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# POLICE AND HIGHER EDUCATION

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Report by  
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Canterbury Christ Church University  
September, 2014

# Introduction

Interest in the relationship between police and higher education is not a new phenomenon. However, in the UK, co-operation between police and the academy has been slow to develop, particularly when compared to the United States and Europe. Nevertheless, a number of police-university partnerships and a variety of courses from Foundation to Masters level aimed at current and aspiring police officers has mushroomed over the last decade, illustrating a recent formalisation of the police-academia relationship in the UK. Overall, the relationship between police and academia has become more routine, taking place at organisational (as opposed to interpersonal) level. The recent introduction of the Certificate of Knowledge in Policing, overseen by the newly established College of Policing, is likely to further expand and deepen the relationship between police and higher education institutions.

The impact of academic police education on the professional identities of the students and the broader organisational culture of the police is a topic that has so far garnered relatively little research (e.g. Punch, 2007, Heslop, 2011). Yet, professional communities, such as higher education and policing, strongly influence identity construction through the process of socialisation. Institutions define and confirm identities via expert knowledge systems that provide ways to interpret the social world and the individual's place in it. Indeed, an individual's entrance to the cultural landscapes of higher education or policing can be viewed as a transformational experience, requiring a renegotiation of one's self-identity.

The perceived and actual cultural and paradigmatic differences between the police and academia implies separate social (and mental) spaces which suggest conceptual tension, uneasy compromise, and a certain degree of dissonance are a possibility for the students wishing to occupy both worlds of higher education and policing.

This paper reports on a small pilot study which explored the above themes through semi-structured interviews of police officers and staff with higher education experiences. Before focusing on the findings, a brief review of the existing literature is provided.

# Literature Review

## Moving Towards Academic Police Education

Overall, the police training landscape can be described as problematic, fragmented and unnecessarily complicated (Howlett Bolton, 2005). It covers various types and levels of training, all of them with their own needs and concerns (Southgate, 1988a), making identifying a clear responsibility or interest group and tracing decision- and policy-making relatively difficult even for the police themselves (Allard, 1997).

While there had been attempts of 'academisation' of police training before (e.g. the short lived Metropolitan Police College during the inter-war years), it wasn't until the 1960s that the move began to gain momentum, however slowly. The period witnessed an increased focus on training and education of police officers as a response to the problems of legitimacy (Lee & Punch, 2004). This coincided with the publications of the influential Robbins Report in 1963, which called for expansion of higher education opportunities and the supporting government policy at the time (ibid) although unlike many other professions, the police retained separate training establishments. Nevertheless, the way had been paved and a number of programmes sending officers to university began, most prominent of which was the Bramshill Scholarship Scheme started in 1966, providing university education opportunities for management level officers. 1968 saw the beginning of the police Graduate Entry Scheme (ibid), which continues (under different names and formats) to this day.

The intake of graduates increased in the 1980s due to the Edmund-Davies 1978 pay awards and rising unemployment (Reiner, 2010). The poor reputation of the police service during the 1990s resulted in the new goal to produce 'reflective practitioners' capable of diffusing situations without violence and fostering good relationships between police and community (Beckley, 2004). Academia seemed to provide a potential solution to the problems and Reiner (1994) observes a period of 'happy rapprochement' between police and academia at this time which has, more or less joyously, continued ever since.

In 2002 a HMIC inspection report *Training Matters* evaluated police probationer training as "*not wholly fit for purpose now, nor to support the police service of the twenty-first century*" (p. 101); an estimate graphically validated a year later by the BBC documentary *The Secret Policeman* which revealed shocking instances of racial prejudice and discrimination among recruits in police training schools. In his 2008 *Review on Policing*, Sir Ronnie Flanagan recommended bringing police training closer to an education model for two key reasons. First, that the requirements of today's policing are such that officers need knowledge and skills traditionally gained within higher education. Second, that policing should be brought into line with other professions in terms of entry qualifications and individual commitment to achieve (as opposed to organisational commitment to provide) those. Together, these heralded a change in recruit training but also led to broader and deeper implications for the police in terms of police professionalisation and cultural change (Heslop, 2011), something which profusion of academic police education taps into.

Since the 2001 introduction of Foundations Degrees a number of forces deliver Initial Police Training in collaboration with the local universities in a move that echoes the trend of two-year junior/community college degrees for law enforcement typical in the US (Hawley, 1998; Bassett & Tapper, 2009). There are

also a number of university courses in Police Studies (and equivalent, the titles of the degrees vary) aimed at those students who are considering a career in law enforcement or a related field. They do not require the students to be already accepted into the police service but often have arrangements with the local forces and encourage students to apply to become special constables. The recent introduction of a pre-entry qualification 'Certificate of Knowledge in Policing' required by a number of forces including The Metropolitan Police, means more aspiring police officers will turn to licensed providers of such training – among them universities. In addition to undergraduate education, there also exists several post-graduate degrees aimed at senior officers. These cover both policing and criminal justice topics as well as more general leadership, management and business oriented courses that most officers now find essential if they wish to reach and work in ACPO level roles.

## Practical Benefits and Symbolic Capital: Professionalisation via Academisation

But *why* are the police turning to HE? A comprehensive review of the literature is beyond the scope of the report but in short academic education brings with it a number of potential practical and symbolic benefits.

