

## From Indifference to Hostility: Police Officers, Organisational Responses and the Symbolic Value of ‘In-Service’ Higher Education in Policing

### Introduction

The last 20 years have seen substantial developments in the relationship between police organisations and higher education institutions (HEIs) in England and Wales (Bryant et al 2012). These developments have been most pronounced in the provision of HE degrees aimed at those currently working in, or aspiring to work in, the policing profession. Bryant and colleagues (2014) note that such programmes generally fall into one of three categories: i) ‘in-service’ where police officers engage with HE education during their service, ii) ‘initial service’ where officers initial police training is provided by an HEI, and iii) ‘pre-service’ where officers study prior to commencing their initial training.

The relationships that have emerged between academic and police organisations can be portrayed as genuine, and productive, characterised by close and effective working practices. Police-university knowledge transfer partnerships have flourished over recent years, while policing degrees at all levels, from Foundation to Masters and PhD study, are offered in several institutions of higher learning. And whilst, historically, it has become *de rigueur* for senior officers to successfully engage with HE level learning (Punch, 2007), perhaps the most significant change over recent years has been the extent to which HE is seen as appropriate to officers at all levels within the organisation.

Unsurprisingly, the expansion of the HE sector to meet the perceived demands of 21<sup>st</sup> century policing has not been without its complications, nor its detractors. At a fundamental level, Canter (2004) notes that one of the greatest differences between the police and academia is

their essentially opposed ideas of what constitutes ‘knowledge’, driving many of the divergences in worldview between the two as police officers and academics draw on significantly different values when testing and assessing data, evidence or information. At a less epistemological level, Bryant et al (2014) show how this meeting of the academy and the police has not always been without issue and that some representatives in both organisations, remain reluctant to engage with the other.

Whilst it is tempting to portray the relationship between police and the academy as a linear account, using broad-brush strokes to cover complex issues, it is important to acknowledge the complexity of the relationship and its underlying contexts. As far back as 1983, Reuss-Ianni and Ianni noted the cultural schism which exists between street officers and managers in the police. Similarly, the term ‘university’ denotes a broad spectrum of institutional histories, structures, relationships and cultures, leading to academic police studies being a ‘stratified’ subject (Manning, 2010: 97). A select few universities act as ‘knowledge producers’ with established research and study programmes, while below them in the hierarchy are the ‘wholesalers’ and ‘retailers’ of knowledge, i.e. the HEIs producing *some* research and researchers, and those that are ‘professionally oriented’.

The contexts against which academic and police organisations operate have seen widespread change over recent years. For example, issues such as austerity measures (Brogden and Ellison, 2012), the advent of New Public Managerialism (Cockcroft and Beattie, 2009) and the changes they have evoked in policing are mirrored by the growing marketisation (Brown & Carasso, 2013) and discourse of employability (Boden & Nedeva, 2010) within the HE sector. Such issues continue to drive substantial, and often resisted, changes to organisations with particular identities. Therefore, whilst it is possible to talk broadly about the relationship between the

police and the academy in England and Wales we should expect nuances to occur in this relationship driven by both internal organisational factors and external political ones.

More recently, the future of police/academic partnerships has come under closer scrutiny with the introduction of the College of Policing consultation on *Policing Education Qualifications Framework* (PEQF) (College of Policing, 2016a). Its proposals for graduate entry will undoubtedly provide the context against which future debates about the role, nature, impact and integration of HE in policing will take place. Likewise, HMIC (2015) explores the extent to which police organisations effectively maximise their use of resources and it may be that efficiency arguments come to drive changes in the ways that police organisations use the skills of those amongst their workforce who have engaged with HE.

The shift to ‘academic’ police education and training offers a unique opportunity to explore the cultural nuances which shape the relationship between HEIs and police organisations. Innovations like the Direct Entry scheme and the move towards embedding evidence based practice within British policing suggest that the police are increasingly engaged with the need to provide a more effective, and more knowledge driven, response to contemporary policing issues. What remains unclear, at present, is the extent to which the potential offered by officers with degrees is being utilised, especially for those who engage with HE during their career (as a part-time ‘in-service’ student) or who do so whilst employed at the lower levels of the rank structure. In this paper, we report on the findings of a study drawn from 31 interviews with serving officers in a large urban police force who studied for a HE qualification whilst ‘in-service’. The research explored a number of factors relating to police officer engagement with HE. The current paper focuses on the cultural and structural responses to officers who gained a degree, whether their first or not, during active service.

