

Manuscript

Introduction

The training of police officers has been debated previously, with different training programmes introduced within the past 20 years in England and Wales (Charman, 2017). In 2005 the Initial Police Learning and Development Programme (IPLDP) was developed and rolled out to policing in England and Wales (Blakemore and Simpson, 2010; Macvean and Cox, 2012; Charman, 2017; Mahruf et al, 2020). This had been the standard training package for new entry police constables until recently.

As part of Policing Vision 2025 and 2030, The College of Policing and National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) have been active in their efforts to professionalise policing (Crawford, 2017; Thompson et al, 2017; Hough and Stanko, 2019). This agenda has been heavily influenced by the Neyroud (2011) review of police training (Holdaway, 2017; Norman and Williams, 2017; Turner, 2021), suggesting a level four entry route for police recruitment (Hough and Stanko, 2019). The relevant key change here being the introduction of the Police Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF) (Williams and Cockcroft, 2019). The PEQF is established on the need to standardise policing training and argues there to be a requirement for student officers to engage with higher education (ibid). The PEQF specifically aimed to recognise policing as a profession and raise the national standard of the police service (Wood, 2018; Belur et al, 2019), with further implementation of evidence-based policing (EBP) and problem solving (Williams et al, 2019) and more successful collaborations between the police and higher education institutions (HEIs) (Mahruf et al, 2020). This introduction transformed policing to become a graduate profession, requiring police forces and universities to jointly deliver degrees to level six (Bachelors Honours Degree) (Cox and Kirby, 2018; Pepper et al, 2021). This includes three new entry routes: Police Constable Degree Apprenticeships (PCDA), Degree Holder Entry Programme (DHEP) or a Degree in Professional Policing (Hough and Stanko, 2019; Turner, 2021). There is evidence to suggest that officers engaging with higher education can develop as stronger critical thinkers and have analytical skills to have a better understanding of complex problems (Norman and Williams, 2017; College of Policing, 2020b). However, the degree requirement has divided opinions in both policing and academia (Cox and Kirby, 2018).

As of March 2021, there were approximately 1,900 PCDA students, (Gov UK, 2021, cited in, Pepper et al, 2021) with this number set to grow. The PCDA is studied over three years whilst students are employed as a police constable (ibid). This primary piece of research aimed to examine the experiences and opinions of a small cohort of student officers undertaking the PCDA in one police force. This was a pilot project to uncover student officer experiences to inform future programme development and to aid the potential for a larger scale project tracking cohorts of student officers on their PCDA journey. The data utilised here was collected from 30 student officers on one PCDA course via four focus groups.

Literature

The training and education of officers is often debated (Cox and Kirby, 2018) with other professions drawing upon academic qualifications as standardised entry (Tilley and Laycock, 2016; Cox and Kirby, 2018) such as nursing, teaching, medicine and law (Holdaway, 2017; Cox and Kirby, 2018; Turner, 2021). The rationale here is typically to attract certain recruits with particular abilities (Hough and Stanko, 2019). Wood (2018) argues that there is little to suggest that the introduction of PEQF is about transforming police officers, and more closely related to austerity. For many police sceptics, it can be argued that following the Conservative austerity cuts to policing, the introduction of the PEQF can also be viewed as an ‘attack on the police’ (Wood, 2018: 375). PEQF does offer chief officers an opportunity to welcome a framework developed on EBP where the primary objective is to be more effective. At a time when the police are being scrutinised for their spending, EBP can help justify funding with a clear direction for where money is spent (Knutsson and Tompson, 2019; Williams et al, 2019). Yet critics of PEQF should not be ignored and consideration should be given to how these changes can actually be embedded effectively (Wood, 2018).

Modern police training has adopted an evidence-based approach (Ramshaw and Soppitt, 2018; Dunham et al, 2020), with the intention of giving officers the understanding of criminological theories, along with the skills to carefully analyse and guide suitable responses (MacPherson, 1999; HMIC, 2002; Dunham et al, 2020). The PCDA encompasses an application of EBP, but this does not come without difficulties (Pepper et al, 2021). It is thoroughly documented that new recruits view work-based training

as more valuable than traditional education (Wood, 2018) but EBP training may allow trainees to recognise the value of higher education, as rigorous research enables better understanding of what has worked in policing (Dunham et al, 2020). The development of critical thinking skills learned through higher education and evidence-based training (Charman, 2017) enables officers to make fully informed decisions (Blakemore and Simpson, 2010; Mahruf et al, 2020), which in the long term can also ease the historical tensions existing between HEIs and policing sectors (Charman, 2017).

