly applied by activist groups. The impact of this 'new visibility' (Goldsmith 2010) is said to have a profound impact on the police and their behaviour. Research with Canadian police confirms the deterrent effect of increasing exposure on potential police misconduct and suggests that this has made police more aware of the legitimacy of their actions. (Brown 2016). While the police face increased scrutiny from emerging accountability mechanisms as described and increased visibility via new technologies, these may remove discretion or autonomy for police as 'street-level bureaucrats' (Lipsky 1980). Rather than lead to more open and transparent decisions, increased visibility can potentially create a sense of fear and risk among professionals. They avoid dealing with cases simply sticking to legal options rather than using professional judgement for fear of reprisal. Morell and Bradford (2018) suggest that increased visibility through technology like body-worn cameras might only have a transient effect and not resolve long-established tensions that might exist with

marginalised groups. To these authors, it offers only a 'thin layer of governance', ignores questions of why policing is conducted in a certain way, or the fact that policing involves interactions where power imbalances exist. They also suggest at best some types of accountability mechanisms that seek to deter behaviour are unlikely to resolve issues with police practice.

### **Internal reorganisation**

Internally workplaces are also being reorganised. Police workforce modernisation has been on the political agenda in the UK for several years (Winsor 2011, 2012). The Winsor Review in 2011/2012 formed a key strategy of the coalitions to reform the police service. The reports suggested comprehensive changes to police officers' pay and conditions, including overtime arrangements, shift allowances, redundancy conditions, sickness benefits, pension arrangements and career routes. They were fearful that the introduction of Windsor would have a profound impact on policing (Hogget et al 2014). Charman, in her research of recruits, found that while not necessarily a concern for all officers, some respondents did mention that it had potentially reduced the attractiveness of the job, particularly in relation to pay and conditions (Charman 2017).

The Direct Superintendent Entry Scheme initially recommended in the Windsor reforms was paused by the CoP in 2020, awaiting an evaluation to be completed by the end of 2021 (College of Policing ND <https://www.college.police.uk/joining-police/direct-entry-police>). The scheme initially caused some controversy (Smith 2015) but was extended to incorporate different ranks, including Direct Entry Inspector, and had the aspirational goal of increasing the range and diversity of people who enter the service. It allowed external candidates with the requisite skills and managerial experience in alternative professions to join the police without first making their way through the ranks. Reservations have been about whether the scheme achieved its desired goals during its operation (Silvestri 2018, Williams et al 2021). One problem has been their acceptance by the existing workforce and questioning their knowledge and skills of Direct Entrants to fulfil the role. Additionally, while traditionally policing like other public service professions is a long-term career choice, people no longer view it as a job for life. This is supported by external stakeholders like CoP (2018) who emphasise that the police service appreciated the need to be a flexible workforce with various entry routes and lengths of service, as well as the possibility of re-joining at a later stage. More flexible work patterns and cognisance of officers' childcare commitments and needs are also part of a new working environment.

### **Re-stratification**

Noordegraaf (2016, p. 11) argues that work might alter because of the composition, social structures and relations embedded within professional fields. He reflects that the homogeneity of professions has changed, and that new fragmented and professional identities have emerged. Noordegraaf and Van der Meulen (2008, p.1068) argue 'how professionalization projects evolve, who is involved, and what outcomes are produced cannot be seen as a functional improvement of systems, but as a search by occupational "segments" for appropriate and legitimate systems'. This is supported by research that suggests that there has been a tendency by some theorists to argue that managerial discourses have shifted core values of employees towards rationality and efficiency. But there is much more diversity and subjectivity in professional discourses and experience or work. Halford and Leonard (2006) found that workplace subjectivities arise because of employees' different experiences and contexts and organisational infrastructures, including space and time like institutional settings (community hospitals versus large urban district hospitals) and shift patterns. There has been a major shift in the composition of the police services in the UK and beyond (Van Dijk et al 2015.) This links to the transformation thesis identified by Bayley and Shearing (1996) who suggested that policing services are no longer monopolised by public police but rather delivered by a range of personnel and providers leading to a fragmentation of services with the private security sector increasingly

delivering policing at local, national, and global locations. While there are multiple issues with this pluralisation of policing,<sup>1</sup> in relation to professionalisation, the mindset of security personnel differs from that of public police. Where public police's allegiances are towards providing a public service, private security are perceived as less professional than their counterparts as their loyalty is towards their employer or the market. (Prenzler and Sarre 2012). Despite this, there is an argument to suggest that 'private security firms may be more flexible and adaptable than public police, be unencumbered by collective agreements that restrict how resources can be deployed and have the potential to produce value for money' (Montgomery and Griffiths 2015, p. 16). Distinguishing public/private provision in this way does not necessarily account for the complexity of these partnerships or necessarily adequately define the views and values of professionals in this field. Research by Adam White (2014, p. 18), into one of the most substantial public-private partnerships between Lincoln Police and G4S, found that the principles were more blurred and that 'those of each ideological persuasion would find positive and negative logics of behaviour on both sides the public-private divide, not ring-fenced on each side'. This indicates that we need to be much more caution is continuing to appreciate and analyse the mixed economy of policing and its impact on professional identities.

