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Police Training; An Exploration of the Necessity and Impact of Higher Education and Vocational Qualifications.

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Abstract

This project aims to offer insight into the impacts of higher education on police officers. The author has taken participants who are active police officers at varying stages of their careers and explored the different entry pathways into the police currently. The author has used a combined quantitative and qualitative approach, using a questionnaire to obtain subjective views of one hundred and sixty-six police officers and their insight on the relevance of having a degree and its impact on their policing ability and well-being. The findings highlighted themes around police officers' aversion to degree entry pathways, debated the relevance of higher education to police duty and well-being of police officers and the sustainability of degree entry pathways. Police officers highlighted a propensity towards the subjective view that higher education should be a choice within and not a recruitment requirement. The literature review also suggested that undertaking higher education has supportive characteristics in decision-making, accountability and problem-solving. However, it has been debated amongst serving police officers as not beneficial. This brought the discussion of organisational culture and the buy-in needed for the pathways to be successful. Higher Educational Institutes (HEI) are encouraged to collaborate in developing practical teaching methods to better prepare the next generation of police officers. The implication is that currently, the Policing Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF) is not considered relevant to frontline Policing based on the views of serving police officers and that the impact on those completing it, is one of higher workload and stress. Since participants do not believe it is relevant or worthwhile, they do not currently provide the needed support and buy-in.

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List of Abbreviations

Policing Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF)

Evidence-Based Policing (EBP)

Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship (PCDA)

Police Constable Entry Programme (PCEP)

Certificate in Knowledge of Policing (CKP)

Degree Holder Entry Programme (DHEP)

Professional Policing Degree (PPD)

Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

National Investigators Examination (NIE)

Initial Police Learning and Development Programme (IPLDP)

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Police forces are experiencing a period of cost-saving-driven change and there is an emphasis on reinventing the career of a police officer as a profession by incorporating degree pathways under the PEQF seeking to increase knowledge, education and standards (College of Policing 2016).

This is a prescient topic for analysis as currently, UK Police forces are seeing problems with meeting recruitment targets whilst also seeing a rise in Police leavers (Home Office Statistics 2023). The concerns are that the current leavers (excluding transfers) sit at 6.6%, with 3.3% being voluntary leavers (Home Office Statistics 2023). There are apparent issues with maintaining and developing a large organisation and workforce with approximately one hundred and forty-seven thousand officers across the United Kingdom. The issues consist of but are not limited to retention, well-being, low morale and increased workloads. The project will aim to direct its attention to the training whilst in the role and other important variables like the impact on police officers' well-being and the relevance of these qualifications compared to learning the job fundamentals.

The strategy of the dissertation is to explore the necessity and the impact of different higher education methods and to obtain this by Police Officers' subjective experience. The overall purpose is to support Police Officers and improve the recruitment and retention of officers in the topic of their development under the PEQF. Professionalising policing with higher education has been a thoroughly debated and researched topic. However, there appear to be limited attempts to gauge police officer opinion on implementing this policy. The literature currently appears to be from the perspective of the stakeholder and organisation seeing what they expected a degree-educated police officer would be more resourceful and efficient in Evidence-Based Policing (EBP). Williams and Cockcroft (2018) examine a common theme to counter this issue: the lack of guidance or an overriding standard defining 'professionalism' and what constitutes a competent police officer. The problem emerges that police officers are reporting further stressors within modern-day policing and showing an aversion to the degree entry pathways. Nevertheless, despite the police officer's resistance to this, it is generally considered that a need to rejuvenate and modernise police training to meet new emerging threats is required.

1.2 Background

In many reports on police standards and professionalism, there is often a focus on initial officer training and reports tend to recommend improvements or modernisation of training. One of the more recent inspections of a police force has been that from the Baroness Casey Review of 2023, in which the Metropolitan Police had its structure, management and overall operational effectiveness reviewed. Focusing on the training aspect of this critical evaluation, it was highlighted that significant failures within the force, commonly observed across all forces, were emphasised in the Casey Review (2023), which stated: *“These risks indicate that essential investment in the workforce has been neglected, and the investment that has been made has lacked rigour and impact. Inadequately trained staff and officers represent a risk to the organisation and to Londoners.”* (p 83-85).

In their review, Neyroud (2010) concluded that a level four qualification would suffice as a pre-joining requirement. The College of Policing then stipulated that a level six qualification would be necessary, leading to the introduction of the Policing Education Qualifications Framework (2016). The introduction of the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship (PCDA), Degree Holder Entry Programme (DHEP) and Initial Police Learning and Development Programme (IPLDP) was established, featuring several variations across different forces in the UK.

The current pathways within most forces may differ slightly but are predominantly offered as:

- Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship (PCDA) enables the student officers to learn on the job, which normally takes three years. Upon completion, they obtain a Policing degree.
- The Police Constable Entry Programme (PCEP) is more familiarly associated with the police force's previous Initial Police Learning and Development Programme (IPLDP), which takes two years and is awarded a level three qualification upon completion. Previously, this was also associated with the Certificate in Knowledge of Policing (CKP).
- A degree in Professional Policing for entry before applying (PPD)
- Degree Holder Entry Programme (DHEP) usually takes two years to obtain a Post Graduate Diploma upon completion, in which students who already have a degree follow an adjusted programme (College of Policing 2024).

1.3 The Aim

The project's aim is to support officers and the police organisations when looking to develop officers and to do so in a targeted approach. Currently, there are only police-orientated degrees in place, which is an obvious choice, but the idea is to tailor the education to the needs of the individuals and benefit the organisation and community. The author has explored practical and theoretical issues. Police training has begun to fill the literature gap about the PEQF's impacts on its police officers. The relevance of this is to ensure that a review to ascertain the future of education, to tackle the disinclination from police officers of obtaining higher education and review the impact on their well-being, additionally supporting the issues with police officer retention and leavers.

1.4 Objectives

Four main objectives were set to achieve the project's aim, which were believed to direct the project.

1. To outline the current processes/pathways to join the police
2. To discuss who would be an ideal candidate to train (police background or other)
3. To evaluate which are more impactful for students or young officers in their careers, higher education or vocational qualifications?
4. To propose to the police service in the UK a new insight into preferred training whether it be Higher Education (Diploma/Degree) or a chosen pathway of a variety of qualifications more suited to Policing (including, but not limited to National Investigators Examination (NIE), Mental Health First Aid).