Policing and HEI's have collaborated previously, and partnerships have existed in different forms historically (Engel and Whalen, 2010). As part of the introduction of PEQF a police force and a university must partner to deliver both the PCDA and DHEP entry routes. HEIs and policing need to ensure effective collaboration for the delivery of PCDA (Pepper et al, 2021). Rojek et al (2012) suggests that policing partnering with academia can result in integrating scientific knowledge and methods into policing, which can in turn help develop understanding to social problems and evaluating the relevant response. However, police-academic partnerships are not without their limitations. A key theme prevalent within the literature is that of the 'dialogue of the deaf' (MacDonald, 1986: 1; Bradley and Nixon, 2009; Crawford, 2017). The concept outlines that policing and academia are unsympathetic to each other's perspectives and expectations (MacDonald, 1986). The argument here being that there is a long standing disconnect between policing and academia, which is argued to be shaped by "misunderstanding, suspicion, distrust and disengagement" (Crawford, 2017: 196). Previous research has highlighted that policing does not consider academia to be able to understand policing problems (Kalyal, 2019) encouraging policing to disconnect. Bacon et al (2020) outline the following key barriers for police-academic partnerships; culture, funding and sustainability.

Much of the evidence base concerning the 'dialogue of the deaf' outlines how police culture is not receptive to higher education (Hough and Stanko, 2019). A culture, that is different to that of academia (Turner, 2021). Particularly when considering Waddington's (1999) Canteen Culture, in which officers devise ad-hoc solutions to changeable problems (cited in, Steinheider et al, 2012) in comparison to academics that are more critical and removed from the realities of policing (ibid). Policing is sceptical to academic research as it is viewed to not be grounded in reality (Fleming, 2010). Arguably, policing

and academia are two separate worlds, with policing needing to respond immediately to problems unlike academia, which affects their ability to operate together (Goode and Lumsden, 2016). This could be a key barrier for forces and HEIs delivering both the PCDA and DHEP. Such research has spurred the redevelopment of training programmes and entry routes into policing in order to combat problematic policing behaviour and ideals (Cockcroft, 2012) and to professionalise the service (Tong and Wood, 2011; Charman, 2017; Knutsson and Tompson, 2019). Cox and Kirby (2018) argue that such negative occupational culture can be combatted by the aid of education.

Early research on the success of the PEQF has highlighted the shift in initial police training from intense physical training (HMIC, 2002; Mahruf et al, 2020) and acquiring knowledge (Charman, 2017) to developing attitudes, skills and knowledge using critical analysis in conjunction with the existing compassion and common sense already displayed in the force (Mahruf et al, 2020). The early evaluation of PCDA conducted by the College of Policing (2020b) found student officers experiences to be positive, with them identifying students to have deeper knowledge and critical thinking as well as stronger time management and writing skills.

Success of such training depends on student satisfaction of the learning experience, as well as their desire to learn and implement the full range of methodologies and knowledge gained in to practice (Blakemore and Simpson, 2010; Williams et al, 2019). Hough and Stanko (2019: 38) argue there needs to be a balance struck “between theory and practice in police learning”, as academic policing programmes can focus more on the academic elements, such as academic literature and referencing, which runs the risk of not enough operational learning (Wood, 2018). Wood (2018) claims that research indicates that student officers’ value on the street learning much more than classroom learning (see Chan, 1997; Heslop, 2011; Constable, 2017).

Norman and Williams (2017) conducted interviews with police officer graduates who had undertaken either a BSc or MSc in Policing. The research uncovered that officers felt empowered but organisational infrastructures prevented them from applying and sharing the knowledge gained in their education (Norman and Williams, 2017). Heslop’s (2011) research with new recruits undertaking a policing foundation degree uncovered that they did not feel that they were real students, and instead felt isolated.

Police forces and universities need to be prepared for this new generation of graduate police officers. Therefore, it is critical to understand how programmes such as the PCDA are being delivered through the eyes of the student officers, given the previous tensions between policing and academia.

