

Exploring the implementation of the Police Education Qualification Framework and its impact on policing culture in England and Wales

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Project description:

The nature and impact of police culture has been the focus of research for many decades. Post-Macpherson, the manifestations of police culture have been challenged and reformed. Loftus (2009) for example, highlighted the changing nature of police culture as a result of social diversity. Similarly, the reconfiguration of the policing mission towards a more victim-centred approach has placed a spotlight on police culture and the values, skills and behaviours required to be a contemporary police officer.

Another contemporary development that places a spotlight of police culture is that of police professionalisation. Professionalism has been identified as the major force determining the introduction of the new educational process in policing achieved through the introduction, by the College of Policing, of a Policing Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF). The PEQF is a national framework that sets education qualification levels by rank or organisational level of responsibility. It offers formal independent academic recognition of the complexity of the role undertaken by those working in policing (College of Policing, 2016). The College of Policing believes that the provision of academic education combined with its application in a professional practice setting, delivered in collaboration with forces and higher education institutes, will have a significant and positive impact on the knowledge, skills and competencies of police officers at all levels across policing; that officers with a degree will be better placed to meet the increasingly complex demands of modern policing (NPCC, 2016; Neyroud, 2011). Traditionally, policing has been anti-intellectual (Hough and Stanko, 2018) with the focus more on developing the 'craft' of policing (Willis and Mastrofski, 2016). The organisational requirements for universities and forces to partner together in this endeavour will involve infrastructural changes but perhaps, most importantly, a significant culture shift that readily recognises the value of graduate learning to professional practice (Fleming and Wingrove, 2017; Wood, 2018).

The implementation of the PEQF has begun with the three entry routes into policing as a police constable – the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship Scheme (PCDA) and the Degree Holder Entry programme (DHeP) where officers 'earn and learn', and a pre-join degree; implementation of these constable entry routes to be initiated across all 43 forces in England and Wales by the end of 2020. There have been few research studies to date on the impact of this new emphasis on learning and its relationship to the professionalism of policing. Studies have focused on perceptions from various groups within policing as to the organisational readiness of forces to develop and implement the PEQF (most notably the introduction of the PCDA), with the identification of various challenges and barriers that need to be overcome (e.g. PFEW 2019; Williams, 2019). MOPAC, in conjunction with the Metropolitan Police Service and the College of Policing have recently reviewed the evidence base on the nature, quality and purpose of police education and learning, providing a useful starting point (Hough and Stanko, 2018).

Cultural change is a long-term activity which takes time to unfold. We are interested in proposals that explore the nature and extent to which the PEQF impacts on the existing police organisational culture, and, what factors help to facilitate and/or inhibit the cultural change required. We are inviting applicants to propose their own approach but this might include the pedagogic challenges in integrating academic theory and professional practice; what approaches best support PEQF as a successful agent of cultural change - the extent to which factors such as staff receptivity and/or resistance influence the change; the impact of leadership in defining what values get absorbed and transmitted within a force; and/or evaluating the extent to which the introduction of a new learning culture leads to a genuine difference in the workplace and establishing the impact of a graduate profession on the public's perception and/or experience of policing?

Proposed Theory and Methodology

The proposed research will be interdisciplinary in nature, drawing on theories and perspectives from management and organisation studies, criminology, law and psychology. The successful candidate will demonstrate a good understanding of theory, policy and practice related to police culture, police professionalisation and police education. The final theoretical framework and methodology will reflect the detailed research topic, research questions and strengths of the candidate. It is most likely that a mixed methods approach will be used based on surveys, case studies, focus groups, and in-depth interviews. The Open University has access to a number of police forces and could facilitate access to potential data sources; for example, to force Learning and Development managers, tutor constables, senior leaders, existing workforce and the cohorts of new officers going through the entry routes.

About the supervisors:

Matt is an interdisciplinary social scientist interested in the contemporary manifestations of police culture. His work has explored the experiences of police officers from minority social groups, the policing of diverse communities and more recently the visual culture of contemporary policing. Matt is Director of Policing Organisation and Practice at the OU and the national Chair of the British Society of Criminology's Policing Network.

Nicky is a Senior Lecturer at the OU. Her research career has been as an applied police researcher, predominately in support of the investigative process. Nicky's current research interests are around evidence-based policing with a particular focus on police-academic collaborations, building the 'what works' evidence base in policing, as well as the barriers and facilitators in getting research into practice.

References / readings:

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