

# Putting Learning into Practice: Self-Reflections from the Cops

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# The role of education in professionalising the police

- College of Policing – professionalisation agenda and the role of education PEQF
- Controversy - #deegreegate

Role of education in policing is complex:

- Christopher (2015) - police officers are routinely placed in nuanced and complex situations that require professional judgement, interpretation and reflection.
- Makes policing a reflexive occupation and this is reflected in the focus on **discretion** within the police ethics literature (Kleinig, 1996; Davis, 2002; Delattre, 2011).
- Art / craft / science
- Establishing and allowing for reflexivity has been problematic

# Context for research

## Contradictions:

- Risk aversion and blame culture (Rowe, 2015)
- Quantifiable measures over process and behaviours (Cockcroft and Beattie, 2009; Guilfoyle, 2013)
- Evidence based policing (Heaton and Tong, 2016)
- Top down and prescriptive reform processes (Sklansky, 2008) impacts on officers' sense of .....
- Organisational justice (Bradford, 2014) – development and sense of engagement from supervisors

# The research....

- National Student Survey - fall in the satisfaction rates under personal development.
- 80% in 2013 to 61% in 2015.
- BUT... Satisfaction relating to teaching rose from 88% in 2013 to 97% in 2015.
- Personal development of largely located within their employment situation

Therefore research aimed to:

- Understand police student experiences and their perceptions of being able to utilise the skills and knowledge gained from police specific university education
- Explore any barriers to the embedding of academic 'knowledge' at a practical level

# Theme 1: Police officer student perceptions of undertaking a degree programme were positive

## – Shifts in perspectives, from negative to positive

*“...It [the degree programme] made me look at things from a slightly different perspective. Whereas before you've got the canteen culture and everything was, you know, the job's fucked and blah blah blah and it's the constant rhetoric of the canteen, but you actually started to look at things from a slightly different perspective and say well yes, okay, that's bad but why is it bad and what's the reason and what can we do about it and can we do anything about it. And having that degree of extra knowledge, by giving you the authority to speak about something, it did make me feel more professional because it made you think I actually know what I'm talking about now. I'm not just bluffing my way through this. I know that this is correct. So yes, and by people listening to you and taking on board what you're saying, it put you in a, not a position of authority so much, but a greater position...”*

**= Developing an individual sense of professionalism and credibility**

## **Theme 1 (cont.)**

- **Police officer student perceptions of undertaking a degree programme were positive**
  - **Knowledge empowered students to ask different questions.**
  - **Enabled wider understanding of complex issues and problem solving options from an informed knowledge base**
- ....Enhancing the ability to problem solve, be open to the use of innovative ideas and to serve the community more effectively using evidence informed practice**
- = developing a sense of individual professionalism and credibility**

**However...the ability to utilise the knowledge and skills gained from the degree was difficult. This led to frustration and a sense of feeling undervalued and deskilled...**

*“It's quite frustrating actually, it is frustrating, because you just think and again, I'm not saying I could do it better, but it would be nice to speak to the people that are doing the organisation and say look, what's your thinking because I think this would be better and they would say actually yes, we've thought of that, we've taken that on board and we've dismissed that. That's fair enough because you've thought about it, but are you aware of this other thing, are you aware of this other way of doing things or are you just quietly following your mindset path? ...What you need to do is say this is the best way we can think of, does anybody know any different?”*

...barriers to the application of knowledge in practice (theme 2) conflict with the top-down, longer-term agenda to embed education and research in police organisations...

*“...I think it’s really, really, really difficult for people who go back in after doing a degree and I think a lot of it is about that hierarchal framework because people of a certain level think they have the knowledge anyway so therefore why would they ask the lowly level PC or PS or whatever. I don't agree with that obviously but of course I completely understand what you’re saying. But I just think it’s interesting that at a time when they’re supposed to be encouraging more engagement from the troops and bottom-up engagement and all that kind of thing that you still feel that you’re almost looked down upon for the fact that you’ve tried to...”*



- **Theme 2: Top-down approaches to drive education and research in policing are currently aspirational and fit into 'short-term'/'reactive' policing agendas. Embedding research and the aims of education in policing in the long-term is limited.**
  - **Perceptions about the College Of Policing.....Integrating education and research in policing**
  - **Police organisational infrastructures are too rigid, top-down and performance-driven rather than focused on being flexible to embed knowledge and evidence from the bottom-up**
  - **Prescriptive approaches is a form of governance and further alienate staff**

**= The application of knowledge was adhoc and unsystematic: Individually driven**

# Conclusion

- Resistance to the kind of reflexive practice which should be a **core** component of good and ethical policing remains.
- Individual v organisational professionalism
- PEQF aims to enhance reflexivity, critical thought and problem solving - systemic issues hinder the long term impact both organisationally and individually
- Need to debate what we think a 'good' police officer is and the way in which this is 'measured' (Cockcroft and Beattie, 2009) – what is 'professional'
- 'Wicked problems' (Grint, 2015) and changing demand truly requires a degree of reflexivity to enable a more nuanced approach to problem solving in relation to outcomes over outputs....

Thank you for listening



"See how quickly he solves problems?  
We need more like him."