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This dissertation chapter reviews the key sources and existing research, which details how impactful a degree would be on police officers and what other options are available within higher education (such as vocational qualifications). The following sources stand out as main features when researching into higher education and the police service. There are notable key considerations that are covered in the sources, being the birth of professionalising the police service, organisational culture, and development and well-being. The Home Office Statistics for Police Leavers across the UK highlights that since its first comparable year (March 2003), the previous financial year had seen the highest levels of police leavers, which also included a younger profile of officers (Home Office 2024). These statistics highlight other considerations into the reasons officers are leaving in increasing numbers and what impact professionalising policing with higher education is having on police officers.

2.1 Professionalisation of Policing

With the ever-growing complexities within modern-day societies, policing is changing and thus, among those who can be classified as in favour of training police officers to a degree level, it is believed that this level of education is required to better operate in this new paradigm. Christopher (2015) further highlights the need for police officers to be more 'critically reflective practitioners' in order to manage the demands of modern societies. Also highlighted by Christopher (2015) are several virtues to both the organisation and individual from the pre-entry degree programmes, such as personal responsibility for development, widening the access to a diverse talent pool, increasing individual employability and promoting professional critical evaluation and ethical reflections. This was concluded to be a requirement to bring the profession in line with other public services (nursing, teaching, etc.) and to assist in avoiding historical failings of the police (Christopher 2015). In contrast to Christopher (2015), Hough and Stanko (2020) discussed the pedagogic issues with implementing a degree programme in policing and albeit in favour of the benefits higher education can bring, it noticeably explained there are large hurdles to accomplish this. One of the notable barriers was the 'buy-in' to the educational pathway and to ensure it was not to be deemed as a 'tick box' exercise to enter the profession. This could play both critically for and against as it may be seen as a positive to recruitment and as a hindrance limiting the talent pool for police officers. It could be argued that despite a potential need for improving and professionalising the police through higher education,

it will come with challenges from within in what is regularly referred to as the 'organisational culture'.

Early research has highlighted conflicted views and conclusions about the actual requirement or positive outcome of police officers having a higher education. Cascio (1977) explains that one of the issues is related to the complex opinions on what makes an officer deemed to be helpful to colleagues and the public;

"Has not been definitively resolved is because there is little agreement as to what constitutes effective police officer performance" (Cascio 1977 p. 89). If the public and police cannot agree on what an efficient police officer is then this discussion on how to develop policing will continue. Historically, this underscores an inference as to why a previously significant portion of the research is conflicting, as no organisation or public body can fully determine what success looks like in the police. When considering the stakeholders of policing, which are generally the public they support, it was established that 34% of participants ranging from different variables believed police officers should have a degree. However, a vast majority of 86% believed they should have some form of higher education awarded to them (Andrews 2024). The analysis indicates that the general public considers the Police as a profession already, assuming the numbers are likely to have replicated what police officers deem necessary. What Andrews (2024) explains, which also seems to be a theme with a lot of research, is the determination or understanding of phrases and words within. In this case, the term 'profession' was deemed its primary definition of what the public perceived as the job role expected of a police officer (attending emergencies, etc.). So, within nearly half a century from Cascio's (1977) research and now Andrews (2024), both are evidence of the debate of professionalising the police as present as ever. Donovan and Klahm (2015) concluded that the Public will base their opinions on what is shown within the media and online, which may not be a true reflection of policing so they may not have the correct information to decide what is best for policing, their education and determining what is needed. When considering a more straightforward method of determination of what an effective officer requires, Bruns and Bruns (2015) looked into the impacts of degree education on statistics of arrests, complaints and use of force. Bruns and Bruns (2015) ascertained that having a degree level education did not mean this positively contributed to officers' confidence and efficiency in the sited areas. Their research demonstrated that those who were degree-educated did not necessarily receive fewer complaints, use less force or make fewer arrests. Albeit suggesting those mentioned above, it also had contrasting results in that having a degree would come with higher educational characteristics. These characteristics will no doubt support them within their careers as officers in problem-solving, analytical aspects

and change coping skills. In contrast to the uncertainty of a degree, Leek's (2015) favour of higher education aimed to require the police to progress the development between them and academic organisations in the pursuit of co-creating higher education pathways, thus ultimately being able to support well-equipped officers to tackle modern policing problems.

Further to this, a contrasting summary of higher educational benefits to Bruns and Bruns (2015) is that the community and organisation both benefit from students obtaining a degree through the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship (PCDA). Such benefits listed recognising officers as experts in their fields and academic skills such as accountability, problem solving and decision making (Pepper, Brown and Stubbs 2022). The opinion here appears to be that degree-educated police officers will ultimately be more advantageous with the skills and potential expertise they may bring but not necessarily for the day-to-day tasks commonly associated with emergency response Policing (Pepper, Brown and Stubbs 2022).

2.2 Organisational Culture

When critically analysing the pros and cons of higher education it is often mentioned that one of the barriers to this is the 'buy-in' from officers and leaders to support this educational pathway. Many police officers believe, and this is in line with public opinion at large, that policing, in its essence, does not require a degree (Andrews 2024). This may be where it is essential to look further into departmental requirements and what nationally accredited higher education would be more impactful for both officer and organisation. Choosing when to complete this education may be a good point of interest, as Chan and Doran (2009) investigated officers' job satisfaction and those reaching a decade within the profession. It was one of the conclusions that within satisfaction considerations, career development and education were a contributing factor, which this author interpreted as higher education being a choice once within rather than a prerequisite to joining.

In contrast to this, Rogers and Gravelle (2020) concluded that there was an overall satisfaction from recruits who notably enjoyed their process through the degree programme within their respective constabulary. Here, it was additionally concluded that the previous methods of training are out of date, and a foundation degree is required to keep officers up to date with educational skills, abilities and knowledge to perform as the public requires. These sources have shown a considerable concern with organisational cultures, funding and 'buy-in' not only from the police but also from universities and organisations (College of Policing). Williams, Norman and Rowe (2019) found that within their transcripts, those interviewed having completed the PEQF degree felt it supported their individual professionalism. Eason and

Blandford (2021) concluded that with increased challenges now globally and nationally occurring, police officers would be required to be educated to the same levels as their peers from external agencies (i.e. Social Workers, Nursing, etc.) in supporting the responses to such problems. A degree-educated officer would be perceived as having a heightened ability to problem-solve and critically understand the public more effectively (Eason and Blandford 2021). There are concerns around focusing on degree education and pathways, which have been highlighted by Woods (2020) and, significantly, the 'buy-in' and investment required for the PEQF to be successful in the long term. Woods (2020) also hints at potential issues with whether higher education institutes can educate officers with regard to practical skills and whether they can apply this knowledge and that the learning needed must be mirrored and contextualised for department-specific roles. This may also prove evidential for officers to secure the vocational shorter courses over a long-term degree (Woods 2020). One example of directed learning to role-specific would be the Police Now pathway, which is another diploma obtained by those already in possession of a degree with the main target of learning to be directed to community policing and community engagement. Cox and Kirby (2018) have covered the negative impacts of culture on organisation change, namely being the 'organisational culture' an issue for those obtaining a higher education route despite the likely benefits. They explained negative traits, like culture and funding as what lead to difficulties between universities/higher education institutes and the Police collaboratively. Williams, Norman and Rowe (2019) mentioned a positive of the PEQF was those police officers felt that they had knowledge to share, but for reasons such as lack of peer support and difficulties with sharing evidence with managers, it proved difficult to use their knowledge actively in their roles.