## **A Brief History of ‘Academisation’**

‘Academisation’ of police education is a long-standing trend within police training/education although until recently was restricted to the higher ranks of the service. In England, it can be traced back all the way to the establishment of Metropolitan Police College in 1934, designed for individuals deemed ‘officer material’ both from the inside, and controversially, outside the police (Martin & Wilson, 1969). However, it was not until the 1960s and the increasing concern over police legitimacy that issues of training and education began to take centre stage (Lee & Punch, 2004). The Robbins Report of 1963 and the resulting government policy expanded HE routes for a number of professions, although the police retained separate training establishments (ibid). By 1966 the Bramshill Scholarship Scheme heralded police support for some management level officers to enter HE and two years later the introduction of the police Graduate Entry Scheme indicated more formal acceptance of the benefits of HE (ibid). The 1978 Edmund-Davies pay awards increased the financial remuneration of police roles, making policing more attractive to graduates (Reiner, 2010).

During the 1990s the concept of ‘reflective practitioners’ (Beckley, 2004) became a powerful motif for public sector occupations increasingly viewed as professions (nursing and social work being suitably comparable). And whilst arguments continue as to whether such ‘new’ professions are being professionalised or merely submitted to greater external oversight (Fournier, 1999; Evetts, 2013), what was becoming clear was that they, and their practitioners, were exhibiting professionalisation in essentially different ways to the more established professions.

By the early 2000s, the HMIC (2002: 10) assessed police probationer training as 'not wholly fit for purpose now, nor to support the police service of the twenty-first century'. A year later, BBC documentary *The Secret Policeman* illustrated some of the shortcomings in police professionalism. Such issues reflected the ongoing concerns over police professionalism, training and education facilitating the emergence of police/academia partnerships. The introduction of Foundation Degrees in 2001 opened another door for collaboration between forces and universities in joint delivery of Initial Police Training, the model echoing the two-year junior/community college degrees for law enforcement typical in the US (Hawley, 1998; Bassett & Tapper, 2009).

A shift from training to education was strongly recommended by Sir Ronnie Flanagan in his 2008 *Review on Policing*. It highlighted both the increasing demands the changing social context placed on officers' skills and knowledge, and the disparity between the police and other professions in regards to entry qualifications and individuals' responsibility to achieve (instead of organisational responsibility to provide) them.

### **The Current State of the Union**

More recently, the relationship between the police and the academy has become increasingly driven by the rhetoric of professionalisation (Cockcroft, 2015), widening the applicability of HE engagement to a broader spectrum of police staff. The current pre-entry qualification Certificate of Knowledge in Policing (CKP), introduced in 2014 and delivered by College of Policing licence holders, including a number of universities (CoP, 2016b), was the first step in a more comprehensive plan toward policing as a graduate profession. The Policing Education

Qualification Framework (CoP, 2016a) proposes to set minimum qualification levels for each rank, with level 6 (Bachelor's Degree) for constables, progressing to a minimum of level 7 (Master's Degree) for Superintendents, with equivalent requirements set for police staff. While there are provisions for recognition of prior learning and alternative routes, there is an explicit commitment to partnership with HE. The rationale for degree-level recognition includes the familiar benefits of transferability of qualifications, standardisation, attracting higher-calibre candidates, critical thinking skills, reflective practice, problem-solving, deeper understanding and broader knowledge whilst also explicitly tying into the professionalisation agenda (Hallenberg, 2012: 2016).

### **Unpacking the Rationale**

The desire to achieve police professionalisation via enhanced training and education provision is not new (e.g. Greenhill, 1981; Potts, 1982; Hawley, 1998; Roberg & Bonn, 2004; Carlan & Lewis, 2009). Indeed, academic education can be seen as a core characteristic of professions, necessary due to the complexity of work, the high level of responsibility, and the guarantee of competence which educational qualification provides. The symbolic benefits are considerable. The abstract knowledge base and the monopoly of techniques and technologies stemming from it serve to define and legitimate a profession (Abbott, 1988). With regard to policing, this is illustrated by Ericson and Haggerty (1997) who show how those engaged in knowledge work (one element of professionalisation) are increasingly granted the authority to shape 'the narratives surrounding crime, disorder and risk' (Cockcroft and Beattie, 2009: 534). Similarly, Loader and Mulcahy (2001: 42) identify the development of the 'elite police voice', how senior officers exercise their power of 'collective naming' by being able to

‘authorize, categorize, evoke, represent, reinforce and undermine elements of the wider culture’.

Professionalisation via academic education thus serves as a way to redefine and relegitimise the police. The instructional abstraction HE provides bolsters credibility and ‘enables survival in the competitive system of professions’ (Abbot, 1988: 9). Increased public and governmental scrutiny have done little to reduce the politicised nature of contemporary police work and, in the face of such external pressure, the professionalisation agenda holds a number of advantages for police organisations. As Sklansky (2014) notes, police professionalism allows the organisations to make claim to bodies of specialist knowledge, to push reform from within and is considered to be associated with greater efficiency. There is also the suggestion that educational inputs may mitigate, in part, some of the negative influences of police organisational culture. In particular, there have been widespread concerns regarding the discretionary nature of policing, both historically (e.g. Royal Commission, 1962 [see Willink, 1962]), and contemporarily (e.g. Punch, 2007).

