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## Designing postgraduate study to support professionalisation in policing

Mike Lucas, Jean Hartley, Sue Hughes and Rachel Connor,  
Centre for Policing Research and Learning, The Open University, UK



CEPOL CONFERENCE, October 2016, Budapest

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## Professionalisation in policing? A contested process

“One the one hand...the police can be viewed like other professionals in fields such as law and medicine, who routinely deal with issues of risk and risk assessment and use expert knowledge to help people deal with uncertainty...”

On the other hand, measured against definitions of professions which emphasise the importance of a period spent in higher or further education, [UK] policing, as Neyroud (2011) acknowledges, does not fit this model” (Fyfe 2013)




  

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## Research question

What impact does study of the OU's PG Cert in Evidence Based Practice have on the practice of individual officers and staff, and on the forces who sponsor them?

This paper sets out the conceptual basis on which the PG Cert was designed, our intended research methodology and some initial findings

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### Model of Evidence Based Practice

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### Conceptualization of evidence based practice

Barends, Rousseau and Briner (2015) argue that evidence based practice involves the use of the best available evidence from four major sources – academically validated research, stakeholder perceptions, contextual data and professional expertise – to inform and improve professional decision-making.

- Based on multi-disciplinary research on professional practice – relevance of evidence from any discipline depends on context
- Explicit link to individual (and collaborative) decision-making in everyday professional practice
- Existing academic research is one of four sources of evidence – so is individual professional expertise.

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### Structure of the study pathway

**Postgraduate Certificate in Evidence Based Practice**

<p><b>Continuing Professional Development in Practice</b> 30 PG credits</p> <p>Prior CPD courses (150 hours)</p> <p>↓</p> <p>150 hours Readings / activities around professional learning and reflective practice</p> <p>Assessment</p>	<p><b>Improving your practice</b> 30 PG credits</p> <p>Evidence Based Practice in Policing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is evidence based practice? 120 hours</li> <li>- Academic research in policing</li> <li>- Research Methods and Skills</li> <li>- Designing an Evidence Based Initiative (EBI)</li> </ul> <p>Optional area(s) of research interest chosen by student 100 hours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Understanding change</li> <li>- Innovating and implementing innovation</li> <li>- Organizational performance and effectiveness</li> <li>- Embedding ethical standards</li> <li>- Decision-making</li> </ul> <p>Assessment : EBI design and plan 80 hours</p>
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### Research rationale and planned methodology

- Critical reflection and meaning making
- Impact of learning on personal practice
- Action inquiry and organisational impact
- Cultural impact of evidence based practice on policing

- Primarily qualitative methods with some student performance analytics

- Tutor-led ethnographic observation
- Online focus group discussion
- Telephone interviews – students and sponsors




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**Initial first phase findings:**

- Familiarity with reflective practitioner model of professional conduct – comparative data

Many police students had experienced reflection before in terms of single and double loop learning, in quite a practical format - the more abstract academic articles and style of the module required a real stretch in their perceived view of reflection. In contrast the clinical students seemed far more comfortable with the academic articles

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**Initial first phase findings:**

- Activist focus of learning behaviour

Students seemed comfortable to work through the online activities, "ticking them off", but far less comfortable when using the learning from those activities to focus on reflection as evidenced by low forum contribution and "clunky" application of the theory in their assignments

Despite the weekly activities, students still seem to tackle to assignments as stand alone "crack through it in a weekend" type tasks. This "get it done" attitude enables the submission to take place, but often impacts on the depth and thoughtful nature of the reflection presented in the assignment - theory was seen as scaffolding for a discussion, with a bit of name checking, rather than used more deeply in reflection

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**Initial first phase findings:**

- Surface'/instrumental approach to prior CPD

CPD in the police appears to be focused on either skills required for a specific role, or preparation for promotion. There is therefore considerable challenge in enabling the police cohort to identify appropriate "episodes" of CPD to reflect on through their module studies - in contrast, NHS staff have access to a wide range of mandatory, skills/role based and personal development training which allows for a much more rounded view on the variety and purpose of CPD

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**Initial first phase findings:**

- Role of sponsoring employer in supporting study

Some forces are providing opportunities for informal "communities of practice", allowing students to discuss their progress and fears openly and honestly, which is enabling them to find sufficient motivation to continue with their studies despite feeling like it is challenging

The motivation of knowing that a funding strapped force is investing in this training on their behalf was a massive motivator in terms of student commitment to complete

Reluctance to criticise the force in their assignments  
Conscious of the need to pass the module

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## References

- Barends, E., Rousseau, D. M. and Briner, R. B. (2015) *Evidence Based Management: the Basic Principles* <http://www.cebma.org/wp-content/uploads/Evidence-Based-Practice-The-Basic-Principles-vs-Dec-2015.pdf>
- Fyfe, N.R. (2013), "Complex transition and uncertain trajectories", *Journal of Workplace Learning*, Vol. 25 Iss 6 pp.407 – 420
- Neyroud, P. (2011), *Review of Police Leadership and Training*, Home Office, London.

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## Questions?