Methods

This study undertook a purely qualitative approach conducting four focus groups with student officers undertaking the PCDA in one police force (N=30) (*See table 1*). The PCDA is vitally important as it is likely to be the most popular entry route for new police constables, and it will play a role in shaping the DHEP and Professional Policing Degree (Wood, 2018). Therefore, the PCDA was the sole focus.

The key aim of this research was to undertake an early evaluation of this specific PCDA between one police force and one university. The research was deemed to be a pilot project to inform a bigger piece of future research that can track cohorts of student officers as they progress through the PCDA. This pilot project aimed to explore the experiences thus far of student officers in order to inform programme designers alike of PCDA pathways.

Four one-hour focus groups were conducted for this study. This included three cohorts of PCDA student officers who are at varying points in their programme (with one cohort split in to two focus groups as a larger group wanted to participate). Predetermined questions aimed to explore the students' expectations prior to the programme and their experiences thus far. The key aim of utilising focus groups was for the participants to debate their experiences thus far on the PCDA, to encourage participants to talk with one another, and to engage critically (Kitzinger, 1995). Participants took part in a focus group with only peers from their cohort but due to the nature of focus groups they were not anonymous. However, confidentiality was assured and participants were asked not to discuss contributions outside of the focus group. The quotations used from the data only identify the broader cohort, not individual student officers to further protect their anonymity.

All four focus groups took place online via MS Teams due to Covid-19 restrictions, which did create some limitations with the method due to the virtual nature of data collection. Although a common limitation, participants speaking over one another was a key barrier due to the online nature which led

the researcher to ask participants to be more mindful of waiting until people had finished speaking. However, participants did still debate their experiences. Although this is a small cohort, the sample here were selected to reflect the already small population undertaking this PCDA route. There was a mixture of age and gender within the sample. Of the 30 participants, they varied from the age of 18 to early 30's. It is found that PCDA cohorts tend to be younger generations (College of Policing, 2020b). The gender balance included 19 (63%) male and 11 (37%) female student officers. Of the 30 participants, half of them (50%) had either begun or completed previous higher education.

Table 1: Sample to go here

All focus groups were audio recorded and the recording sent away to be transcribed verbatim. Inductive thematic analysis was utilised for its strengths in organising rich datasets (Braun and Clarke, 2006), allowing clear presentation of the participants views and experiences to be summarised (Braun and Clarke, 2014). Coding was completed manually by the researcher due to there only being four transcripts, via the process of becoming familiar with the data, exploring and creating themes and finally reviewing the final themes identified (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The transcripts and codes were then reviewed by another member of the research team to determine accuracy.

Findings and Discussion

Following thematic analysis, core themes were identified as follows: motivations for joining the PCDA, expectations of the PCDA, and what the programme offers in terms of positive and negative experiences so far.

Table 2: Summary of key findings to go here

Motivations for joining PCDA

Participants expressed a range of motivations for joining the police force through the PCDA, with three key reasons particularly evident.

The first being a desire for a role in which they feel they are making a positive impact on their community. 11 of the 30 (37%) participants specifically discussed this, but others in the groups also agreed. Participants stated:

It's like one of those jobs where you feel like you're actually making a positive impact. It's not like you're just sitting behind a desk, you're actually getting out there and being the change that you want to see (PCDA4)

Connected to this group of participants was also the desire for job satisfaction. Participants felt job satisfaction was lacking from their previous roles and is an expected outcome of being an officer post-training, as evidenced by: "I am sick of not having job satisfaction." (PCDA3)

I want to look back, when I'm 60-odd, and think that I've made an actual contribution to society in some way. It doesn't matter how small or big, I just- Something that I think is worthwhile (PCDA4)

Finally, working as part of a tight knit team where there is variety in the day-to-day role was appealing for seven (23%) of the recruits in particular. They stated: "That variety of the different jobs in a career in the same organisation is great. I love variety." (PCDA4)

Although gaining a degree through the PCDA was considered by some a perk, it was not a driving force for 12 (40%) participants to join policing.

"I'm glad I'm doing the degree because it's the only way in isn't it. But if I had the choice, I wouldn't be doing the degree." (PCDA1)

"I applied because it's the only way to get in" (PCDA2)

"I'm on a PCDA, basically because you didn't have a choice" (PCDA3)

Yet, five (17%) student officers stated they viewed higher education as beneficial:

It was the only way in but on the flipside, the brilliant fact of getting a degree alongside of it that is free. I never thought I would go to uni (PCDA2).