2.3 Development and Well-being

Elntib and Milincic (2021) looked into motivations for joining a Police force noting that job opportunities and development prospects were prominent reasons which could support recruitment and retention. In contrast, this research highlighted students' altruistic motivations for joining, which would counter this in that officers were joining vocationally and not necessarily for a degree. Williams, Norman and Rowe (2019) reviewed that the PEQF, although having a positive potential, could be seen as something being 'done' to officers and not with them or for them, which would potentially lose any 'buy-in' from the officers completing them. It is thus deduced that the PEQF institutes working with the police, need to ensure they are developing the PEQF to be varied and enhanced to meet the correct needs so that the PEQF does not become a hindrance to development therefore, they encourage more to choose a degree entry

route (Williams, Norman and Rowe 2019). The College of Policing (2022) conducted a survey for all students of different pathways on entry to the police and found that those students on the PEQF pathways were predominantly more satisfied with the course than those on the traditional method of IPLDP (level three qualification) training. Deeper insight into the findings did offer some further evidence to consider, as in year one, students were often more content with their learning than those in years and beyond. This was also the case for police officers being more content with their well-being and work-life balance after some time. Paoline, Terrill and Rossler (2015) looked into decades of research to conclude a critical analysis of the discussion of higher education. There were positives but not without contrasting findings. Some of the findings were described as experiencing no consistent empirical data to show any improvement when having a degree in police officer's job satisfaction, view of management and roles within. It highlighted that those with higher education were less happy within the frontline roles of policing. Paoline, Terrill and Rossler (2015) highlighted some interesting notes in that there was an apparent increase in police officers joining with a degree and seeking higher education once within, highlighting that police officers were, choosing to obtain higher education. The reasons for choosing may still require some research and analysis to further add to the reasoning for this change. Charman and Bennett (2022) discuss the negative impacts of higher education as responses from those with higher education who were frustrated with career progression and opportunities and consequently lost the incentive to remain in the police. This is related to a further weakness of degree entry pathways. Pollock and Rauhaus (2023) investigated the burnout and retention issues within policing.

One of the conclusions discussed was the relationship between university institutes and the Police. They proposed that more informative decisions about modern-day Policing would support officers being able to choose directed courses to support both officer development and organisation. It may be argued that 'shorter' courses could be more favourable than 'longer' courses (e.g., a police and society degree). One notable finding is that it appeared that those who were degree-educated suffered burnout more frequently than those without equivalent educational qualifications for such reasons as boredom and suffering work-related stress, including that with dealings with supervisors (Pollock and Rauhaus, 2023). This may be an overlooked bleak insight into what is to come with the PEQF student officers in the future. The well-being of the officers in what is widely acknowledged as a high-stress work environment could be argued that it may be a contributing weakness or barrier to higher education pathways and having to balance this along with learning the basics of practical policing skills. Cartwright and Roach (2021) have highlighted a considerable rise in mental health, which had nearly

doubled in the decade prior, and one of these stressors documented was 'workload', which could now comprise the University work required.

2.4 Summary

The summary of the literature review appears to offer a complex view of the degree impacts and its place within policing and professionalisation. The reviewed research appears to take the view that a degree does not necessarily need to be a requirement for policing nonetheless, it provides an understanding that higher education is required to move policing forward. The reviewed research delivers an understanding of the benefits and barriers in that workload, undervalued degree holders and organisational culture are some of the complexities policing and higher educational institutes face now and in the future. This leads to research on development and well-being. Police officers being at risk of being forced into degrees brings about the potential risk of losing the 'buy-in' highlighted throughout, leading to losing the incentive for officers to remain and affecting police officer well-being through increased workloads. The author, with this literature review, may be able to surmise initially that higher education is required for improvement but will require some long-term co-creation of pathways and achievement collaboratively by the police and the institutions.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

A common framework of research techniques is the 'Research Onion' created by Saunders et al. (2007), as shown below in Figure one. Each section or 'layer' would assist with directing and developing research through its stages. The main six layers begin with Philosophies, Approaches, Strategies, Choices, Time horizons and Techniques and procedures, all with a central focus on data collection and analysis. This framework is used to support the planning and execution of research methodology.