Academic education and its recognisable qualifications (cultural capital) improve the police’s status with the public, other professions and government (social capital), in turn strengthening the claim for pay and resources (economic capital) and providing a much needed edge in ‘conflicts over competence’ that the police routinely find themselves engaged in (Hallenberg, 2012, cf Bourdieu, 1986) The steer towards ‘academisation’ can therefore be seen as driven by the perceived benefits at an external or symbolic level, rather than the ‘up-skilling’ of individual officers. Research does show that higher education background is linked to higher levels of public satisfaction, lower numbers of complaints and disciplinary actions and less use of physical or verbal force in interactions with the public (e.g. Lee & Punch,

2004; Wimshurst & Ransley, 2007; Paoline & Terrill, 2007). However, such evidence appears to attract less prominence than it might warrant. Similarly, less focus is being given to the benefits of HE for individual officer performance in terms of autonomous learning, analytic skills and criticality.

The relationship between HE and policing draws us to a number of issues which have been highlighted above. A partial explanation for the challenges identified here may be found in the intrinsic tension between the process and/or rhetoric of police 'academisation' and the ongoing agenda to 'professionalise' the police (Cockcroft, 2015; Hallenberg, 2012). At a superficial level, these two processes align. However, in reality, we will argue, there exist structural and cultural resistances within the police organisation that create hurdles to successful implementation.

## **Methodology**

The aim of this project was to assess police officer experiences of having undertaken a HE degree. The study utilised a constructivist qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews with 31 officers from a large urban police force.

In 2013, the authors were awarded a small grant to resource a feasibility study in this area of research. Six semi-structured interviews were undertaken and analysed and a report published (Hallenberg and Cockcroft, 2014). The report identified five key themes warranting further research: 1) drivers of officers' HE study, 2) facilitators/inhibitors of their HE engagement, 3) organisational and individual responses, 4) outcomes of the experience, and 5) the resulting identity change.



For the present study, and with further funding, a sample of serving police officers was created through a designated sponsor within the police service in question who publicised the research on the organisation's intranet and collated positive responses to the request for participation.

While the study did not systematically collect demographic data, the interviews typically covered such contextualising information. 5 (16%) of the participants were female, which is less than the current statistics showing that female officers make up 28.6% of the police workforce in England and Wales (Home Office, 2016). As the sample was self-selective, this does not necessarily reflect the gender division among officers gaining in-service degrees. Participants' ages varied from under 30 to over 50, and their years of service from 3 to just over 30. The majority of participants were serving officers, their ranks varying from Constable to Superintendent, but two were Specials, which is a voluntary role with same powers as regular police officers. As such, they have been treated equally for the purposes of analysis and not specifically identified in the interview quotes. Reflecting the general structure of the organisation, the lower ranks of Constable and Sergeant made up the majority of the sample, 20 (64.5%) of participants falling into this category. The roles included several key policing functions, such as neighbourhood policing, investigations, counter-terrorism, preventative and educational work, roads and transport, financial crime, emergency response as well as strategic and policy work. Interviews also revealed a diverse mix of HE experiences. Half (15 out of 31) of the participants had a pre-service degree of some kind. Mostly this was only at undergraduate level, but 3 out of the 15 had achieved a Masters level qualification before entering the police. The pre-service degrees were mostly in non-policing related subjects, though one participant did have a policing degree and another had studied law.

For 16 participants, their first encounter with HE therefore was whilst in service. Interestingly, everyone in this group studied a policing related topic, typically a policing undergraduate degree. 4 out of the 16 had either progressed to or gone straight to a Master level course. Looking at the sample as a whole, a more diverse picture emerges. All 31 participants had done an in-service degree, meaning that almost half of the sample had more than one degree. Out of the whole cohort, 16 possessed or currently studied for a postgraduate degree. Notably, this included 4 PhDs. In terms of the degree topics, only 6 were in disciplines that were not directly related to policing, although those participants did find relevance even beyond transferable skills. All other in-service degrees were in policing related subjects such as policing degrees, criminology, law and intelligence and security studies.

The respondents participated in a semi-structured interview based upon a set of standardised questions mapping the above five themes. The approach also enabled the exploration of unanticipated issues that arose during the course of the interview. This allowed key themes to emerge organically and for issues of interest to be developed in greater depth. Following transcription of the data, a thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006) has been initiated, utilising the NVivo qualitative data analysis software.

Given the constructivist nature of the strategy and data, the authors make no claims regarding generalisability. However, following the work of Guba and Lincoln (1994) the paper seeks to highlight the ‘transferability’ of the findings by presenting an appropriate level of information to enable others to judge how such knowledge could be used in other contexts. The authors also aim to adhere to Malterud’s (2001) advice on being careful not to overstate the material that has been drawn upon.

## **Findings**

The scope of this paper is to provide a preliminary analysis of a key theme emerging from the data during the early stages of the thematic analysis. Whilst the project generated a number of themes and sub-themes around motivations, drivers/facilitators, inhibiting factors and organisational response, it is the latter of these that provides the focus for this paper.