Another example of re-stratification is the more diverse make-up of professions, particularly along gendered lines. Police organisations in several jurisdictions have increased diversity and we have witnessed increasing numbers of women in policing. (Silvestri 2018). On the face of it, there is an appearance of more gender equality. But, while numerically there are numerous women entering police service and prominence of women in leadership roles, the picture is much more complex and internal inequality, particularly when leadership style and expectations are considered, have still meant challenges to women's progression in the service. Despite this, Silvestri (2018) suggests that workforce modernisation and the challenges that policies like the previously mentioned direct entry scheme in England and Wales brought to policing could potentially change the dynamic and culture of policing. Where there has been a tradition of a job for life mentality and staged hierarchical career progression working through the ranks, this has proved detrimental to diversity. She argues, 'the century ideology of internal recruitment within policing has now been fractured and the number of direct entrants looks set to increase across various roles and ranks within policing'. Brown et al. (2020) found that women police officers can act as liminal workers, who can disrupt traditional cultural values and help adopt other new values essential to new professional identities.

Recruits entering the service can also fracture traditional practice. For example, Charman (2017, p. 332) identifies a 'new breed' of officers emerging in the service with a change in attitude towards the job, as more of a job for now. In addition, their priorities within that role have changed and rather than prioritise crime-fighting, recruits appreciate other aspects of their role such as public safety and reassurance. She further identifies a shift away from the occupational solidarity that was a core characteristic of police occupational cultures in the past.

## **Relocation**

One type of relocation is digital relocation or dislocation, where new technology has changed the shape of service provision or indeed the nature of the demand that service may have to address. For policing in recent years, this has been the changing nature of crime and its relocation into cyberspace. Wall (2007) discusses how both traditional forms of crime have been reshaped by the internet, where most fraud would be localised, the availability of technology means that the nature and location of such criminal activity have changed and been repositioned. In addition, issues such as fraud have become high volume crimes where the estimated number of incidents with at least one online element was approximately 3.5 million (cited in Reform 2018). A victim is situated in one jurisdiction and the perpetrator elsewhere. The nature of victimisation is also changing, whereas traditional crimes of fraud may have been in more urban areas. Due to a higher number of professional groups occupying these areas, rural communities are more exposed (Loveday 2017). The reporting of business fraud has also increased substantially. The Global Economic

Crime and Fraud Survey reported that 47% of respondents said their companies had been victims of fraud or economic crime, up from 36% in 2016 (PWC 2020). This could be because of growing awareness but is also likely to increase criminal activity online. The internet and availability of technology have meant increased numbers of victims and offenders engaging in forms of criminality, for example, online harassment and threats, child sexual exploitation, hacking and money laundering (Reform 2018). The volume of on-line crimes has likely accelerated by the recent Covid-19 crisis, particularly for individual victims (Buil-Gil, D. et al 2021).

The availability of online services has also led to the reshaping of the physical location of services, for policing the ability to report online and the increased use of third-party reporting centres, for example, in shopping centres or local libraries, means the local police stations are no longer required. A push to save money, because of the financial crisis and the cost of maintaining old buildings and estates, has added to this closure of some localised police stations and relocation of services through the introduction of centralisation. Police services have been combined in a bid to save money. As noted by Terpstra and Fyfe (2015), the process of shifting from decentralised and fragmented services towards more central and national forces has become relatively common in Western and Northern Europe. The impact of this has been relocation of physical services and also governance. For example, in the Netherlands and Scotland a shift towards more national governance arrangements and a focus on national priorities meant some local policing arrangements were compromised (Hail 2016). Local communities might also feel detached from services and unable to connect to services some distance away. This leads to not just the removal of the physical station but also the symbolic nature of a rural police station as embedding safety and security at the heart of the community (McLaughlin 2005, Smith and Somerville 2013).

It could be argued that centralisation could potentially mean that national or specialist services dealing with a serious crime, like terrorism are strengthened when positioned in one location (Griffiths and Easton 2008 cited in Mendel et al 2017). Examining evidence from a range of studies Mendel et al., (2017) propose that when services are relocated, and staff moved to different locations, it can create challenges as staff may not wish to relocate and the reduction in leadership roles or specialist opportunities can stifle career progression. These authors make it clear that the impact on the merging or decentralisation of services is mixed and determined by the social, cultural, and economic factors at play. It is also unlikely that more decisions relating to centralisation will be reversed, but it is important that physical and geographical location are considered in relation to impact on the way in which services are delivered and how this might also impact the opportunities for staff progression and development in new professional spaces.