As Charman (2017) states, it is important to understand the motivations for joining the police service, in order to further understand what is expected and will be gained from initial training. That is important here in order to consider their positive and negative experiences of the programme. Participants' responses in this study may reflect a shift in motivations in more recent years which aligns more with the everyday role of the police. Many participants here expressed that they were not aware of any other route into the police force and that they considered the PCDA to be their only option. Ultimately their career goals certainly outweighed any considered perks of higher education. Jones (2015) uncovered similar findings of serving officers who undertook an undergraduate degree to make them a more rounded police officer and for future career goals.

In Charman's (2018) study only 16% of new recruits related the police role to 'helping' and safeguarding vulnerable members of the community. This statistic rose to 85% of recruits after four years of service. To cite helping the community as a key motivation for joining the police across multiple cohorts here suggests that the new recruits are less focussed on crime fighting and have a greater understanding of their day-to-day role compared to their earlier counterparts. Altruistic reasons for joining the police has been evident from other, more recent research. Elntib and Milincic (2020) linked social-capital motivations such as helping the community and supporting vulnerable residents to younger recruits. Lander (2013) and Wallace (2021) further highlight altruistic motivations on a global scale. A desire to help the public has been evident from other research (Cox and Kirby, 2018) and

should positively impact police-public relations and community, media and government confidence in the police (Worrall, 1999; Flanagan, 2008; Cockcroft 2012).

Team working as a reason for joining policing is not unusual, as evidenced by Lander (2013: 47-8). She found that although a 'desire to belong' is not limited to the police role, it certainly presented as a key theme for motivations for joining the police amongst her participants. As they look forward to developing the team bonds which will inevitably form during their time within the force, it is important that these bonds are encouraged without developing some of the negative aspects of police culture previously highlighted (MacVean and Cox, 2012; Lander, 2013; Cox and Kirby, 2018).

Expectations of the PCDA

With regards to understanding of what the programme would entail, participants generally fell into one of two categories: those with previous experience of higher education (50%) and those without (50%). Participants who had previous experience of higher education felt more prepared for the demands of coursework and had expectations that the PCDA would involve a level of essay writing and structured lectures:

"I was halfway through an Open University law degree, so I had some academic knowledge of what a university course looked like and how it was run." (PCDA3)

I was expecting a lot of assignment writing. From what I remember when I was in university, it was you would get set four assignments at the same time, all due in roundabout the same time, and it was just tough (PCDA4)

Participants without experience of higher education reported an expectation that the programme would be much more practical and hands-on, resulting in some stating that they struggled with academic elements, as they expected it to be more ‘actual policing’:

I’m feeling out of my depth with all we’ve had to be doing. I don’t want to sound negative but I didn’t know what I was going to be doing was coursework and essays. (PCDA1)

I had a preconception. I thought it would be a lot more hands-on. That we would do a lot more physical stuff and it would be more about actual policing, as opposed to the theory behind policing, the theories behind communities and why criminals do what they do. (PCDA3)

It is important to understand the student officers’ expectations when evaluating their experiences of the PCDA in order to inform the design and delivery of the programme. The expectations of those without previous HE experience reflect a more old-fashioned approach to police training, pre-IPLDP. It appears they focussed more on the hands-on police work using both human and technological tools, rather than the day-to-day policing, requiring background knowledge and understanding of police and community issues (Loftus, 2009; Charman, 2018). Those with previous HE experience appear more prepared to differentiate between training tasks and embracing theoretical research and development of critical thinking skills (Charman, 2017). The two types of expectations may impact upon their positive and negative experiences and their overall engagement with the PCDA.

Understanding of the PCDA Programme

Positive Experiences

Participants reported many positive experiences on the programme thus far. All cohorts agreed, they praised staff for being a good source of support and knowledgeable in their fields.