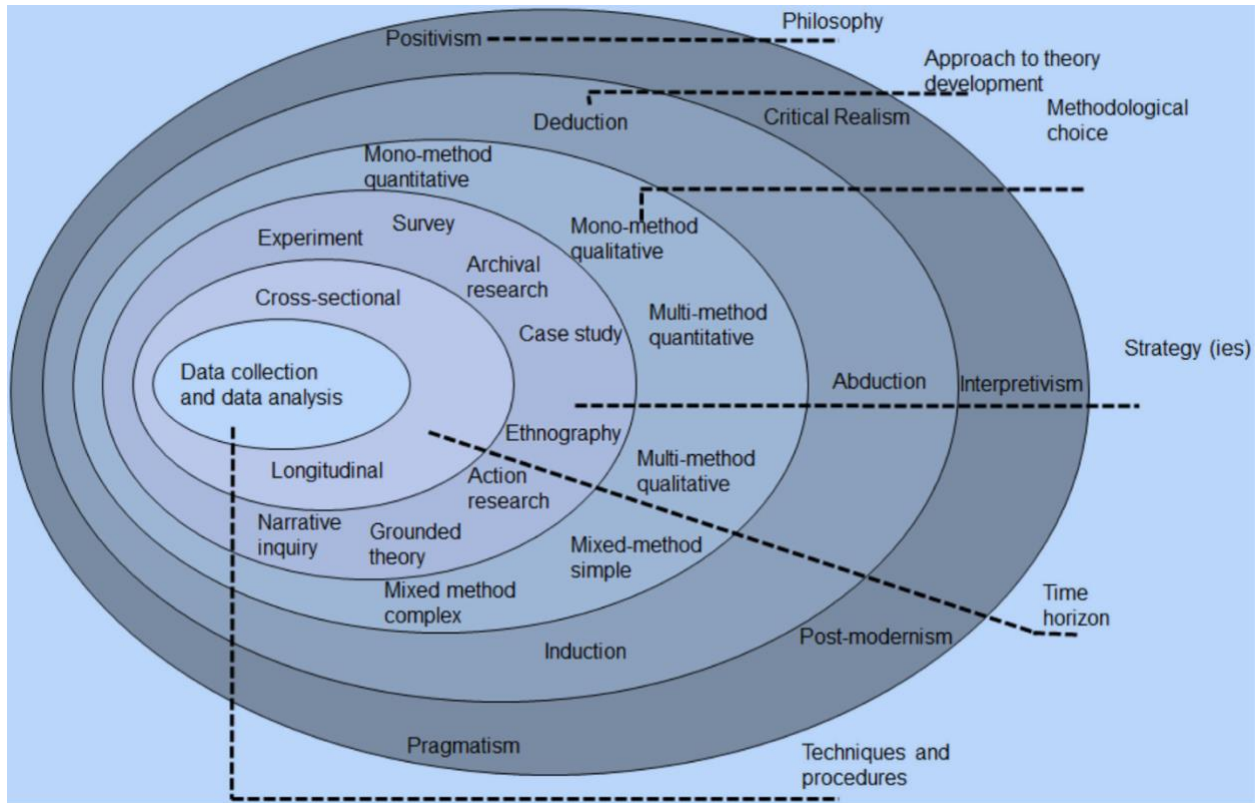


Fig.1 Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 108).

3.2 Research Strategy

The main philosophy appears to originate from an 'Interpretivism' basis as the research is wholly based on the views of the participants and how they view this topic, namely exploring the impacts of the PEQF on their development. When applying the second layer, an inductive

approach was used within this research methodology to observe the data found and draw on this to allow for developing ideas and themes. The approach is known to be flexible and adaptable based on the findings, which allows for ease of use (Saunders et al 2007).

The third layer is incorporated by obtaining data through a questionnaire. A survey will be created using Microsoft Forms and sent to a third party to disseminate within the participating police service. A copy of this can be found in the Appendixes (Appendix 2). The individual will then send this out to all willing participants, who will be serving police officers, to answer the questions, which will form both qualitative and quantitative methods as it will enable the participants to respond with closed and open questions. Offering both questions will add further clarification or detail to the initial response answers.

Delving into the fourth layer, Tasshakori and Teddie (2003) offered a view of mixed-methods as *“A mixed methods systematic review that combines the findings of qualitative and quantitative studies within a single review in order to address overlapping or complementary questions.”*

This shows that combining quantitative and qualitative has been long discussed in its infancy by Tasshakori and Teddie (1998). More recently, Shorten and Smith (2017) described some positives as balancing out each other's weaknesses, more granular detailing of the results, and stronger more confident evidence. This also enables participants to offer dialogue to their quantitative responses. In contrast to using mixed methods, it could become a more complex and time-consuming method whereby it would potentially require multi-disciplinary teams and advanced expertise to manage efficiently (Shorten and Smith 2017).

Peeling away the fifth layer, the author has taken data from a cross-sectional time horizon to allow for the convenience of time to meet the project deadline, and to allow for a snapshot of the current period. The data obtained has been collected from serving officers who are basing their subjective views on the experiences of the PEQF as it is, now. When critically analysing cross-sectional data, Wang and Cheng (2020) highlighted some strengths and weaknesses. The strengths of using cross-sectional studies allow ease for generating conclusions, quick and cost-effective methods and multiple outcomes from data can be studied. In contrast to this, the exact text also highlighted weaknesses. One standout weakness is a susceptibility to biases, for instance, non, non-responsive bias in which the prospective participants simply do not respond or respond adequately.

The sixth layer pertains to the actual data collection methods and strategies, which are predominantly made up of either primary sources or secondary sources (Saunders et al. 2007). The difference between data can be summarised as primary data, the author's research and

secondary data analysing second-hand data (Streefkerk 2023). The author here has decided that this project will use primary-sourced data.

3.3 Data Collection

The project will use primary research and new data in the form of a questionnaire. Patten (2016) described questionnaires as an easy method to collate data, valuable when obtaining sensitive data and more so when the participants are anonymous as no rapport is required with each party. To contrast the positives and uses of questionnaires, it was also described that a questionnaire, when seeking anonymous participants, yields a low response rate. In contrast to the belief in low response rates, Hunter (2012) discussed the phrase 'Snowballing' in which e-questionnaires were sent out further by colleagues to attract more participants and gain more responses. 'Snowball sampling' was advantageous as it supports access to hard-to-reach samples and is cost-effective and flexible. The disadvantages are that it may allow sampling bias and oppose the reach, making it hard to reach the sample group (Nikolopoulou 2022). The author has allowed for a snowballing process which has added to a larger cross-sectional sample of Police Officers.

In contrast to the use of questionnaires Nikolopoulou (2023 and 2024) articulated the potential for response and non-responsive bias. Suggestions for countering these included keeping the questionnaire short, avoiding jargon, use of neutral language and making the questionnaire relevant to the participants. Further suggestions included offering incentives, ensuring anonymity and keeping flexible with obtaining the data (Nikolopoulou 2022).

3.4 Limitations

The limitations to the study have been access to participants as there are an estimated one hundred and forty-seven thousand (147,000) police officers across the UK. Although it cannot be reasonably completed as specific data from all willing participants, the project is based on a snapshot in one time of one police service, so it cannot be said that this is a diverse insight. The author has mitigated this by keeping participants anonymous so no unconscious bias can be placed.

This was further mitigated here in that the time span for respondents had been loosened to allow for more participants to participate and encourage further data collection. By the end of the project, there had been one hundred and seventy-three (173) participants, with one hundred and sixty-six (166) choosing to participate with consent. This improved the initially believed

numbers of participants and offered a snapshot in time when considering the impact of the PEQF on police officers.