The current study explores the structurally and culturally driven responses of the organisation and its staff to serving graduate officers who have completed an in-service degree. During this preliminary analysis stage we have not differentiated between participants in terms of gender, ethnicity, rank, degree type or level, although it is likely that such factors may explain some variation in experiences.

One of the key focuses of the research was to explore officers' organisational experiences whilst undertaking the degree and after its completion. Overwhelmingly, officers reported a perceived indifference on the part of the organisation to their successful completion of an educational programme, signified e.g. by non-utilisation of skills, apparent lack of value placed on the degree in general or as part of officers' career progression. Whilst some positive experiences were reported, these occurred at an ad hoc or informal level (through peers), typically driven by existing inter-personal contacts. In addition, some officers felt that they received a tokenistic response (e.g. through routine 'notices' posted on organisational intranet) to their educational achievements, while some also reported what they perceived as hostile reactions. The following section will explore these in more depth. Where necessary, the

interview excerpts have been truncated to accommodate presentational restrictions, whilst taking care to maintain the integrity of the data.

## Indifference

The strongest theme emerging from the data was that of perceived indifference on behalf of the organisation. All participants, even when noting examples of outright hostility or tokenistic acknowledgement (or the rare experiences of positive regard), described a ‘non-reaction’ on part of the police organisation to their HE achievement. Many indicated that this was what they had expected although it is difficult to know how much of that is due to post-hoc rationalisation. Some, like Participant 23, a male Detective Constable with an undergraduate degree in policing, openly acknowledged having had more positive expectations of the police response to their educational award.

I mistakenly thought that the police would recognise your achievement [laughs] but obviously, nowadays the [name removed] police doesn't care whether you're the cleverest person in the world or whether you're the stupidest person in the world (Participant 23)

Knowledge and research on policing topics, even those directly relevant the officer's immediate work role were met with perceived indifference. Participant 27, a male Sergeant who had already completed his undergraduate degree in policing and was part way through his postgraduate degree in law, commented on this explicitly. He had identified an issue within his own work role and completed a dissertation on it.

I've been in [unit] so long there's been a real lack of female officers in [unit], it's not gone up from 5% in the last 20 years. Even though the amount of female officers has increased twofold. No interest in it whatsoever. Still the same sort of cultures that are in place, especially in [unit]. [...] I think they don't even want to know. There's answers

in there, in the dissertation there's answers of what you can do – just small things because there's research to support it. Not interested. Not interested, because the culture is so strong in [unit] (Participant 27)

In a similar vein, Participant 4, a Sergeant with a policing degree, relates his experiences of having studied organisational change and then attempted to apply this knowledge to his work.

We studied it and we looked into it and we looked at the limited research on it and we found out the general over-riding things and we wrote our bits on it and then coming back into the police ... And I said “well look, I'm not being funny but I've done research on this.” Not interested. “But you're doing it wrong,” “We're not interested, that's the way we're doing it (Participant 4)

The experience of Participant 2, a senior female officer with a PhD, expresses a similar sentiment.

I am an expert in [subject]...I've written, I've peer reviewed...And so then the service are organising how they're all [subject]....do you think they'd involve me? Despite me writing to them and this that and the other. No, not interested. I've written to the College of Policing five times because they are doing the work that I've already done. And they don't even bother to write back to me (Participant 2)

Similarly, Participant 31, an Inspector halfway through his PhD, also reports a lack of response from the organisation to knowledge and skills that he perceived as relevant.

I registered my work as you're meant to through the What Works Centre, College of Policing and I also sent a précis of my study to the Evidenced Based Policing Unit within the [organisation]. I didn't get any response, confirmation from them whatsoever to say thank you very much for letting us know that you're doing the study... But those skills, that experience is not – that's why I keep coming to 'valued' or 'used'. I don't feel as though I'm being utilised in the way that I could be. There's no talent management within the organisation around. No strategic kind of mission. We've got all these people with these skills and attributes, But there's no real 'let's make the best use we can of that resource' (Participant 31)

As the above interview extract suggests, the perception that officers' newly acquired skills and knowledge were being overlooked tended to impact negatively on officers. Participant 9, a PC who has studied to a postgraduate level (in a policing related topic) during her service, relates her experiences:

I haven't been used, I can't say, even though like I've updated HR that yes I have this qualification and stuff like that. I think there should be somebody who's phoning you, having a chat with you to say "well what did you do?" and see if they can use you in a particular setting. But you just update them and that's it. (Participant 9)

When asked how that made her feel, she answered:

Useless. You're there, you've got it, you know, but nobody's interested. And some of us, we don't mind volunteering even if I don't get paid because I know I'm developing myself, I'm keeping myself active. Unlike me studying and not really using it then after a while you become rusty. (Participant 9)

In contrast Participant 21, a Sergeant with an undergraduate policing degree was one of the few who described his studies contributing to a work-related project.