Higher education can be seen as a route to standardisation while externally recognised qualifications provide a way to prove transferrable skills and competencies, and thus leading to increased career flexibility (Hallenberg, 2012; Jaschke & Neidhardt, 2007). It can also benefit the personal and professional development of officers, bringing a sense of being valued for their knowledge and skills and improved self-esteem and job motivation (Hallenberg, 2012; Lee and Punch, 2004; Punch, 2007). Crucially, HE fosters equal standing with other professions while also leading improved performance and public image (Hallenberg, 2012; Wimshurst & Ransley; 2007). Broader knowledge and deeper understanding of the policing issues coupled with various transferrable skills have also been identified as an advantage enjoyed by officers with HE background (Hallenberg, 2012; Werth, 2011; Trofymowych, 2007; Roberg & Bonn, 2004).

But the potential benefits of academic education go beyond that and tap into the process of police professionalisation. Concern over it is not new, nor is the idea of achieving it via improved training and education (e.g. Greenhill, 1981; Potts, 1982; Hawley, 1998; Roberg & Bonn, 2004; Carlan & Lewis, 2009). After all, academic education is considered an essential characteristic of professions, deemed necessary due to the complex nature of work, professions' position of power and responsibility, and the guarantee of competence which educational qualifications bring. Possession and control of abstract knowledge and the techniques and technologies stemming from it both defines and legitimates a profession (Abbott, 1988) and strengthens its institutional jurisdiction and cognitive hegemony (Ericson and Haggerty, 1997). Professionalising the police via academic education then is a process that serves, and is perhaps deliberately aimed, to redefine and relegitimise the police. The name of the game is survival: survival in the 'competitive system of professions' (Abbott, 1988), in the increasingly discerning market and in the changing society that places more demands on the police while at the same time openly questioning its ability and means to meet them.

In short then, it can be argued that academic education and obtaining recognisable qualifications (cultural capital) improves the police's status with the public, other professions and government (social capital), which makes it easier to secure pay and resources (economic capital) and provides a much needed edge in 'conflicts over competence' that they may find themselves embroiled in (Hallenberg, 2012; cf Bourdieu, 1986).

# Cops and Academics: Two Cultures, Two Worlds?

Academisation of police education is, however, far from straightforward despite the supporting policy changes and professionalisation trend. While there are a number of practical challenges and issues to content with (see Hallenberg, 2012), this is in part reflects so called ‘two worlds thinking’ emphasising the differences between academia and academic education on one hand and police and police training on the other. Fundamental to this is the notion of two different types of organisational cultures.

Literature on ‘cop culture’ identifies characteristics that might be considered incompatible with the academic ethos, such as mission- and action-orientation, isolation, conservatism, machismo, strong internal solidarity, pessimism, cynicism, suspicion of outsiders, and the institutionalised triad of racism, sexism and heterosexism (e.g. Holdaway, 1983; Foster, 2003; Reiner, 1992, 2010; Young, 1991), all of which remain pertinent even in the modern policing context (Loftus, 2010, Cockcroft, 2012). There are a number of differences between the ‘two worlds’ of academic and police, polarised in Table 1.

Academia	Police
theory	practice
research	experience
analysis	management
long-term	short-term
interest-led	needs-led
formal learning	informal learning
independence	collectivity
originality	loyalty

**Table 1.** The Two Worlds of Academia and Police (from Hallenberg, 2012: 167)

Academia is seen as more interested in theory, research, and analysis of information, of broadening one’s perspectives. Typically, academic research has long-term goals and takes a relatively long time to produce results is both accepted and almost expected. Even directly vocational courses that clearly lead to a profession are led much more by academic and personal interest, than as a result of careful scoping and needs analysis. Academia is a place of formal learning but values freedom of thought, independence and originality (Henkel, 2000).

Police, on the other hand, rate experience and practice over theoretical knowledge. They are more concerned with decision-making and management of practical issues (Reiner 2010). The ‘emergency service’ nature of much policing, the necessary focus on immediate problems, and the time leaders must devote to administrative, organisational and political concerns, all explain the absence of long-term management commitment to development of knowledge through research (Goldstein, 2003). While academics are used to unrestricted exploration and the possibility of negative as well as positive results, policing, structured by law and public expectations, can rarely afford this type of risk-taking (ibid). The training is needs-led, responding to the needs of the organisation. Despite more formalised training of

the last few decades, a lot of the learning still takes place informally through the socialisation processes. The occupational culture is rooted in collective 'policing family' ethos, which values loyalty to the organisation.

The above description is of course deliberately dichotomised and simplified and in reality such cultural and organisational characteristics are more blurred and fluid, particularly in context of the recent financial and political pressures on both the police and HE. Nevertheless, it serves to illustrate the *perceived* (but not necessarily real) gap between police and academia.



# Identity

Culture serves to express a sense of identity, foster commitment to an outside entity (e.g. profession, organisation), stabilise social systems, and enable sense-making to guide behaviour (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; cited in Savin-Baden & Major, 2004). Identity is a *“task under continual construction [...] mediated by abstract expert systems of knowledge”* (Spalek, 2008: 11). Those expert systems of knowledge are then controlled by the professions (Hallenberg, 2012), which themselves form an important basis for identity. For Elliot (1972) the ideal type of professions is characterised by work being a key interest, an occupational role that is maintained outside work-specific contexts and ‘total identity submersion’, one sign of which is being aware of the general behavioural expectations professional status demands – all of which are easily recognisable descriptors of the police. Indeed, becoming a police officer is a process that requires renegotiation of one’s self-identity (Fielding, 1988).