A limitation to consider is that the author has over ten years of experience in a Police force serving pre-PEQF and spending time associating and educating newer officers under the PEQF. This substantial experience may lead to an unconscious or implicit bias in the methods of introducing higher education to police officers. Thorndike (1920) described the 'Halo and Horns' effect as a cognitive bias dependent on the author's judgements and opinions (Nikolopoulou 2023). This is believed to have been mitigated as the author has a personal interest in police officer development and strives to assist forces with the outcomes of the project to better the framework. When applying this to the authors project, the limitations may have unconsciously allowed for response bias within the questionnaire. Nikolopoulou (2023) suggested to eliminate implicit bias there are mitigating factors to consider such third-party support as in someone to neutrally advocate for the opposing sides, slowing down the thinking process and being mindful of the potential for implicit bias.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

There are five overarching ethical considerations to consider here and notably those worth consideration is consent, anonymity, confidentiality, to do no harm to any involved and transparency. The author has highlighted the mitigating actions taken to tackle each, with consent being validated through the questionnaire, anonymity and confidentiality of the participants protecting their privacy by not obtaining their personal data. Bhandari (2024) had articulated further ethical considerations like prevention of harm to participants and to organisation, informed consent, results communication and confidentiality. The author has mitigated this risk by allowing for anonymity of participants, filtering those who do not consent to participation within the questionnaire and the topic not being considered controversial by the author, which also mitigates the prevention of harm to any involved.

Chapter 4 Analysis of Results

4.1 Introduction and Method of Analysis

The data analysis methods used within this project are a mixed combination of quantitative and qualitative. A positive of using a mixed method is that it allows a detailed look into the figures obtained for a potential explanation for the data. It allows the participants to give their opinions on the topics and objectives set out in the project. Quantitative data is described simply as numerical data to test or confirm a theory or concept, whereas qualitative data is described as words used for a more detailed understanding of the theories or concepts (Streefkerk, 2023). Quantitative data is usually set for larger-scaled populations or samples, and data-gathering methods such as questionnaires are efficient (Quinlan, 2023). A negative of this is that there is little opportunity to probe the results from the participants; hence, the combined method approach (both quantitative and qualitative) allowed the author to mitigate this by using follow-up questions to allow participants to further elaborate on their responses. This also allows for an understanding of the group feedback to allow for coding and themes to be assigned if relevant, allowing for more structured data analysis. By answering some of the objectives of this project, the author hoped that a combined method would allow for obtaining as large of a sample as possible but also offer an in-depth summary of the participants' subjective opinions (Quinlan, 2023).

4.2 Analysis and Themes

Of the 173 participants, 166 gave consent to continue and have their data used within the project, so to respect their privacy and choice, the author has omitted their results (Results Summary within Appendix). The following themes were documented within the results: 'Police Officer aversion to the Degrees', 'Police Officer Well-being', and 'Degree Relevance' in terms of skills obtained and usage.

4.2.1 Theme 1 - Aversion to Degrees

For context on the sample group, 58% of the participants were on one of the more modern pathways (involving a degree or Post Graduate Diploma) and only 21% of the participants are 'traditional' joiners through the IPLDP pathway (level three qualification) shown within Question two. 42% of the participants were on probation, whilst 30% were in their first year of service, as shown in Question Three (Appendix 3). This is important for recognising the potential risks of 'organisational culture' (Cox & Kirby, 2018) and considering their responses' validity.



Fig.2 Question 2 (Author's Questionnaire).

The themes noticed predominantly within the questionnaire are that an overwhelming number of participants felt the degree was not something they should require before joining a constabulary despite their service or whether they are in the probationary period. This could be argued as evidence for and against the 'organisational culture' as very new officers appear to share the same opinions as experienced officers.

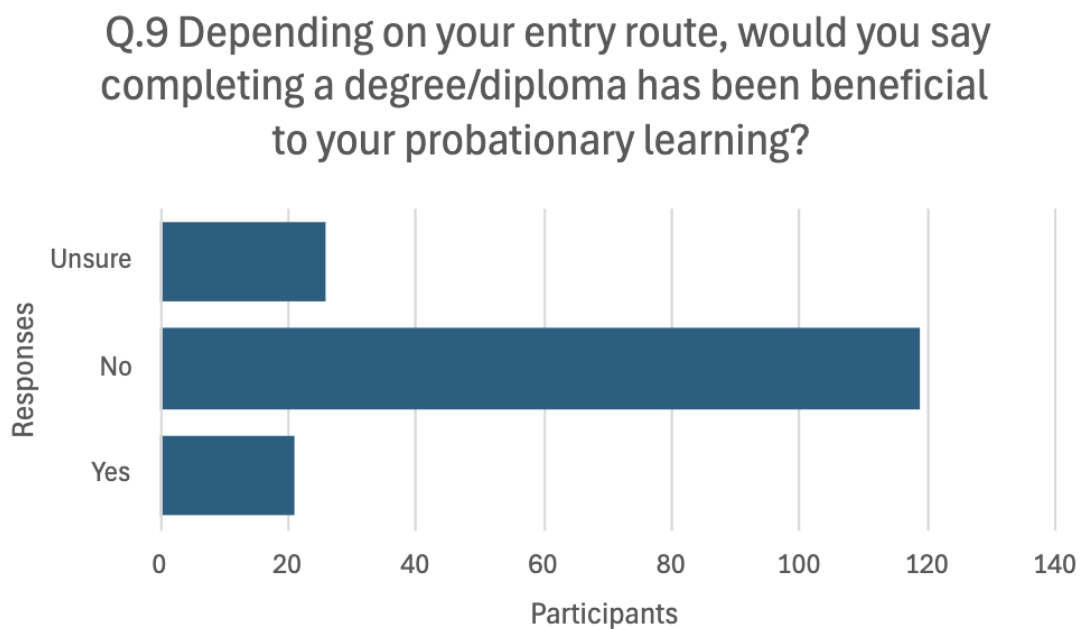


Fig.3 Graph of Question 9 from Author's Questionnaire

These results may also counter the survey completed by the College of Policing (2022) concluding overall how positive the participants were towards obtaining a degree through the pathway (although no further detailed analysis of the survey was conveyed, so would be open to interpretation). 84% of the participants have stated that they joined the police service with little to no motivation for obtaining a qualification (shown in Question four Appendix three). This would support the suggestion that most participants joined vocationally as 86% of participants had intended to remain for the full duration of their service (shown in Question Five, Appendix Three). This data would parallel the general public's perception of what they believe in relation to holding a degree, as mentioned by Andrews (2024), who claimed two-thirds of his respondents believed Police would not require a degree. Within this, there were also further details as respondents would associate a requirement for a degree to rank or specialised roles and departments. These figures do not assume that higher education has no relevance, as 48% of this author's project participants stated they would like to obtain higher education once they are within the force.

