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FROM INDIFFERENCE TO HOSTILITY – ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSES TO GRADUATE OFFICERS

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American Society for Criminology Annual Conference, New Orleans

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Aims of the Paper

- Exploring the structurally and culturally driven responses of the organisation and its staff to serving graduate officers
- Outline:
 - *Police & HE: Potted history and current state of the union*
 - *Unpacking the police-HE relationship*
 - *Methodology*
 - *Findings: Indifference, hostility, tokenism*
 - *Discussion: Value of HE & Structural and cultural integration*

Potted History

- Long history of 'academisation'
- 1960s: concern over police legitimacy, Robbins Report of 1963, Bramshill Scholarship Scheme
- 1970s: Edmund-Davies pay awards
- 1990s: reflective practitioners in 'new professions'
- 2000s: HMIC Inspection Report 'Training Matters', The Secret Policeman, introduction of Foundation Degrees, shift from training to education to meet the complex demands of 21st century policing

Current State of the Union

- Substantial developments
- Rhetoric of professionalisation
- Proliferation of police-university RKE partnerships and policing degrees at all levels
- CKP
- Policing Education Qualifications Framework
- Explicit commitment to working with HE
- Police as a graduate profession?

Unpacking the Police-HE Relationship

- Underlying complexities & the wider context
 - Professionalisation agenda
 - Academic education a core characteristic of professions
 - Considerable symbolic benefits
 - Knowledge work (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997) & 'elite police voice' (Loader & Mulcahy, 2001)
 - Redefining and relegitimising the police
- The instructional abstraction HE provides bolsters the profession's credibility and "enables survival in the competitive system of professions" (Abbot, 1988: 9)
 - HE provides cultural capital, which serves to improve the social (and potentially economic) capital of the profession



Value of HE symbolic & strategic, rather than improving policing or upskilling officers

Methodology

- Part of a larger project investigating experiences of graduate officers in terms of
 1. Drivers
 2. Facilitators/inhibitors
 3. **Responses to HE engagement**
 4. Outcomes
 5. Identity and identity change
- 31 graduate officers who had completed an 'in-service' degree
- Semi-structured interviews
- Preliminary thematic analysis
- No differentiation of participants at this stage though gender, rank, type and level of degree etc likely to explain some variation in experiences

Findings: Indifference

"I've been in firearms so long there's been a real lack of female officers in firearms, 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 firearms. [...] 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 firearms." (Participant 27)

"I mistakenly thought that the police would recognise your achievement [laughs] but obviously, well nowadays currently 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)

"I am an expert in domestic abuse...I've written, I've peer reviewed...And so then the service are organising how they're all domestic abuse....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 so I've got over the anger about that but I find it incredibly... Really a business – you wouldn't have a business that does like that." (Participant 2)

Findings: Indifference

"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 think 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, how do we best use them? They will just let people sit in silos and just do their day job and they'll say "great P's got a PhD, bully for him" But there's no real 'let's make the best use we can of that resource.'" (Participant 31)

"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. [...] They come like the whole package so to speak. Whereas graduates bring more in or graduates that are brand new and once they're in doors are opening for them and things like that. Whereas I don't have any issue with that. It's principle, but I think you need to be looking at what you've got internally as well because it's an even rounder package. [...] 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)

Findings: Hostility

"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, completely unrelated, 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)

"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 went to [area name] ... And I remember going in with the other probationers for this so called welcome meeting. [...] And 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 it was a negative thing. And so I never mentioned it. 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. And 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)

Findings: Tokenism

"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)

"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)

"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? Where do you think...? It's "X can read and write, here's a safe pair of hands, go off and write..." whatever they need writing." (Participant 29)

Value of HE?

- Rhetoric vs. experience of graduate officers
- 'In-service' degrees perceived as lesser value than pre-service ones
→ changing the police to a graduate profession only surface deep?
- HE valued for its symbolic cultural capital, not for the concrete knowledge and skills graduate officers could bring
- Underlying differences in what constitutes knowledge, in the police experience and 'common sense' still tip the scales

Structural and cultural integration?

- No structural integration, no direct influence on career, role or deployment by organisation
- Cultural integration more varied: support, interest, hostility, suspicion
- Graduate officer responses: flying under the radar, open resistance, shift from professional to personal valuing of HE

Conclusions

- Have we moved on from Young's (1991: 37-8) estimation of the police?

“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.”

- HE publicly commended, but value less clearly articulated to those who engage with it
- Valuing of presentational benefits vs ignoring the benefits that practitioners with enhanced skills, knowledge and experience would bring

Questions?