Institutions define and confirm identities; their knowledge systems come with ways of categorising and differentiating, and inevitably, discriminating (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997). Writing from the context of diversity and police culture, Loftus (2008) describes how emerging (non-white, non-male, non-heterosexual) police identities are being subordinated and marginalised by the ‘narratives of resentment and discontent’ constructed by officers with dominant (white, male, heterosexual) identities. Will the emerging identity of (academically educated) police professionals and the new narrative of (academically educated) police profession fare any better? And more crucially, can they make a difference to the way police officers think and act, with each other and with the public? Primary and secondary research findings (Hallenberg, 2012) hint at a positive answer while Punch (2007) sees the increasing acceptance and welcome of academically educated officers representing a change in the police organisational identity. Higher education certainly plays an important part in individual’s identity formation. For example, when reflecting on his own research process, Heslop (2011: 303-4) explicitly states that:

*“My own experience of combining university study with a police career has, I believe, had a positive influence on my professional identity. Having joined the police without having previously been to university I proceeded to study for degrees in politics, sociology and education. For me, this experience was literally ‘transformational’ [ref] and it opened my mind to new ways of thinking about the world.”*

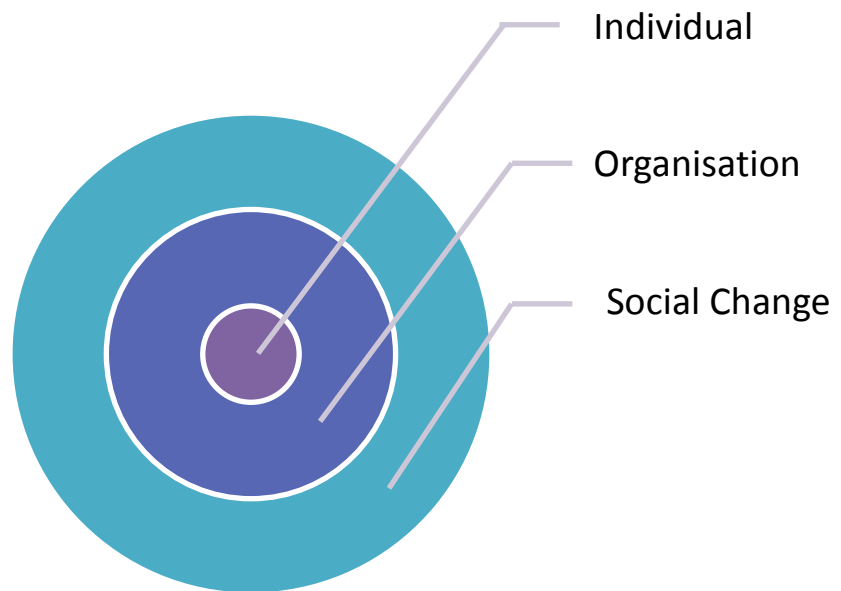
As Barnett (2003: 179; cited in Savin-Baden & Major, 2004: 51) points out: *“Universities are not, in the first place, sites of knowing but of being. Knowing comes, if at all, through the being.”*

## Social Change

Policing can be described as both dynamic and stable. It responds to the constantly shifting targets and tasks while at the same time the police *métier*, their routine practices, shaped by forces of organisational structures, resource allocation, socialised interpersonal tactics the police use, and formal and informal rewards all of the above offer, create a “*reaffirming, reinforcing, and repetitive*” feedback loop (Manning, 2010: 217 and Ch9). Indeed, Astley (2006) sees professional institutions (e.g. the police and universities) as ‘sites of struggle’, characterised both desire for social change and resistance to change.

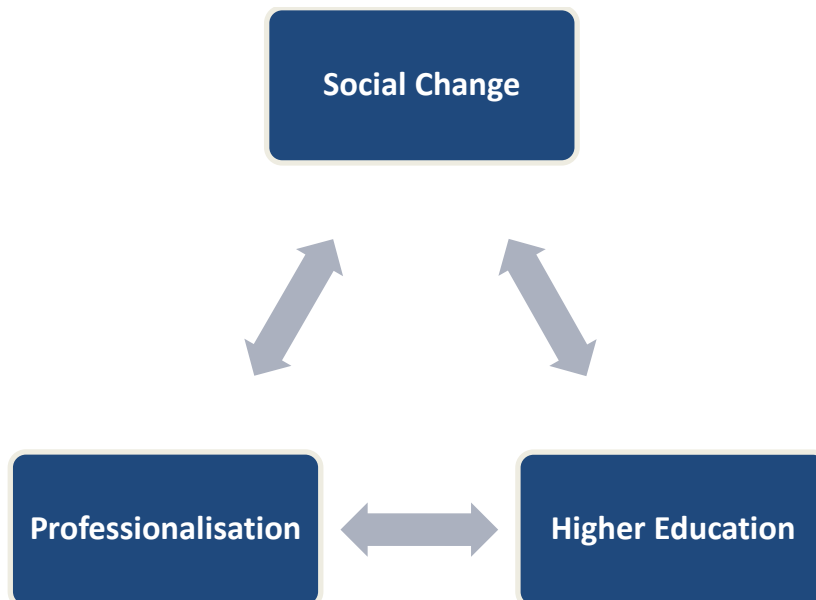
The sense that the police are falling increasingly behind the times, unable to meet the society’s needs or demands, is a familiar theme in current discussions. The concept of deep social change, an ontological shift of sorts that both enables and commands an equivalent change in the way society is policed and by whom, can therefore be seen as a key background driver for the academisation of police education.