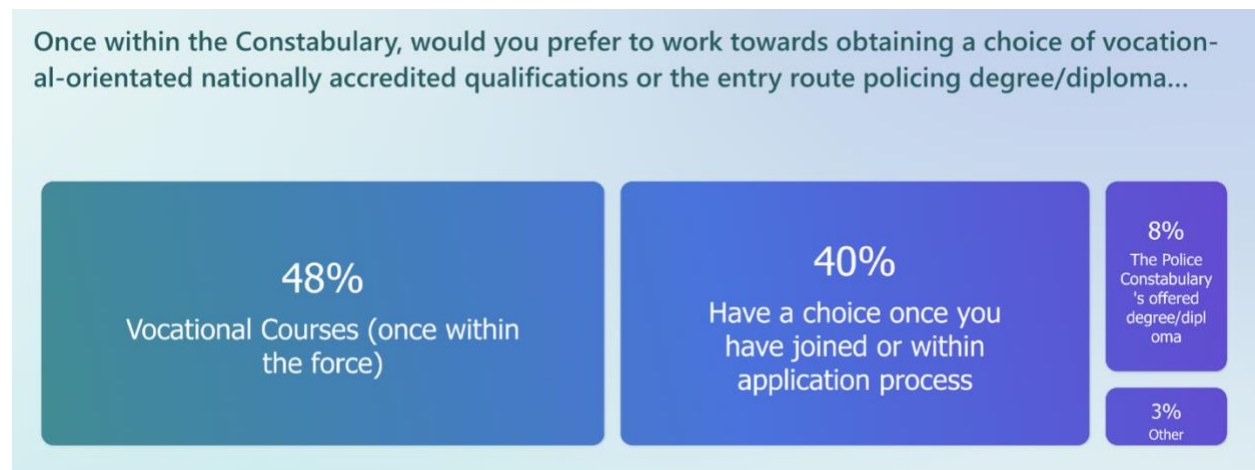


Fig.4 Question 9 (Author's Questionnaire).

4.2.2 Theme 2 – Well-being

The theme discussed here is the 'well-being' of police officers and the natural demands of Policing. It is commonly suggested that officers may struggle with higher education at this career stage, with 72% suggesting that the current pathways are not sustainable for officers (shown within Question Thirteen, Appendix Three). Within Schools and Higher Education Institutes, it is often commonly accepted that degrees and education have elements of stress associated with them. An organisation, Mentally Healthy Schools, has depicted three levels of

stress: Positive – describes acceptable levels and somewhat helps build resilience; Tolerable – describes having the proper foundations of support; and then Toxic - seeps into the realms of mental health challenges and concerns. This, along with the abundant amount of research and data (MIND UK 2019, Steel et al. 2021), highlights the concerning state of police officers' mental health and a call for more to be in place to support them. So, it appears counterintuitive, but it is up to debate when accepting both the Policing and Educational settings are stressful environments, and despite this, higher education is seemingly required in the workforce. From the author's data, they wish this to be chosen development achievement, if at all (Question Three, Authors Questionnaire, Appendix Three). Platt (2024), a serving police officer in Cumbria, discussed a modern-day snapshot of stress-related PEQF concerns the author could find, and so appears to be a topic in much need of further review and data collection, as only a decade from its creation discussions are now emerging of the negative impact of the PEQF is having on police officers. Platt (2024) discussed the implementation of support networks and potential extreme measures to support officers by removing them from frontline duties when their workload (case file and degree associated) leads the student officers to an Occupational Referral. This could be argued as an approach that may suit a county constabulary due to the potential for a less demanding service. However, a more significant city force is untested, and as of yet, due to how recently this was collated, would still be classed as innovative, although it would be interesting for future researchers to base their studies on this.

"It can be difficult to switch off from work when you have to go home and open up your works laptop and complete essays/workbooks on policing. When you already have to learn the job during working hours its not entirely beneficial to overall mental health to have to think about policing on your rest days." (Participant 20 - Author's Questionnaire, Appendix Three).

4.2.3 Theme 3 - Relevance of a Degree

Another of the author's objectives is to evaluate which method of higher education is more relevant to frontline Policing; this leads to another noted theme of 'Relevance of the Degree'. 89% of participants claimed that they believe that a degree or entry-level diploma should not be a requirement for frontline roles (shown within Question Eleven Appendix three) with such themes as 'communication skills', and 'experience', not believing they are using their university skills (needed to or opportunity to) and that the recruitment appears to be focused more on academics than practical skills (shown within Question twelve, the free text offered to elaborate on Question eleven Appendix three). Furthermore, within the elaborating free text question, it was also noted that participants referred to other themes such as personal development and departmental roles that may benefit more from being degree-educated or use towards promotional aspects aligned to the public's expectations from Andrews (2024) data. An additional theme to the data achieved is strong opinions against higher education or the relevance of a degree. However, participants appear to show a positive take on the educational routes and believe vocational training is perceived as more beneficial. This would support Chan and Doran (2009) when discussing whether higher education should be offered later in careers, although, as discussed, Pepper, Brown and Stubbs (2022) would counter the delay in favour of degrees offering skills for police officers such as accountability, problem-solving and, decision-making.

"The PCDA/DHEP scheme does not aid students in their wellbeing or in development of the role. They do not work alongside each other as it does not provide any positive benefits. It does not enable you to understand the role of an officer more and hinders you when trying to learn the role or when dealing with serious incidents as you cannot switch off on rest days."
(Participant Five responds to free text Question Nineteen, Appendix Three).

This participant's opinion contradicts Pepper, Brown and Stubbs' (2022) opinion. The participant does not appear to view the potential qualities gained and sees the degree pathway as a hindrance to learning more preferred practical skills. Another participant has continued to support the requirement for an alternative or review of the pathway to be more relevant to front-line policing. Both these participants (participants five and seven) may also show an aversion to the current pathways and the qualities linked to degrees (accountability, problem-solving and decision-making) as not valuable to their roles.

"I believe that as an apprenticeship, the degree needs to be completed in an alternative way. Perhaps completing vocational courses - i.e. Additional first aid, mental health, Fire safety etc alongside a more advanced version of an OCP/SOLAP - where evidence of progression and

ability is gained through experience and actual attendance to incidents. Even should the need to complete essays/workbooks continue - they should be more relevant to the role (of frontline policing). I personally found that the questions were predominantly focused on NPT issues, Policing and Cyber Crime. It should really be - Domestic Abuse, Mental Health and Conflict.” (Participant Seven responds to free text Question Nineteen Appendix Three).

The concept of ‘buy-in’, as discussed by Hough and Stank (2020), presents a significant challenge. It requires officers to favour education and pathways to ensure the PEQF works and is required at all levels of policing. From the data, within the free text sections, there were many occasions where officers would describe the degree as unnecessary and irrelevant to their role in their responses:

“The best way to learn in this job is by doing, an academic qualification adds no benefit and increases stress.” (Participant Two responds to Question Twelve Appendix Three).