My team has used it. My Chief Inspector has shown an interest in it and wants to implement it across the cluster. And I've even had a couple of people from some of the neighbourhood policing teams who I follow on Twitter, get in touch with me personally and say "I'm interested in what you're doing, can you send me what you're doing." (Participant 21)

This participant's response to how that made him feel was, consequently, markedly more positively:

It's validating. It's validated the work that I've done so far in a way that not getting recognised by senior managers sometimes doesn't do. But there is a sense of pride there, it feels finally worth it and that finally someone's actually listening to – not necessarily listening to me but listening to what the evidence and what the research shows. (Participant 21)

The value attributed to HE degrees, according to the interviewees, seems constrained by officers' rank and role. Most notably, interviewees expressed a perception that the graduate qualities of those entering the police service with a degree were more highly valued than those who acquired the same qualities whilst 'in service' as Participant 28, a female Inspector with an undergraduate policing degree, explains:

We've got so many people who are graduates at different levels and I think the organisation looks far too much at what is outside rather than what is inside. We've got fantastic people in this organisation at different ranks, all the rest of it, who've got some fantastic ideas but are effectively overlooked. This organisation, they put so much emphasis on graduates and I am a graduate, and I'm a graduate in Policing and I'm still waiting with 450 people to find out tomorrow whether or not I'll be promoted in a job that I already do and I have done for three years. So that's the frustration, that's the negative because there is absolutely nothing that I have filled in [in the application] that gives me the edge because I'm a graduate. It hasn't benefitted me professionally in any way at all (Participant 28)

Similarly, Participant 7, a male Constable with a criminology degree, comments:

Nothing, it means nothing in the [Police Service] to have a degree as a police officer. It makes you feel devalued in some ways... If you've got a 2:1 you can go straight through the process, straight in to training and in three years you'll be an inspector. For me to do the same from now it would take me a lot longer yet I've got eight year's experience as a police officer in loads of different roles and have done a degree during my service and there's no assistance for me in any way to do that. So they obviously see a value in officers with degrees – coming from the outside. But they don't appear to value officers who are already in the police who have degrees (Participant 7)

We will explore some of the potential cultural and structural reasons that may help explain these data in the discussion section, First, it is necessary to note two other types of experiences related by the participants.

Hostility

As noted, indifference – from the organisation, colleagues and superiors – was the most overwhelmingly common experience or perception reported by graduate officers. However, some also shared stories of explicitly negative or hostile responses. Such reactions, when reported, tended to come from line managers or other superior officers, suggesting that the hierarchical rank structure of the police bears some explanatory relevance here. Two interview quotes below illustrate this, though it should be noted that the first relies on an anecdote rather than direct experience. The first comes from a male Inspector with a pre-service degree and an in-service postgraduate degree, both in disciplines not directly related to policing. Participant 26 is a male Sergeant with an undergraduate policing degree.

There was a guy came in he had a PhD apparently and on his email signature it sort of said you know – PC 452 ST, PhD at the end of it. And apparently his sergeant said to him “take that off you \*\*\*\* that means nothing.” And there is still very much a culture of a degree is something that you ought to hide (Participant 3)

The guy that sat down next to us [prompting a change in interview location] is my Chief Inspector. He knows I’ve been doing it [the degree], he has said in three years four words on the subject. And that’s when I came up with an idea that he hadn’t thought of first – completely unrelated to the degree, but he thought that. “That’s that effing degree,” were his words. And I looked at him and said “well actually it’s not but clearly that’s what you think.” So yeah, I haven’t put a picture of myself in my gown on my desk – I don’t think he’d be impressed! (Participant 26)

Participant 24, a Chief Inspector with two undergraduate degrees, one achieved pre- and the other in-service, recalls her experience upon joining the police after her first degree;

Because I always remember, when I first joined this job and I’d finished my maths degree. I passed out of [training school], went for our first day on what was then called Division. And I remember going in with the other probationers for this so-called welcome meeting. I remember that he [Chief Inspector] said, he just looked down and he said to me “yeah, PC X, I don’t think a degree’s going to do you any good in this job.” I never forget him saying that and it was almost like I’d been marked out as a graduate, marked out as if it was a negative thing. So I never mentioned it. And I know that’s a common experience because I know my colleague has had the same sort of reaction and in those days it was. I love the fact that you could now say ‘oh guess what,



we're taking in graduates and we're taking them in at inspector level.' I think if I did they would just be turning in their grave. It would be too much for them to comprehend, they wouldn't have understood it at all. And I remember being told as a probationer, I was told that I asked too many questions and that I would fail. That they would sack me if I continued to ask questions. I got a very damning first report because I asked too many questions (Participant 24)

## Tokenism

On those occasions that officers' HE achievements were acknowledged, it was usually reported as being done in a tokenistic manner as Participant 8, a male Constable educated to a postgraduate level both pre- and in-service, observes.