Figure 1, based on Elliott’s (1972) observation of professionalisation taking place at three levels (general social change, occupational organisation and individual life-cycle) offers a way to conceptualise influences on and impact of academic police education: the role and function of the police in the society, the organisational changes required and the effect it will have on the training, career, work role and identity of individual officers. The last two are of course influenced by the first, which itself is characterised by shifting priorities and lack of deep consensus, making generalisations about academic police education and identity difficult.



**Figure 1.** Levels of Influence (from Hallenberg, 2012: 119)

Jarausch (1983) argues that there exists a relationship between social change and higher education that is both circular and interdependent, mirroring the similar relationship between social change and professionalisation.



**Figure 2.** Social Change, Professionalisation and Higher Education (from Hallenberg, 2012: 120)

Figure 2 illustrates the dynamic relationship between all three. The placement of social change at the top is not accidental but representative of the way changes in the *conceptual* structures of the society and our understanding of them bring about changes in its *concrete* structures, such as the system of professions and the organisation of higher education, which, by their very existence, will influence the direction and shape of the currents of social change.

# Pilot Study

## Sample

The qualitative data for this study was generated from semi-structured interviews conducted with six individuals who work as police officers or police community support officers.

## Research Aims

1. To explore the impact of higher education on police officers in terms of their professional identities and the broader organisational culture
2. To explore what, if any, difference does the timing of higher education experience (before or during service) makes on the above

## Methodology

To undertake the data collection semi-structured interviews were used. This method was chosen as an appropriate means of developing contextual knowledge (rather than that which might be used for purposes of comparability) in that it allows for greater, "*clarification and elaboration*" (May, 2011: 134, italics in original). Such an approach is particularly important in respect of research topics, like this one, where there is a scarcity of existing empirical data on the issues being addressed amongst this particular occupational population. In this respect, this research might be termed 'Exploratory' (Robson, 2002) in that it allows for a less-prescriptive approach to generating qualitative data that will allow themes to be drawn from the data during the analysis stage. This approach is important in that it goes some way towards positioning itself in the Weberian tradition that avoids, "the pre-definition of what is to be considered important" (Spradley, 1980: 24) by allowing ample flexibility for interviewees to highlight pertinent themes within the parameters of the question.

For a sample of the interview schedule please see Appendix 1. The questions were derived from the literature in this area and sought to generate data that would allow for a thematic analysis to explore issues pertaining to our basic research aims. Some examples of relevant issues include individual motivation to join the police and to engage in HE study. Similarly, the researchers wished to explore the ways in which officers rationalised their participation in the dual cultural worlds of academia and policing and how these two apparently conflicting yet supporting sets of cultural dynamics impact on people's day to day occupational practices and identities.

# Preliminary Findings

Preliminary findings, derived from the NVIVO facilitated thematic analysis, indicate a number of inter-connected themes that have emerged from the qualitative data. These can be broadly identified as;

Drivers – those factors which encourage police officers to be oriented towards engaging with programmes delivered by HE institutions.

Facilitators/inhibitors – those external or organisational factors which facilitate or act as barriers towards police officers successfully engaging with HE programmes.

Responses to HE engagement (organisational and individual) - the impact of engagement with HE programmes at both an individual and an organisational level.

Outcomes – the net impact of police officers having engaged with HE programmes.

Identity and identity change – a thread that runs through the above themes and which impacts at all levels of the 'journey' undertaken by police officers undertaking HE programmes.

## Drivers

A number of drivers for police officers to engage with HE were identified. For some, their parents had been fundamental in instilling in them a value for higher education. Others, however, found that they almost 'fell' into HE study. For example, one interviewee found a willing champion of HE who facilitated the opportunity;

*"I had a very, very nice DI, a really top guy, and through working with him and everything. I'd always really, really fancied doing a degree. It was just something I'd wanted to do since I was at school but circumstances wouldn't allow for that at the time and then, all of a sudden, one day he came to me and he said 'Canterbury Christ Church are offering degree places for the policing degree. I've signed you up'. Ok. Fair play"*

One of the key, themes that emerged might be identified as 'Future-proofing'. In other words HE was a means of providing insurance for their police career aspirations and their post-police careers, be their origins in retirement or injury. For example;

*"I'm hoping that that is going to do me some good when I leave here next year. That's what I'm aiming towards".*

*"I'd thought a lot about what I wanted to get out of the police prior to joining it and I did think that it's a job...it is an investment. It's a 35 year career. It's not a job, it is a career. I thought I did want to go down the route of promotion at some stage in my career and I thought the way things are going eventually they're going to require degrees for people to become police officers. So, if I went straight into the job, which I think I may have possibly been able to do, I may not, I don't now, if I'd gone straight into it, I'd have been about five or six years service now but in 10 years down the line when I want to go for those promotions, if they require degrees for new starters, there's no way there going to make me up to a sergeant or inspector without one so I saw it as an investment. The big thing was in the first year of my degree, one of my flat-mates was successful in applying to the Met and he did the first year of the course and then left to go and join the Met as he thought...As far as he'd seen it, he'd got the end result without having to do the three years and, at the time, I really seriously considered 'Is this what I want to do, is it worth me waiting another two years before going and doing the job I want to do or should I just go now?' and after thinking about it, I spoke to the course leader about it, I spoke to my parents, spoke to a few people and I decided that I was one year in to a three year course and the last two years is a really worthy investment if I can walk away with a bit of paper that says I've got this to prove my standard of learning to a certain level, that's what I need to be doing, ultimately, because the other one I thought was, if I get into policing and think this isn't for me, I don't enjoy this, I then have no life skills if I've gone straight into it whereas now, even though my degree is very police-centric, I've proven I've got that ability of learning so it was an insurance policy as much as anything else".*