“Not only does having a degree not help you in any way with frontline policing, making it a requirement alienates and hinders individuals who are not academic from joining the police. Some of the best officers I have worked with would probably have failed the degree/diploma process.” (Participant Three responds to Question Twelve Appendix Three).

This could be a telling sign that despite nearing a decade of the process of PEQF, the ‘buy-in’ is not quite there yet. This may be a sign of foreseeing further need for insight for officers to understand the potential value of higher education and practical learning. Stanko (2020) also endorsed it was her stance that there was still a much-needed position for the ‘old school’ IPLDP experienced trainer to embed within the academic learnings intended to ensure mutual complementarity.

4.3 Conclusion

To conclude the data findings, the questions asked of the participants returned some expected and some unexpected findings. For instance, it was unexpected to see that despite the pretty even split of probationers and substantive officers who participated, it is evident that their experience and service matter not when the majority perceived the pathways as unsustainable and degrees being unnecessary for police officers in frontline policing roles. It was also unprecedented to see how many officer participants were considering or have considered leaving their constabulary (approximately half) compared to when they joined; they were under the impression they were joining a ‘career for life’. Multiple variables within personal matters could be the root cause of this, but it would be fair to suggest that once within the police, the degree may be seen as unsustainable. It also could be debated that, as mentioned

by Charman and Bennett (2022) earlier, there have been disruptions to those with higher education career satisfaction compared to those without higher education. Joining the Police with an additional degree may not offer the pathway to career progression as initially believed by recruits. Bruns and Bruns (2015) countered this belief, suggesting that degree education would offer skills and enlightenment to support career progression. Despite this, most of the officer participants in the author's research would appear to favour the non-degree route and practical teaching methods.

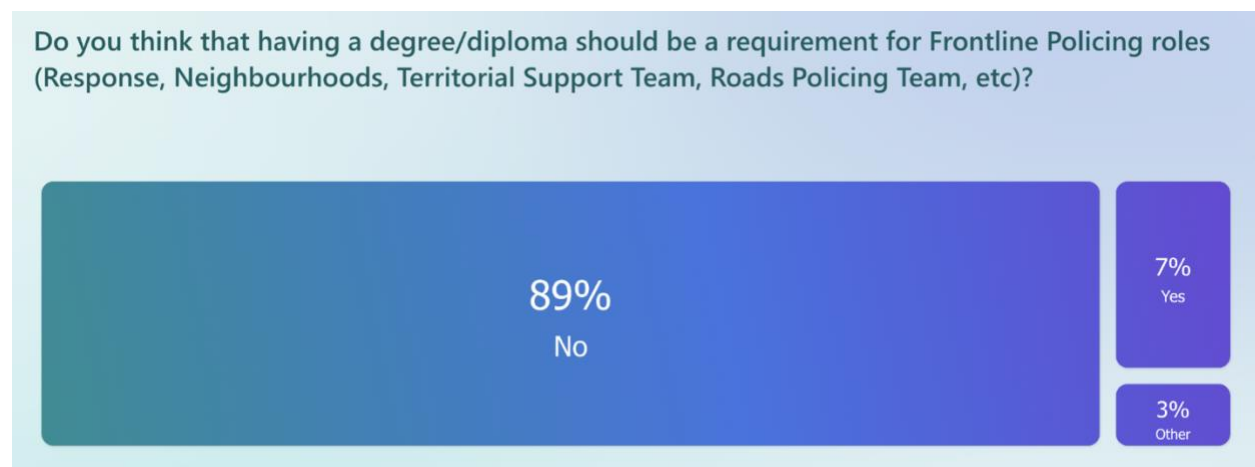


Fig.5 Question 11 (Author's Questionnaire).

It is also crucial to consider the common theme of well-being as many participants reported the pressures of the PEQF degree pathways alongside being a probationer and learning practical skills. Stevelink et al. (2020) investigated Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Mental Well-being and physiological blood pressure concerns. They concluded that those within Response or frontline roles, along with those at lower ranks, those who mostly are the candidates for completing the PEQF pathways, suffered the majority of health risk concerns. This would be required to be acknowledged alongside the data figures that the PEQF pathways were stressors and not sustainable at this level of service (as shown above).

Chapter 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The data results show several main themes, three of which stand out in the quantitative and qualitative responses. The three main themes noticed are an aversion to the police degrees, concerns over police officer well-being, and perceived lack of relevance of the degree, which has mixed perceptions on career progression.

5.2 Research Findings

- Aversion to Degree

The initial data highlighted a general resistance to degree requirements, with a significant number of the police officers expressing that degrees should not be a prerequisite for entry to the police. This appears to counter the survey conducted by The College of Policing (2022), in which the majority of student police officers appeared to be in favour of the degree pathways.

Vocational reasons for joining the police appear to be essential, as 84% of participants report having little to no interest in joining the police to obtain a degree. This highlights that police officers valued vocational satisfaction over academic motivation. Despite this, 48% then expressed a potential interest in pursuing higher education at their own choice once within the police. An argument could be made that the participant's value learning the practical police role over the initial degree theory. The 'Buy In' reported by Hough and Stanko (2020) and Andrews (2024) discussed this as a barrier in that police officers were required to buy into the programme as one of the requirements to make the PEQF a successful change to training. The results appear to show that this is not quite ready to support this, with many participants discussing an aversion to the requirement for police officers to have degrees, with many sharing varying opinions on departments, promotion and views on what is required, namely practical/characterisable skills.

- Well-being of Police Officers

72% highlighted stress and sustainability as reasons for not approving the degree entry pathways. Within the qualitative data, police officers mentioned having to fit degree work around the pressures of policing and family life, noting that this was not a sustainable level of work for new recruits. The discussion on stress and the work aligned to the degrees concerning police officer mental health had been highlighted by MIND UK

(2019), Platt (2024) and Steel (2021), who recommended a need or requirement for better support systems for Police.

- Relevance of having a degree

89% of participants reported a degree as not a requirement for frontline policing roles, and many referred to having a focus on characteristic skills such as communication and experience over academic qualifications. Many participants focused on vocational training being a choice once within as 48% would prefer this method, and an additional 40% preferred to simply make a choice once within, with only 8% choosing the degree (Question Six responses, Appendix three).

71% of participants on the degree entry pathways reported not necessarily feeling as though they had used their degree experience. It could be argued that due to the organisational culture within the police, described by Cox and Kirby (2018), the police officers are not quite aware of or have the knowledge of degree characteristics that can be obtained, like decision-making, accountability, and problem-solving (Pepper Brown and Stubbs 2020, Roger and Gravelle 2022).