I don't know if it's valued, I think they just expect to see it. 'Do you have your degree? Yes you do. Fine...' I think it's very much a tick box (Participant 8)

A number of participants related stories of the organisation acknowledging those officers who had successfully completed university degrees through the issuing of police notices on the organisation's intranet:

There isn't anything. There's no, other than it being put out on the Intranet whenever you pass, just as a cursory thing, somebody phoned me up and told me I was on there. Nothing (Participant 18)

I think they put it in notices all the following people have got a BSc because one of the other people pushed for it, one of the other people who graduated at the same time pushed for it but I don't think it's been recognised at all (Participant 24)

This type of recognition was not rated very highly by the officers who reported that they would have rather had a more practical opportunity to put their newly acquired skills and knowledge

to practical use within the organisation. Participant 4, a Sergeant with an undergraduate degree in policing, conveys his sense of personal and professional disillusionment clearly:

I've long ago given up bucking the system and worrying about... I should be more angry than I am but you might as well throw rocks at your head, the only difference it'll make. I'm disappointed, not so much in that because I know the way it's a big organisation. I would have thought there would be someone in the organisation going "oh right, we've got a pool of newly qualified, therefore obviously quite keen because they've gone out of their own way, on their own time with their own finances to get this degree, let's utilise this, let's set up a research department or something in the organisation where these newly acquired skills can be honed, directed to the benefit of the police". What they've actually done is say "thanks very much, not interested." "I've got this great idea." "Yeah, that's really nice but we're not doing it that way." I didn't really expect it to be any different. I'm disappointed for the police. I'm disappointed because I do believe that – and it's not just in this degree thing - I think it's generally they don't look at the resources they have in their staff (Participant 4)

It appears that the organisation had made a start at collating information about the educational and skills background of staff. However, these efforts did not go any further. Participant 1 and 16, both male Constables educated to a postgraduate level, discuss this.

There is a group led by somebody, I forget his name but we've been in email contact, who has reached out and has got a database of people with an academic history or a relationship with – yeah – it hasn't gone anywhere. I don't know if it's a case of me failing to pursue it... (Participant 1)

HR's got it [details of degree]. The research unit's got it. They've got a copy. They used to have a website that was taken down, a unit, a section of it was taken down. But every research done and sponsored by the [service]... They were there, spanning ten years. (Participant 16)

When officers' HE related skills and knowledge were used, which according to the data, was very rarely, there was a perception that their attributes were being used at a superficial level. We have heard from Participant 24 already and her experiences are echoed in those of Participant 29, an Inspector part-way through his PhD.

Sometimes when they thrust something at me, because I've got a slightly mathematical background I'll say 'yeah but that's meaningless. The numbers are low, statistically that's not going to be significant.' I keep saying to them 'that's not a very good statistical tool when you're talking about this sort of thing and you'd be better...' and they just look at you and you think 'ok, I'll give up now' (Participant 24)

They think because you can read and write you might want to look at some cost saving measures for them or do some sort of weary report that you might not have any interest or indeed specialist knowledge in, but because you can read and write you might be a safe pair of hands. And it's almost an exploitative, rather than a relationship, rather than a collaborative approach about how do you think this might help the organisation? It's "X can read and write, here's a safe pair of hands, go off and write..." whatever they need writing (Participant 29)

#### Wider Contextual Data

Whilst the current paper focuses on the interviewees' perception of the organisation's responses to their HE study, it is important to place this in the wider context of the other key themes from the complete research project. Particularly, the participants' motivations for HE study are likely to mediate their experiences. These were a combination of professional and personal factors, including sense of achievement and 'proving oneself', potential benefits for career advancement and 'future proofing', i.e. widening one's opportunities for post-police career progression. Preliminary analysis suggests that interviewees' initial motivations were moderated in light of their organisational experiences during the process of HE engagement. A second related theme emerging from the interviews was the 'response to response', i.e. how the participants reacted to the perceived indifference, hostility or tokenism from the police organisation. This could take a variety of forms. For example, some officers concealed their studies whilst others were provocative in their overt commitment to Higher Education. A more detailed exploration of either the motivations or the consequences of organisation's responses

is beyond the remit of the current paper but provides a crucial context and a fruitful area of further dissemination.

## **Discussion**

The findings provide two key areas for further discussion. First, around the value of an HE qualification and, second, around the cultural and structural integration of ‘in service’ graduates.