*"I was thinking, long term, what's going to happen when I retire? And that degrees going to take three years and at the end of those three years I'll be well into my last 10 years. I've got six years service left to do until a full pension, I'll be 54. So, it was what am I going to do when I finish? Well, having a degree is going to open more doors than not having one and that was the other thought process behind it. And, on completion of that, am I going to do something else? Cause I'm going to need time after that before I leave the police in case I want to bolt something on top of it and specialize so as I can offer myself to the*

*train operating companies or somewhere else with a skill set I need time to build these qualifications because in the greater scheme of things, 5 'O' levels as a 55 year old isn't going to get you a great deal of stuff. It's going to be all about experience and/or higher education. That was my thought process and that's why I did it".*

*"This is the dark topic that no one likes to talk about, is if I get injured out of the police service and injured to such an extent that they say you can no longer discharge your duties, off you go. If I didn't have a degree already I think my lifeskills would not be applicable to any other job role outside of policing".*

Others amongst the interviewees perceived that HE qualifications were going to be increasingly seen as an integral part of the modern police officer's educational background;

*"Yeah, I think the service is moving in a direction where it's becoming the norm for police officers to have degrees. I know a couple of officers who are not on my team but they are studying in their own time to get degrees because they think that that's something that will benefit them in the longer term so I think overall the service is moving in that direction. If not valuing the degree itself it, it is definitely valuing the skills that it gives".*

## Facilitators/Inhibitors

To some of the sample, their HE experiences were perceived as facilitating their practitioner training, not least by providing a wider context for their understanding. For example,

*"A lot of training some of the stuff that we were learning at training college we were already learning at university so obviously I had a lot of my university notes so I did take a lot of them in to training, you know, brush up on them every cos it wasn't perfect or anything like that but I knew that I'd done it at uni. So yeah definitely the knowledge er in that aspect er. But also the broader picture I think because with higher education study you've got to be able to see the bigger picture in everything so I think that in terms of the policing side sometimes you always only ever think one track by you know...there are other aspects...say certain aspects of crime can lead onto this and this and this...I think in the role it's helped me now, it's helped me to kind of broaden the possibilities of, oh it could be this but then it could be that...why they've done this or why they've done that. Yeah, not just thinking inside the box as it were, it's helped me think outside the box in my current role...so I think the knowledge has definitely helped from being in higher education studies, the wider aspects of it"*

For another respondent, a motivation for them during their study was that they could cascade knowledge to colleagues.

*"...the study that I'd done through my degree, broken windows theory and all that, I found I was able to share that with my colleagues who probably either didn't have...they knew about it but didn't know all the ins and outs of it so I was able to share my knowledge with them from that point of view which again I enjoyed doing anyway and they got benefit out of it anyway so it was a win-win situation from that point of view"*

Another facilitating factor for one respondent was that some colleagues were very positively disposed towards the values of HE;

*"No, we've got one sergeant who did 30 years with Bedfordshire Police and retired and then joined our police force, that can be done, there's a way around it with the pension. So, ultimately, he's now a sergeant. He gets his sergeant's pension from Bedfordshire and his current wage so he's been around the block a few times in 30 years and he's very, very good at what he does. He has two children who are about four, five years younger than me and they're just going to university so he's really pro university degree higher education because he's putting his own children through it as it were. I do think that that might be something that lessens the anti nature of this distrust towards higher education and this looking down on it, these officers' children are actually going through higher education themselves because when these officers were younger and they didn't or couldn't go to university, for whatever reason, now that their children have the opportunity to go I think they are much more sort of pro than they would have been had their children not been going to university. I think university has become more accessible and the fact that their children are going makes them far more open to the concept of higher education than they would be if they weren't"*

However, the operational demands of policing ensured that it was difficult to attend every session because of the exigencies of operational demands.



*"...usually made all the lectures, all the study weekends. There was one lot I didn't make and that was frustrating because it was during the psychology one which is the subject I'd chosen, one of the questions I'd chosen to do for my exam that year. But they wouldn't allow me to go because I was on a course and it was quite an intense course for a month so they wouldn't give me the time to actually go to the lectures so that was a real challenge for me and quite...it didn't...I was quite upset about that one. I really, really wanted to be there and do that so that was a bit of a challenge but apart from that they were very accommodating going to the lectures and it wasn't a problem".*

## Responses to HE Engagement

A substantial theme to emerge out of the interviews was that interviewees did not always meet with positive responses to their engagement with HE, either in terms of how they were received by their colleagues or in how the police as an organisation recognised their skill sets following completion of a HE programme. In terms of the former;

*“Jealousy, a lot of jealousy. It takes so much effort to study and work, and working in the police force isn’t 9 to 5. It is shift work that changes constantly. Managing a degree programme...it’s not easy. So if people want to do it they don’t want to do the effort”.*

*“The problem I found was that in the Police Force people with higher education are looked down on. This was ten years ago now it was a different culture to what it is now people don’t like you with qualifications in the Police Force. If they know they will treat you differently in every aspect. They either think that you’re very independent, you’re ambitious”.*

Similarly, there was a perception, by one interviewee, that the cultural dynamics of policing resisted concepts that might place one officer as essentially ‘different’ to another;