5.3 Conclusion and Recommendations

It is evident that there's a significant gap between the educational pathways and the practical learning required for new Police Officers that does not quite match the participants' expectations. Whilst the degree pathways appear to offer benefits for Police Officers, the overall perception from officers in frontline roles seems to depict that they do not see or believe in the necessity of higher education despite a potential interest later in their careers. Vocational qualifications appear to be the preferred method of higher education as they may be more targeted to specific roles, which are preferred over generic degrees. The stress associated with the degree of additional workload and lack of reported support systems appears to be a concern noted for the participants.

The author's recommendations to police services emphasise the need to review and develop the PEQF to ensure a collaborative approach to educating officers with a balance of higher educational theory and practical experience to complement each other. As there appears to be a lack of research within this area, the author hoped to set a foundation within the aims and objectives striving towards a better training view for officers with their aspirations and development at the forefront of the decisions made about their higher education.

- To revisit the pathways' structure and their relevance to the overall learning outcome.
- To review the collaboration between higher education institutes and Police trainers to create a balance of practical and theory that complement each other.
- Further research into the specific training for Police Officers may match their target department and individual aspirations.
- To review the education benefits and highlight this information to all officers in order to counter the organisational culture and buy-in concerns highlighted.

The author's overall objectives have been achieved by outlining all the current pathways for entry to the police. The discussion of the ideal candidate is open for debate as there are highlighted benefits of both higher education and practical ability. The exploration of the impact of the degree pathways clearly shows that police officer participants are not in favour of the current pathways, and there is a foundation laid for further research to be conducted into targeted learning with specific degrees or vocational training or reviews of policing degrees. This will help tackle the aversion and negative perceptions shown by participants. The author has opened the door for further exploration into the review of the degree pathways highlighting a supportive need for education, but with the support and collaboration of serving police officers. Further exploration into the support systems in place and availability for police officers would support the well-being of those undertaking the pathways, thus making the pathway and entry into the Police Service more sustainable.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Questionnaire Blank and available on request

* Required

1. An initial invitation, an explanation of the research, and a consent explanation have already been provided and you have thus agreed to take part by continuing to engage with this questionnaire. To remind you, all details will be kept anonymous and your details (Name, address, anything identifying you) will not be asked for. You would've been sent this questionnaire through a random third party within your force therefore I have had no choice of participants. Do you consent to take part in this research using a questionnaire and possibly an additional audio-recorded interview (if the interview was not highlighted within your invitation, this does not apply to you)? *

- ☐ Yes, I consent
- ☐ No, I do not consent

2. When joining your current Police Constabulary, which initial training programme did you join through? *

- ☐ Initial Police Learning and Development Programme (IPLDP)
- ☐ Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship (PCDA)
- ☐ Degree Holder Entry Programme (DHEP)
- ☐ Police Now
- ☐ Other

3. What is your length of service? *

- ☐ Less than one year (0-1 year)
- ☐ Less than two years (1-2 years)
- ☐ Two to four years (2-4 years)
- ☐ Four or more years (4+ years)

4. When joining your current Police Service, did you intend to join with an additional purpose of obtaining a recognised generic qualification (for instance a Police orientated degree or diploma)? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Other

5. When joining your current Police Service, was your initial intention to remain for the full duration of the service (30 years service)? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ Other

6. Once within the Constabulary, would you prefer to work towards obtaining a choice of vocational-orientated nationally accredited qualifications or the entry route policing degree/diploma offered? For example, these could be Mental Health First Aid, Countering Health and Safety (NIBCSH), or other topics that could benefit yourself, the Police Service, and the wider community. *

- ☐ Vocational Course (once within the force)
- ☐ The Police Constabulary's offered degree/diploma
- ☐ Have a choice once you have joined or within application process
- ☐ Other

7. Do you think a degree should be offered after your probation? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Other

8. Briefly explain your answer (in reference to Question 7) *

9. Depending on your entry route, would you say completing a degree/diploma has been beneficial to your probationary learning? *

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Unsure

10. Briefly explain your answer (in reference to Question 9) *

11. Do you think that having a degree/diploma should be a requirement for Frontline Policing roles (Response, Neighbourhoods, Territorial Support Team, Roads Policing Team, etc)? *

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Other

12. Briefly explain your answer (in reference to Question 11) *

13. Do you think pursuing a degree/diploma alongside learning the functional skills of policing during probation is sustainable? *

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Depends on the individual and circumstances (uncertain response)

14. Have you considered leaving your current Police Constabulary at any point for a different career? *

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Other

15. Briefly explain your answer (in reference to Question 14) *

16. In your opinion, which would best support you in making a career move from the Police? *

- ☐ Entry Level Policing Degree/Diploma
☐ Vocational Qualification
☐ Other

17. If you have obtained your Constabulary's current or previous degree/diploma through entry to the Police, do you feel that this has been beneficial in anyway to your current role or future aspirational roles within the Police Service? *

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

18. Briefly explain your answer (in reference to Question 17) *

19. This is an opportunity to add any additional opinions on the matters discussed above. *

Appendix 2

Summary of Results to Questionnaire and available on request



10. Briefly explain your answer (in reference to Question 9)

163
Responses

Latest Responses
No

"None of my diploma improved me as an officer and I did not learn much f.
I did not have to complete a degree or diploma on joining but I know more."

Update

63 respondents (38%) answered degree for this question.



11. Do you think that having a degree/diploma should be a requirement for Frontline Policing roles (Response, Neighbourhoods, Technical Support Team, Assets Policing Team, etc)?



12. Briefly explain your answer (in reference to Question 11)

163
Responses

Latest Responses
No

"The best way to learn in this job is by doing, an academic qualification add.
Absolutely not. Not only does having a degree not help you in any way at all."

Update

82 respondents (49%) answered degrees for this question.



13. Do you think pursuing a degree/diploma alongside learning the functional skills of policing during probation is sustainable?



14. Have you considered leaving your current Police Constabulary at any point for a different career?



15. Briefly explain your answer (in reference to Question 14)

163
Responses

Latest Responses
No

"Occasionally consider leaving due to demands and trouble staffing number.
I joined the police as a career I do not like the way the police are going on."

Update

80 respondents (49%) answered job for this question.



16. In your opinion, which would best support you in making a career move from the Police?



17. If you have obtained your Constabulary's current or previous degree/diploma through entry to the Police, do you feel that this has been beneficial in anyway to your current role or future aspirational roles within the Police Service?