### Value of an HE Qualification

Despite the rhetoric of police organisations’ value of HE qualifications, our data suggests that a majority of police officers in our sample perceived the organisation as being indifferent to those who successfully complete degree programmes. Some also experienced reactions that were more openly negative or hostile. Recognition, when present, was reported as being tokenistic, and only rarely did officers feel they had the opportunity to utilise their skills and knowledge in a professional context. Behind these headline findings, some interesting nuances emerge. First, our data suggested that those who have undertaken ‘in-service’ HE qualifications perceive their degrees to be of lesser value than when entering with a similar qualification. In this respect, it appeared that the police were able to accommodate the ‘graduate’ label if present prior to joining the service. The current rhetoric of changing the police to a graduate profession thus remains challenging. The data did not investigate the experiences of the new graduate entrants, and thus a question remains whether their skills and knowledge are utilised in any substantively different way from those who graduate ‘in service’. All in all, the preliminary analysis of the interviews suggests that, for ‘in service’

graduates at least, the value of HE lies in its symbolic cultural capital rather than in the knowledge and skills graduate officers bring to the organisation and practice of policing.

Reasons for this likely stem, in part, from the police's views on what constitutes 'knowledge'. Clark (2005) describes two 'ideal type' perspectives into professional expertise. The first is 'knowledge focused', being formal, systematic, theoretical, developed via accredited research and transmitted via (academic) publications. The second perspective is 'agent focused', resting on the assumption that "*professionalism resides in the character of the professional as a person*" (ibid: 186) and is thus by necessity subjective, acquired through experience and acceptance of personal responsibility. Police professionalism has, traditionally, relied on the latter and without a doubt, contextualised knowledge is important for police work (Thacher, 2008), as well as being increasingly valued in HE as evidenced by the adoption of various problem-based learning approaches. However, the imbalance has negative consequences as evident in the experiences of the graduate officers interviewed here.

Fraser (2008) describes 'common sense' as the 'knowledge engine' that drives the police organisation, creating a culture where "*you don't need rigorous evidence to back up any argument or decision, just personal experience*" (ibid: 163). Graduate officers challenge the 'habitus of policing' and the established credibility deriving from practical experience. They are willing and able to question why things are done the way they are (axiomatic knowledge), how people and events are categorised (dictionary knowledge), the methods (directory knowledge) and values of policing (recipe knowledge) (Sackmann, 1991). What is particularly problematic is that they are doing this from *within* the organisation, which makes its reactions (ignoring, discouraging, placating) understandable. That said, there is evidence to suggest that the advent of evidence-based policing will provide a shift away from such 'common sense'

approaches For example, Telep and Lum (2014) suggest that receptivity to academic information is integral to imbedding evidence based policing in organisational practice.

Second, there was a perception that those officers of a senior rank were more likely to be accepted as graduates, than those of the constable or sergeant ranks. This feature is supported by Bryant et al's (2014) reference to the 'excluded middle' in police education, where higher ranking officers and new recruits are encouraged to engage with education, while those between the two are effectively dissuaded from doing so. Despite these findings, the rhetoric of the value of education permeates modern policing as is shown by this year's PEQF consultation.

#### Structural and Cultural Integration of Graduates

There appeared to be little reported structural integration of 'in-service' educated officers by the police organisation. None of the interviewees reported that their degree qualification directly influenced their subsequent career, role or deployment by the organisation. Numerous respondents highlighted the lack of response by the organisation to their successful completion of a degree although some received acknowledgement of their attainment through notices. Others had more negative experiences. For example, Participant 2 experienced a real reluctance on the part of the police organisation to draw on her expertise and PhD research. The central finding regarding structural integration of officers following an 'in-service' degree was that they felt that their skills were effectively ignored.

In terms of cultural integration of officers gaining a degree whilst in service, the findings show a little more variation. Many officers found close colleagues in the organisational environment

supportive of their achievements. Others witnessed elements of informal hostility through comments suggesting that their degree was irrelevant, something derided or the academic process a means of ingratiating oneself with superior officers. The data suggests that these cultural responses may have contributed to some interesting coping mechanisms. Some interviewees were effectively ‘flying under the radar’ by self-funding their studies and not applying for study leave. Some hid their educational engagement from even close colleagues. Conversely, others used post-nominal letters as a means of standing up to the culture that they felt had not supported them. For many, the perceived lack of support and acknowledgement for their academic pursuits meant that whilst they joined a degree programme with professional development in mind, they quickly learnt to re-assess its purpose as either ‘personal development’ or as a means of ‘future-proofing’ in an occupation that no longer represented a long term vocation. What is of particular interest here is that many of the interviewees continued to value their HE experiences and qualifications (and the values associated with HE) regardless of the structural or cultural responses of the organisation.

Despite the rhetoric supportive of HE, many officers found little acknowledgement of this by the police. Indeed, we came across only a few instances where the police had sought to use those skills or knowledge, which officers had gained through their studies. This was considered surprising by many given the financial and study leave support that the organisation had made available to officers. At a more informal (or cultural) level, responses varied from supportive to hostile. In terms of the latter, some officers were denigrated for their engagement with HE and given the impression that it was incompatible with the work and values of police officers.