*“I think there could be some disadvantages but that’s a cultural issues on the part of other officers rather than the graduates themselves. If you walk into the job thinking ‘I am a graduate therefore I’m brilliant. I’m qualified to do this’. I think there is a certain aspect of police culture. You will get beaten down into line very, very quickly and I’ve been told by one of my sergeants that I have a tendency to over-think issues”*

The same officer suggested that officers with HE qualifications might feel the need to prove themselves as a police officer as a result of their academic background:

*“There was a couple who were a little bit anti initially in terms of they looked down on degrees, higher education as a whole and I felt the best way to overcome that was just to work really hard and prove that I can do the job just as capably as anybody else. If not more so, in some situations”.*

Several of the officers questioned the extent to which their qualifications were valued at an organisational level, despite the organisation providing financial support for some officers attending HEIs;

*“Do they value the investment they made in me? It wasn’t a cheap investment. No. Do they even realise that it’s there? By and large, no. Apart from my line manager who signed the form for me to go and enroll and have the time off and those who bother to read the general orders and we had to ask to be put into general orders as it didn’t get announced automatically. No. I spoke about my line manager, the inspector, who found me an irritant because I was writing a report he couldn’t comprehend and had no understanding of. I don’t think he valued it at all”.*

A persistent theme, throughout the data, however was that for police officers undertaking a HE qualification, the key driver was an individual’s own personal orientation, and the key rewards were felt at an individual level rather than in terms of financial or career recognition;

*"I think it's more valued by individuals than the service itself. There's no...although I wouldn't want recognition for it...there is no recognition to say this person's a graduate, this person's not. No, I don't think it is particularly valued. I know I've gone down this whole thing of saying it's really, really good, it's very, very positive, I don't think the service itself values it but I do't know how they would value it".*

The above extracts suggest a predominantly negative reception to officers with HE qualifications within the police. Despite this, there was evidence that some under some conditions, HE qualifications could enhance an officer's working life and/or career. One officer, for example, noted that his HE qualification could enhance the quality of his 'horizontal relationships', for example with police partners;

*"You know, you can go and have some quite interesting conversations with people. The crime reduction officers, and I am by no means an expert, and this policing degree was scratching the surface of all of this sort of thing but if you go and talk to the crime reduction officer and you drop the name Oscar Newman you get a totally different reaction from them. The face lights up in front of you. 'Ooh, you've actually read some of the stuff I've read and you've got an interest in my skill area because most people find it a bit dry and a bit boring sort of thing so that's quite interesting. And it definitely does have an ability to open doors but not with people in a hierarchical situation".*

This final sentiment, about HE working as an asset for those at the higher levels of the rank structure, figured in a number of narratives. For example,

*"And certainly there were people who during the process did...NAME REMOVED...was actually an inspector when we started. He's a superintendent now and he was a temporary superintendent when he came out at the end of the degree and he said that his chief inspector's board, having done the first year of the degree programme, was the easiest thing he ever did. He said he just sat there, dropped Oscar Newman's name, Reiner and Alice Colman and a couple of other names here and there and he said the panel just lapped it up. Because he did his board right in the middle of...the second module that we did. He did his board right in the middle of that, coming out with all this stuff he'd picked up and he just blew them away".*

*"...on one of our newsfeeds it was congratulations to the Chief Inspector who just finished a degree in policing or something. So it is being recognised and I think obviously the senior you are in the rankings I think they probably do expect you to try and have a degree or put themselves out to do their policing studies degree"*

*"...if I was going to go into strategic planning or something like that then maybe it would benefit me but in my role as it stands at the moment it's not been beneficial to that".*

There were, however, some positives identified at a team level of having colleagues with a HE qualification. For example,

*"And when it comes round to things like computers and IT I'm quite IT compliant so when you can actually help those officers out when they've got a problem it wins them round very, very quickly...Yes, I think in terms of the people I work with, like individuals, it is very much valued because we all bring a different skill set to the table and I think that this sort of harks back to what I was saying that it shouldn't be a requirement because you get people with ex-military skill sets that are fantastic in the way they can approach a problem, deal with it very, very decisively and individuals, like people on my team, value it. I*

*still get the occasional bit of sort of mickey taking 'Oh, he's got a degree' or if I can't do something that they see as very, very easy 'Well, he's got a degree as well, hasn't he?', well you do get that. You expect a little bit of back and forth but we all take the mickey. But, yeah, I think individuals value it. The service as a whole doesn't but I don't know how they would".*

The last point raises an interesting issue regarding a lack of clarity about how police organisations could recognise the HE qualifications achieved by its staff. Finally, one officer noted that the skills associated with HE, rather than formal qualifications, are increasingly becoming more valued organisationally.

*"I think it's valued, like when you go for a job application and they say competency-based questions 'Tell us a time when you've done this, that or the other' and you actually put I've got the degree under qualifications I think it is valued there but in terms of a day to day, I think they just expect...I dunno, I think people who know you personally will say he's got the degree and that's probably what contributed to why he is where he is and I think that aspect of it is definitely valued. Yeah, I think the service is moving in a direction where it's becoming the norm for police officers to have degrees. I know a couple of officers who are not on my team but they are studying in their own time to get degrees because they think that that's something that will benefit them in the longer term so I think overall the service is moving in that direction. If not valuing the degree itself it, it is definitely valuing the skills that it gives".*

## Outcomes

Interviewees identified both positive and negative outcomes as a result of their experiences of HE. In terms of the former, for most the outcomes involved a sense of gaining knowledge, skills or confidence.