I had [tutor] so I benefited from that fact that he was an ex-bobby himself and if I had a problem he was actually the first person that I'd go to ... He was brilliant from the start, he really helped me along. (PCDA1)

As PCDA3 came to the end of their first teaching block, they were keen to express how much they enjoy speaking to subject experts. Participants explained that discussion sessions were engaging and useful to hear of others' professional experiences. Student officers felt they could learn from such experts: "It helps us going forward, because then we can learn from their experiences and put it into practice when we go over the tutor constable phase." (PCDA3)

For PCDA1 who had returned from their tutor-constable deployment part of the programme, the positive experiences with face-to-face staff within operational teams continued. They remarked on feeling welcomed from arrival and at ease with asking questions.

They were all helpful enough, I still ask questions with everyone on the block now and I'm not scared to ask them and they let me know from the get-go that don't be scared to ask questions. (PCDA1)

They also highlighted the curiosity of serving officers, who were unfamiliar with the PCDA route. They appeared surprised at the level of work involved, as one participant highlighted:

I think their first question is 'how do you manage it all?', you know? 'When do you do your essays?' and stuff because everyone else just comes in and just has to do their portfolio for the police whereas obviously we do that and the written work so yeah. Their initial concern, I say concern, they're curious as to whether it's manageable and stuff. (PCDA1)

As Blakemore and Simpson (2010) have stated, the success of police training is dependent on student satisfaction and their desire to learn and therefore it is positive to see participants speak highly of aspects of this PCDA. Mahruf et al (2020) highlighted, lecturers from a range of backgrounds need to guide and assist students in developing their skills, and the participants in this study echo the need and the

usefulness of having staff with a diverse range of experiences. It is clear efforts have been made in the development of this PCDA to invite teaching staff with varying backgrounds and a wealth of experience, indicating progress has been made since the HMIC (2002) investigation which credited some aspects of poor training to trainers who do not feel sufficiently prepared themselves. The findings here are contrary to the findings of Cordner and Shain (2011) whose participants on the IPLDP reported poor treatment from university lecturers who dismissed their knowledge and experiences. Developing such partnerships to deliver the PCDA does transfer some educational responsibility from police trainers to university academics (Turner, 2021).

Successes on deployment was also evident from the positive reviews of PCDA1. The HMIC (2002) Training Matters guidelines highlighted the importance of a tutor constable playing a key role in initial police training. As participants reported helpful and receptive tutor constables and colleagues, they felt they learned a great deal during their deployment stage. This is reflective of Brown's (2018) statement that an essential element of university training comes from stepping outside the institution and meeting a wider range of people. Yet, this could further lead to students valuing operational learning more than classroom learning (Chan, 1997; Heslop, 2011; Constable, 2017; Williams and Cockcroft, 2019). Currently there are no plans to continually assess officer engagement with strands such as EBP following the completion of the PCDA, which could lead officers to value operational experience more (Pepper et al, 2021).

Considering the current position of the professionalisation agenda (College of Policing, 2020) 12 (40%) of the participants highlighted the changes to police education as necessary, citing that being trained to an academic level on par with nursing and social work helps their professional standing within society. The sample here appeared to value the changes as a relatively positive experience. Participants in the early stages (3-6 months) of the programme recognised the role of higher education within their police training in improving their performance on the job. Multiple participants in this group outlined their development of cognitive analysis when addressing a situation, alongside a proactive rather than a reactive approach to policing, as shared below:

"I can see how that academics is going to link into the day-to-day job." (PCDA3)

I think the degree apprenticeship itself is making people critically think a lot more. It is making the officers be a lot more critically aware. ... it is really starting to build those sorts of cognitive skills amongst us. (PCDA3)

Negative Experiences

Yet, this did appear to change for the nine (30%) participants who had experienced operational deployment, leaving them to question the relevance of the academic teaching. This was due to not being able to transform the academic content into physical operational practice, as the academic teaching was often theory based and not always practical.

“A lot of what we were doing college-wise had no relevance to what we were doing. It was very distracting.” (PCDA1)

As far as the content of what the uni were teaching us ... on the whole it felt that, for me, it was teaching on a higher level than what we're going out to deal with. (PCDA1)

Green and Gates (2014) identified that research and academia have never played a key role in attracting new recruits to the police force, a statement which remained true through this research. Whilst students did express similar ideas to Reiner (2016) and Mahruf et al (2020), as their consideration for the role of the police allowing them to exercise discretion when recording offences and dealing with the public indicates that their education must be elevated to reflect the powers they have, it appears the disconnect remained as they became operational (Crawford, 2017; Hough and Stanko, 2019). This was a challenge highlighted also by Wood (2018) for academia to overcome. There is a debate within the literature concerning whether officers gain their knowledge culturally or from academia (Williams and Cockcroft, 2019). Similar was uncovered in the College of Policing (2020b: 5) evaluation as student officers “preferred lessons with a direct connection to policing, compared with those where the relevance was less immediately clear”. However, as policing progresses to be more informed by academia, further research should evolve by the next generation of officers into policing issues (Williams et al, 2019).