Police professionalism is implicitly connected to police culture, with the latter often viewed as having a detrimental or destabilising effect on attempts to enhance the former. The shift from a paradigm based on experience (often denoted through 'years served') to one based on knowledge (Gundhus, 2013) is likely to meet with cultural resistance. Parallel to this is a transformation from what Bryant et al (2014) term 'de facto' authority to 'epistemic' authority. Police professionalisation, as driven, in part, by 'academic' knowledge appears to be meeting with similar cultural resistance as the management reform agendas depicted in the work of Marks (2007) which highlighted the challenges of implementing New Public Management agendas in police organisations. However, at the same time, it can be argued that cultural resistance to new forms and orientations of knowledge within the police could be driven by more than a mere reactionary stance against 'change'. Indeed, what remains to be seen is whether or not the academic influence in policing proposed by the PEQF is entirely dissimilar from the reforms driven by NPM. Gundhus (2013) writing about the 'new' professions notes the presence of new structures through which to enforce control and little of the 'occupational collegiate authority' which we associate with more established professions. At the same time, we should be open to the fact that resistance to academic knowledge and ways of thinking may in part be structural rather than cultural. For example, Gundhus (ibid) identifies how the vertical hierarchy of command within police organisations is likely to inhibit officers' abilities to take meaningful decisions, especially within the lower ranks. This may prove to be the crux of the problem. Low to mid ranking officers with degrees present a dilemma for the police: whilst they possess the critical and analytic skills of a graduate, they remain situated at a position on the police hierarchy prohibiting the applications of such attributes.



It should be also noted that, some of the issues reported by our sample may be common to many employment sectors. In particular, policing is increasingly viewed as a ‘new’ profession in that it is a traditional vocation that is gradually becoming underpinned by professional knowledge. Other professions that have undergone such transitions include nursing and social work. Such transitions are rarely smooth and, as has been reported in research into other such employment sectors, the perceived undervaluing of graduates within such professions is an established issue (Brooks and Rafferty, 2010). Likewise, such tensions or perceptions may be exacerbated by the balance between the financial rewards associated with being a graduate in a graduate profession and the costs of studying for that award (see Matasar, 2010). Some of these challenges are directly driven by the ambiguity of policing in terms of its graduate status and whilst police organisations have engaged effectively with academia over recent years we also have to be aware that the last 30 years have seen a steady flow of graduates into non-graduate jobs (De Francesco and Jarousse, 1983). Likewise, research into experiences of graduates within the police has generally focussed on the re-entry of officers who were supported to temporarily leave the police to study before returning to the job (e.g. Lee and Punch, 2004). The sample in this research is composed of officers who opted to engage in part-time study whilst continuing to serve the police. Research suggests that those who engage in part-time degree study are less likely to realise substantial economic rewards in respect of their educational qualifications (Walker and Zhu, 2013). This appears especially pertinent in the light of the findings of this research as ‘in-service’ study is invariably part-time. We need, therefore, to acknowledge that many employment sectors may employ people who believe that there is insufficient attention paid to their degree, be it in respect of financial remuneration or professional credibility.

## **Conclusion**

Malcolm Young (1991: 37-8), in his classic biographical and anthropological exploration of policing, noted that:

Even at the same time as it publicly commends higher education, seeking out the graduate entrant, spending large sums on publicity to this end, and funding access to degree courses on scholarships, it also holds to a central ethic of distrust of the academic

A quarter of a century later, according to those ‘in service; graduates that were interviewed, little appears to have changed. Of interest here is that whilst HE is ‘publicly commended’, at an internal organisational level it’s value is less clearly articulated to those who engage with it. This suggests that we can identify a substantial contrast between the external facing benefits of HE at a presentational level (for example, in terms of evidencing professionalisation) and those potential benefits derived from employing practitioners with enhanced skills, knowledge and experience. This discrepancy has been keenly felt by the graduate officers in the current study. The findings align closely to the work of others (such as Punch, 2007) who show that whilst the police as an institution may aspire to be viewed as a profession, underpinned by engagement with HE, at the structural and cultural levels, the integration of HE into the police may expect to encounter resistance. It is possible that this will lessen due to the gradual influx of direct entry Inspectors and Superintendents from other sectors, and the introduction of programmes like ‘Police Now’ which provides intensive six weeks training to graduates before they take on the duties of a police officer (Police Now, 2016). Of course, this does not directly address the continued exclusion of those officers ‘in the middle’ (Bryant et al, 2014) whose self-initiated and self-sponsored development and career aspirations do not neatly fall under an

established scheme. The detrimental impact on motivation and, through it, retention of skilled staff has potential to be substantive, and something certainly felt by a number of participants in the current study. The push for evidence-based policing may prove pertinent here, as it should, at least in theoretically and rhetorically, raise the profile and demand for those officers with the requisite research skills to implement such approaches. It will also be interesting to see how the outcome of the PEQF consultation will affect the organisation's responses to its existing graduate officers. Undoubtedly, there remains scope for future work in assessing potential differentiation in organisational response to those who enter the organisation as graduates and those whose HE engagement takes place whilst employed at a higher rank.

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