*“Where I’d just finished my degree there was about a year cross over from my first degree to joining Specials and I was putting in to practice what I learnt in the theory I was actually seeing things in a reality and able to for me I was able to show all the criminological theories and all everything that you learnt it was real and it could work because I was doing it”.*

Interviewees also reported some changes to occupational behaviours that might be described as professionalisation. For example;

*“You started to see people transfer their skills, transfer their time management, a bit more confidence and more focused on their work. Sometimes it had been a bit of a lazy attitude in the work place. The people I was seeing starting to do education whether it was a Degree programme or other things people were starting to do there Maths and English cos they could see where it was starting to get me. And people were taking more pride and more effort and responsibility, started to see calls being answered differently, better management, less mistakes. So I think it transferred skills.”*

*“I think there’s massive advantages in the way that the service is going now because the police service is constantly looking at itself and trying to say ‘We want to be professional, we want to be seen as professional’ and they’re very pro the idea of people coming in with degrees and the skills you gain at a degree sort of the ability to go and independently research things, problem solving and approaching an issue from lots of different angles at once I think sometimes can help in the role...Not only in terms of investigating but, I’m trying to think of a problem you might encounter. You need to find out how to do something, you don’t know how to do it so you need to find a way to do it. I’m quite happy to go and tackle that as an issue. From not knowing where to begin I’ll try dipping my finger in, having a look and having a go at solving the problem. And know, some of my colleagues who are longer in service who don’t have degrees go ‘Well, I don’t know, I’ll go and ask the sergeant’. And I don’t like asking the sergeant. Having the ability to independently research something is certainly one of the biggest benefits you get”.*

Some officers noted the notion of criticality as a particular benefit or outcome;

*“But it helped me analyse things better and look at them more critically and look at alternative arguments that I may not have thought of prior to that. Plus, with the readings and that that obviously we’d done, again, I could refer back to readings and if someone mentioned something for instance something to do with routine activity or whatever I’d say ‘Well, read this’ or ‘I’ve got this. You can have a look’. From that point of view it was good”.*

*“...I think the idea of getting critical officers will be beneficial because the more you get, the more widespread the idea of reflective practice is and, equally, as they go up the ranks, they’re more willing to accept people questioning ‘Why do we do it this way, Boss? Why aren’t we doing it that way?’ and I think you will hopefully see some positive reforms as a result of it but we shall see, time will tell”.*

*“You see something on the telly sat at home with my wife and we discuss it, I think I discuss it differently. I try and look far more broadly, I’m not as narrow focused as I was. I tend to look, I hate the expression the*

*'bigger picture' but that's now what I look at. I look at other things, so even if I see something and I think that's absolutely smashing, that's perfect or the way it should be or I look at it and say that's absolutely terrible, it should never have happened. Irrespective of which way that is going, I will look at 'Well, why did that happen the way it did?' "*

One of the more practical outcomes, identified by interviewees, were writing skills. For example;

*"And, equally, if you're asked to write something be it a report about an incident you're investigating or a letter to victim, you've got those writing skills. You've done three years, or four years in some cases, of essays. You've typed a lot of words in that time. You're quite comfortable approaching something like a written...like a piece of written work as well".*

*"It really has changed the way I write reports and stuff".*

*"It's definitely altered the way I write and the way I view things and the way I think about things and when discussing..."*

Some interviewees, however, saw the outcome of their degree in more negative terms, especially in terms of the perceived lack of organisational acknowledgement or use of their skills/knowledge. For example;

*"It's hard for them to identify the people that have then had the benefit of that Higher Education which is very specific to the policing world and then unless those people are successful in going for specific roles...I think only then does the actual achievement of the person get identified to the organisation. Because once we all achieved our different degrees it wasn't like we were put on a pedestal and you know 'These are the guys that achieved this, this, this...make sure you use these guys for these types of projects if you've got anything of that nature' or 'Use this person as a point of contact because they maybe have got experience from their degree'. None of that sort of happens so it's almost like through our own self-development or own interests within the organisation we have to kind of highlight what knowledge we've gained through the degree. That's hard in an organisation like this unless you are in a particular level of the organisation I think only then will that get highlighted..."*

## Identity and Identity Change

In terms of identity and identity change, there was a variance in views put forward. Only one interviewee saw her experiences of HE as having a major change on her outlook. She said;

*"Yeah, definitely, I do look at things and, yeah, it's definitely altered me, definitely altered me. There's a greater desire to understand why than there ever was...it's difficult to explain".*

Others, however, saw the effects of HE in a more subtle way and often in terms that represented an enhancement rather than a transformation. For example;

*"Personally, not really...For me, uni wasn't a shock like that. Definitely in terms of life experience I've gained more but I don't think it's changed me".*

*"I suppose there's certain morals that I expected of every police officer and that I came to the job with and those morals have not probably been changed by what I've learned on the degree because I wouldn't say that I have changed as a person but it's probably...Being on the degree has probably changed certain elements of how I view the role because I became more informed because of some of the research that I had to do for some of the modules so...I was more aware of certain things that I maybe would never have had the chance or been exposed to if I had not done some of the research for some of the modules...so it's definitely made me more aware from a research perspective".*

For some interviewees, whilst academia may have not changed them fundamentally, they developed a substantial bond with academia. For example;

*"I found myself thinking whilst I was doing that I wish I could have done this when I was younger and done it as a full-time thing. I just wholly like the whole university experience. Whether that because I was older or, you know, had life experience behind me, I don't know but I just liked the whole, whole thing".*

*"I think it's a mix. It is definitely a mix because I suppose again there are people I work with that are actually doing degrees at the moment as well so you know it is quite good and I think on my course there are two of us who are police officers are on my course at the moment... But I think it's both really. I very much enjoy the academic side of it and I do like it and I do find myself thinking if something comes up 'I'm not sure if I agree with that because...' and I'll give my take on things..."*

*"I've got a mortgage and stuff like a lot of people. But I just...I'm coming to the point where I'm thinking 'My God, it finishes in September. What am I going to do?' Because I've been doing it for so long, I just enjoy it".*

## Discussion

This research suggests that the relationship between police officers and their involvement in HE is a complex one.