Nevertheless, this is reflective of the very early stages of police training and university education – within the first year of one programme – and the changing attitudes of those who have returned from deployment may be suggestive that traditional patterns repeat themselves, despite the changes to officer entry. As Fleming (2010) highlights, the police typically show scepticism towards academic research, arguing that it is not ‘grounded in the real world’ (Fleming, 2010: 141). As the student officers progressively see themselves more as police officers rather than students, particularly after deployment (Cox and Kirby, 2018), they may be more influenced by the stories and experiences of their fellow officers, observing ‘war stories’ and perceiving practical hands-on experience as more valuable (Belur et al, 2019: 81). PCDA offers an opportunity for students to utilise research approaches and implement it in to policing practice (Pepper et al, 2021) but this may be a hurdle to overcome. It has to be accounted for here also that combining university teaching and police training is a clash of cultures (Turner, 2021).

All cohorts shared other poor experiences on their programme.

One being lack of a schedule from both police trainers and academic tutors. All 30 participants (100%) discussed the difficulties of coping with class times changing at short notice and not being able to plan time for completing assignments and personal or family commitments.

“There was no structure to it and we didn’t really know what we were doing week to week... it was hard to focus on.” (PCDA1)

“We’re lucky if we get a day-to-day rota.” (PCDA4)

The lack of schedule, alongside disagreements over who was teaching specific topics or marking assignments made it clear to the participants that there was a lack of communication amongst police trainers and academic staff, with some even getting the impression of an ‘us and them’ divide. This led all student officers to feel as though the programme was disjointed at times.

From the get go it felt like the police and the uni had never even met before and they were just working it out on the day that we got there. (PCDA1)

This prompted participants to feel unprepared in teaching and for assignments. Arguably, 14 (47%) of the participants did not feel supported for the academic skills part of the programme as they had been encouraged to research referencing and essay writing skills on their own without formal academic teaching, which is the responsibility of the academic institution. This was the 50% of participants who had no previous HEI experience.

The intelligence input, for example, we have a full essay to do on it and the only input we got was a couple of videos to watch and a Q&A with somebody. (PCDA3)

I struggled a lot with referencing. I've never done it. And they were like, "Just look at the Harvard Referencing Guide," and I was like, "I've looked at it, I still don't understand it." And it was like, "Just go and look at it," people were sending me left, right and centre. (PCDA4)

Tensions between the police and academia has been well documented (Fleming, 2010; Tong and Wood, 2011; Charman, 2017) and evidently still pose an issue on this PCDA. With participants reporting an impression that communication between both sectors is inconsistent and disagreeable, which led to gaps in teaching and their quality of teaching being hindered (Fleming, 2010; Charman, 2017). The 'us and them' culture between police and academic staff identified by MacVean and Cox (2012) threatens to influence the new recruits, who under COVID restrictions receive more in-person teaching from their police trainers, in contrast to the university teaching which is almost entirely conducted online. Despite Covid-19, all teaching in this partnership from both parties is delivered on police premises and not university. Heslop's (2011: 306) research found that officers undertaking a degree "were not treated like 'real students'" and the risk is again run here. Turner (2021) argues that a benefit of teaching student officers at university removes them from an environment with established police culture. This undoubtedly exacerbates the feeling of a disjointed programme, the lack of communication may cause participants to grow distrustful and resentful toward the academic side of their course, which some of them previously stated they would not be taking part in if they had the choice. By almost alienating

students from academia, negative elements of police culture could continue to thrive as it historically has through traditional task-focussed police training (Loftus, 2009).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research aimed to explore the experiences of student police officers undertaking the PCDA and indicated some key findings regarding their programme. It is acknowledged that a key methodological limitation here is that this is a programme in only its first year of delivery, with three small cohorts of student officers in one police force. The research is not intended to be representative of all PCDA programmes but instead, to assist in offering considerations for other PCDA programme designers. Building from this research it would be important to conduct a larger scale study, tracking the cohorts of student officers through their PCDA, which the researchers intend. Conducting a larger, long term study would enable the potential for valuing operational practice more than academic teaching, and adopting aspects of police culture to be fully explored, as it is only an indication here.