## Discussion

The consequences of this restructuring of professional fields mean traditional perspectives of professionalism are an unstable category (Noordegraaf 2016). Noordegraaf suggests considering the broader dynamics currently shaping professions by exploring the way they have been reconfigured. If this framework is applied to policing professionalism, organisational and external social, cultural, and political shifts shaping the profession can be identified. These may also have profound implications for police professional identities and the adaptation required managing these shifts. Returning to more traditional forms of professional control that favour a move towards re-establishing occupational dominance (for example, through increased autonomy and discretion) or beyond professionalism towards disciplinary control are unlikely to be sufficient to provide organisations and professionals with the solutions required. Instead, Noordegraaf (2011) argues that we need to move towards more 'organized professionalism' that reconnects professionals and organisations to try and reduce potential fragmentation and heterogeneity within and between occupations and organisations. This means new or different approaches that try to manage the potential fracturing of policing as a profession.

For policing, this will continue to be a challenge, the current re-professionalisation programme has tended to focus on adopting a trait-based approach as a way of re-legitimising and re-establishing professional identities, while this not problematic itself, solutions focus on developing established forms of knowledge through the introduction of evidence-based practice and education may not be sufficient on their own to prevent this process. While they only form part of strategies to 're-professionalise' the police, it is argued here that different approaches that account for external and internal shifts are required. As stated by Noordegraaf (2016, p. 802), this restructuring has implications for the way that professionals are educated and developed within organisations. He argues

instead of 'merely' teaching methodical skills, professionals will have to be taught how they can connect to other professionals, other disciplines, and outside worlds. Professionals themselves will need to acquire connective capacities, which they use to tackle cases, build careers, and secure authority.

Police services in England and Wales need to think more holistically and try and create links between organisations and occupational domains and external worlds. As service delivery is increasingly determined externally and new service delivery patterns arise, like increased demand in cases concerning vulnerability, global pandemics and other emerging crimes, new connective and new organisational values will need to be embedded and considered.

Recent research on learning and development across UK forces (MOPAC/OU 2020) suggests that austerity has led to stripping back of essential personal and continuing professional development opportunities across the board in policing in England and Wales, but this is also reflected in other parts of the UK (HMICS 2020). Learning and development often takes a back seat to other operational priorities. Recognition of the requirement to enhance workforce development was recently confirmed by the CoP in a future scanning exercise which like Policing Vision 2025 emphasises on developing a diverse and skilled workforce but emphasises the need to connect to a broader ecosystem of partners (College of Policing 2021). If not carefully applied, this can create further fragmentation that the reconfiguration framework suggests is already underway. The danger is the reinforcing of the notion of 'abstract' policing referred to above, where internal relations between officers are increasingly fractured (Tespera, Fyfe, and Salet 2019).

It is critical to embed reflection and learning needs at an organisational level, allowing the police service to become more self-reforming. Metcalf (2017:153) argues that police services need to shift from being a blame culture where mistakes and crises are acted upon defensively or reactively to embed an organisational learning approach that moves the police to be 'an intelligent and adaptive network enabled by an engaged, confident and trusting workforce'. This should incorporate a vision of 'learn-how' rather than just internal 'know-how'. Williams et al (2016) argue for police professionalism as community-centred, a model that encourages individual reflection based on practitioner experience alongside feedback from external communities to adjust practices and organisations that endorse the 'spirit of discovery' and accept not all solutions can be pre-empted. They argue that it is essential for police to acknowledge they alone do not have all the answers.

## Conclusions

Professional fields become increasingly dependent on shifting external and internal circumstances. This is evidenced through recent shifts within the police service in the UK and changes to governance structures, work patterns and workforce, increased specialisation and the changing nature and re-location of crime described above. While this loss of autonomy was already underway, due to other pressures, such as managerialism, shifts in governance, increased visibility and demand added to the destabilising of occupational identity further (Freidson 2001, Noordegraaf 2016, Evetts 2018). The solution to this tends to revert to traditional values of professionalism as a solution to re-assert police legitimacy and professional status. What this article has shown is that recent attempts to 're-professionalise' the police in this way through the adoption of particular traits have led to continued debates between organisational and professional logics rather than creating

an understanding of professionalism that moves beyond these dichotomies. To fully understand the current context of police professionalism more interdisciplinary research, flexible definitions and further empirical enquiry are required.

## Note

1. For an overview of the some of the key challenges and opportunities of the pluralisation of policing, see Stenning and Shearing (2015).

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