The initial motivation for officers to engage, or to consider engaging, with HE can take a variety of forms. Some officers appear to find themselves in HE almost by luck whereas others may view HE as a means of future-proofing themselves against a changing police service which may no longer represent their sole career. Whilst the police organisation may not have fully embraced the notion of HE at either a cultural or an organisational level, some officers appear to detect a gradual shifting of this position and may opt into HE as a potential benefit to their future career.

There are certainly benefits for police officers to enjoy whilst engaging in HE. Some may find higher ranking colleagues are supportive of their involvement (although this did not appear the most common position). Others found that their occupational and academic lives provided a synergy that brought clarity to their understanding of both spheres. However, the timetabling of academic study does not always sit well with the operational demands placed upon police officers by an occupation that has to react to incidents as and when they occur. For some officers, therefore, actually getting to attend academic inputs might become a challenge.

Interviewees often felt that there was a cultural resistance amongst peers to view HE engagement in positive terms. However, there is evidence that, despite this, the individual fulfilment experienced is considered worthwhile, particularly so when higher ranking officers engage in it. It may therefore be the case that there is a lack of clarity concerning the level/rank at which HE is seen as universally appropriate and by whom. For officers in the lower ranks there is the possibility that HE experience will help enhance their horizontal relationships (within partnerships, for example) if not their vertical relationships (within the rank structure). Of further interest is that, despite the fact that officers may perceive that there is little recognition for being the holder of an HE qualification, the skills that they bring to teamwork may be seen of great value. This may suggest that the skills associated with a HE qualification are valued even if the formal qualification is not.

In terms of outcomes, it was interesting to note that police officers perceive HE experience as leading to enhanced intellectual skills (for example, criticality) and communication skills (for example, writing). The challenge remains, however, of whether or not the police could or should acknowledge the achievements of officers who have successfully completed HE programmes.

The extent to which experiences of HE can be seen as impacting on identity is incredibly hard to chart. The qualitative data from this research suggests that whilst it is unlikely that HE would have a profound impact on the identity of police officers who study within it, that many officers may view its impact as a beneficial one that perhaps enhances their existing personal attributes. For some, however, they quite simply find that they enjoy academia and see it as a valued aspect of their lives.



# Conclusions

In conclusion, this research has shown that the experiences of police officers undertaking HE programmes raises interesting and important themes regarding their orientation towards academic study and the benefits that might be enjoyed by their employing organisation. Of particular note are the issues surrounding motivation, benefits to the organisation and identity.

We believe that further research can have real academic and policy relevance. Further research may allow us to unpick differences between, for example, the experiences of those undertaking vocational or non-vocational programmes, of those studying a pre-service or in-service programme and the differential experiences of holding a HE qualification at different ranks.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1. Interview Schedule

<p><b><u>Introduction – Policing</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please tell me about your role and what your job entails.</li> <li>• How long have you been in your current position?</li> <li>• Where did you work before that?</li> <li>• Why did you join the police?</li> <li>• Tell me what being a police officer means to you?</li> </ul>	
<p><b><u>Higher Education</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me about how you came to do a university degree?</li> <li>• Why did you undertake a HE policing programme in particular?</li> <li>• What were the advantages/disadvantages (benefits/challenges) of undertaking HE education?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>PRE-SERVICE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why did you opt to undertake HE study prior to joining the police?</li> </ul>	<p><b>IN-SERVICE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why did you opt to undertake HE study whilst employed?</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Policing AND Higher Education</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you consider the HE experience relevant to your work in the police?</li> <li>• Were the values of HE compatible with the values of the police?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>PRE-SERVICE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did the job meet your expectations, given your experiences of HE prior to joining?</li> <li>• What are the advantages/disadvantages (benefits/challenges) of undertaking pre-service HE education?</li> <li>• How do you think your experience of</li> </ul>	<p><b>IN-SERVICE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did your HE education make you view your job differently?</li> <li>• What are the advantages/disadvantages (benefits/challenges) of undertaking in-service HE education?</li> </ul>

<p>being a police officer would have been different if you had not gone to university first?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you think you're different person/police officer as a result of your degree? How? Do you behave differently during the conduct of your professional duties (Do you 'police differently')? Can you provide an example of 'before... after...'?</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Policing AND Higher Education Cont.</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the degree changed you?</li> <li>• Is academic education valued by you personally?</li> <li>• Do you think the police as an organisation is changing as a result of more officers gaining university degrees? How?</li> <li>• Is academic education valued within the police?</li> <li>• Should a HE qualification be compulsory for police officers? All/some/particular roles?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Anything you'd like to add? Any final comments or thoughts? Anything important that we haven't talked about?</b></p>	