Despite the changes to police education a clear theme here outlined that participants all shared similar motivations for joining the police. Although they shared appreciation in gaining a degree, this was not the motivating factor to join the PCDA, as identified by Green and Gates previously (2014). It was viewed amongst participants as the access route into this career, outlining altruistic reasons for joining (Lander, 2013; Charman, 2018; Elntib and Milincic, 2020; Wallace, 2021). Considering the positive experiences shared by the sample, student officers on this PCDA valued expert inputs in their teaching sessions in order to build their policing knowledge (Mahruf, 2020). This was further echoed by the students who had experienced operational deployment, stating the positive learning they gained from their operational colleagues.

The study uncovered that those student police officers who had previous experience of higher education, felt more prepared for what to expect on the PCDA in comparison to those without higher education experience. Yet, there was scepticism about how the academic teaching could assist participants in policing roles (Crawford, 2017; Wood, 2018; Hough and Stanko, 2019). For student officers who had returned from their operational tutoring phase, it appeared that they often disregarded the academic

teaching and valued the operational learning more (Chan, 1997; Heslop, 2011; Constable, 2017; Wood, 2018; Williams and Cockcroft, 2019; Pepper et al, 2021). Within the professionalisation agenda there is the aim to combat student officers adopting negative aspects of police culture through the aid of education (Cox and Kirby, 2018). However, the 'us and them' culture identified by Macvean and Cox (2012) was arguably still identifiable here in this small sample and it would be beneficial to explore this in a larger study over the full course of the PCDA.

Student officers identified a disconnect between policing and academia. This was a key barrier highlighted by all participants as it impacted on their teaching, assessments and feedback. This disconnect was always a concern for the PCDA, when considering the 'dialogue of the deaf' (MacDonald, 1986: 1; Bradley and Nixon, 2009; Crawford, 2017) and how policing and academia are clashing cultures (Turner, 2021). Tensions between policing and academia are long standing in the evidence base (Fleming, 2010; Tong and Wood, 2011; Charman, 2017) and remain a barrier for programmes such as the PCDA to overcome.

When considering the key experiences for this group of students, programme designers should consider the following. Ensuring that there is a clear schedule of teaching and building upon this it should be clear to students' which aspects are police and academic taught. A key learning point here is the students felt a disconnect between policing and academic staff, communication between the two organisations and the staff delivering the PCDA should be considered in order for this to be avoided. Finally, it appears that police culture may influence students upon deployment, encouraging some student officers to disregard the academic learning. Programmes should be mindful of this. Further research is recommended here, over a longer period on a larger scale tracking cohorts of PCDA student officers from various forces through their programme to fully explore the impact of police culture and the professionalisation agenda. Without doing so a key implication for policing is the professionalisation agenda may not reach its intended goals.

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Tables

Group	Length of Service	Number Participants
PCDA1	12 months	9
PCDA2	6 months	4
PCDA3and4	3 months	17 (split in to two; 8 in one and 9 in one)
Total		30

Table 1: Sample

Theme	Codes	Number of participants
Motivations for joining the police	Positive impact	11 of 30 (37%)
	Job satisfaction	11 of 30 (37%)
	Team working	7 of 30 (23%)
	Benefit of higher education	5 of 30 (17%)
Expectations of PCDA	Those with HE experiences felt prepared for the academic elements	15 of 30 (50%)
	Not as 'hands on' and practical as expected	15 of 30 (50%)
Understanding of PCDA	Valued engaging with subject experts and operational officers	17 of 30 (57%)
	Benefits of being trained to HE level	12 of 30 (40%)
	Not being able to transform academic learning into operational practice	9 of 30 (30%)
	Lack of teaching schedule	30 of 30 (100%)
	Disjointed programme due to poor relationships between policing and academia	30 of 30 (100%)
	Not supported for academic specific skills	14 of 30 (47%)

Table 2: Summary of key findings