Organisational Readiness for the PEQF: Findings from 5 police constabularies

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1. Introduction and Background

The Police Education Qualification Framework (PEQF) aims to standardise education standards within the police and forms part of the wider professionalisation agenda being delivered by the College of Policing (CoP)\(^1\). This report is primarily concerned with preparation for the entry of police degree apprenticeship (PCDA) officers who are entering the police whilst undertaking a level 6 qualification within a Higher Education Institution (HEI) and current officers’ perceptions of their organisations’ preparedness for this process. Police services are at different stages with the implementation across the country and this needs to be noted for the purposes of this report. Four of the forces involved in this research were in design discussions with their partner forces and the fifth had already started delivering the PCDA locally. At the time of the research two of the forces were going through significant restructure as a previous ‘two force alliance’ arrangement was being withdrawn. However, the shared learning and development functionality remained at the time of the research. Similarly, two other forces in the sample had a shared department across the areas. Therefore, the research not only reflects on the preparedness of specific police services but also comments on the impact collaboration between police services has had in preparation for the PCDA.

The rationale for undertaking this piece of research was based on findings from a small-scale piece at CCCU exploring officers, who are completing an academic programme, perceptions of their organisations’ willingness to utilise their learnt knowledge in practice (source). The officers felt that generally there was an unwillingness to move beyond the tacit knowledge that they had learnt as part of their craft, particularly those at lower ranks (source). There is limited research on the perspectives of those working within learning and development departments and indeed the officers who will ultimately have responsibility for supervising these new recruits. Therefore, the aims of this research were to:

1: Explore the perceptions of police officers and staff around the organisational readiness of their constabulary to manage and develop new degree level entry recruits
2: Identify promising practice in the preparedness of police organisations
3: Identify barriers to successful implementation and embedding of the PEQF

This report is delivered in five sections. The next section will briefly outline some key findings from research conducted on the PEQF which are relevant for this research. The methodology will be detailed in section three, followed by the findings and the concluding remarks.

\(^1\) Please see [https://www.npcc.police.uk/documents/Policing%20Vision.pdf](https://www.npcc.police.uk/documents/Policing%20Vision.pdf) for further discussion.
2. What does the current literature tell us?

Exploring the research around other initiatives aimed at improving the training of police officers offers some insights into the problematic nature of embedding new forms of knowledge within the police organisation. Importantly it is the knowledge component of police training that the PEQF seeks to improve (Joyce, 2018). The implementation of the Initial Police Learning and Development Programme (IPLDP) provides a contextual backdrop to understanding the themes that pose problems with organisational readiness in the adoption of new policies and the complexity of building the relationships between police and HEIs is key. The IPLDP became one of the entry routes into policing at constable level in 2006, replacing the Foundation training, and resulting in an award of a level 3 Diploma in Policing (NPIA, 2008). The importance of working with HEIs formed a significant part of the evaluations’ findings for the IPLDP and this is relevant for this research (NPIA, 2008). The relationships between police forces and their partner HEIs was paramount in establishing the academic nuances of professional training coupled with policing education (Wood and Tong, 2009). However, there was perceived ambiguity in relation to the role of the HEI in qualifying an individual officer to the rank of constable and the required flexibility within the curriculum to accommodate the fluctuations of recruitment (NPIA, 2008). Furthermore, there were questions around how best to align the IPLDP with the Higher Education Awards and how this arrangement could supplement a clear progression system within the police supported by accredited learning (NPIA, 2008). Other more generic issues such as the lack of clear communication between management and those under their supervision and managing the training jointly with HEIs were persistent problems during the establishment of the IPLDP.

Partnerships with HEIs

Cooperation with higher education institutions comprises a key component of the PEQF. In the implementation of PEQF, the relationship between forces and HEIs is a vital element to its’ success. Some forces have established relationships with local universities in their area and therefore have a comprehensive understanding of the way in which HEIs operate. Conversely other forces experienced difficulty when negotiating relationships with HEI as they did not know how to discuss the terms of their partnership (Hough & Stanko, 2018). Simmill-Binning and Towers (2017) argue that whilst most forces understand that HEIs would drive the education part of the new entry routes through the PEQF, some areas expressed a desire to have more involvement in the curriculum development. This often related to finding the balance between delivering an integrated approach to theory and practice. Indeed, Hough and Stanko (2018), found that few forces had managed this successfully. Other issues around responsibility for quality assurance and assessments have also arisen.
Negotiating their way through this remains complex for some police areas and another area of challenge has related to the location of where the programmes would take place. This seemed to reflect the disparity in understanding how education is best received in an academic environment and the need for consistency in allocating specific locations for training and education (Hough & Stanko, 2019). Additionally, the limitations with capacity for intake and timings problematised this process further. Given that the academic year for undergraduate degrees start in September and finish around May/June this does not allow for the fluctuation in levels of recruits wanting the join the police throughout the year (Hough & Stanko, 2019).

A discussion of training for omni-competence versus specialist skills also raised an important point in the detailed plans for the PEQF (Tong, 2017). Some forces were more in favour of an increased emphasis on specialisation especially considering the need for modern skills such as cybercrime and computer science knowledge rather than a uniform, one-size fits all blanket training programme covering ‘the basics’ of policing (Hough and Stanko, 2019).

Cultural / Organisational Challenges

Policing has traditionally relied on in-house training from experienced officers rather than external teaching staff. Indeed, this potential transferral of cultural tacit knowledge can perpetuate the police culture and the dominant practices of ‘expertise’ utilised by the practitioners working within it (Chan, 1997; Williams and Cockcroft, 2019). A core aim of the PEQF is to change this reliance on officer trainers and make learning more consistent across the country Charman (2018) describes the onset of a newbreed of police officer whose views on police work, the role of the police and ethical standards are in contrast to those of longer-serving officers. Such different views on the reality of police work elevates the significance of broadening the scope of evidence-based practice to encompass issues including victimology, public protection and vulnerability, legitimacy, ethics, integrity and procedural justice (Williams et al, 2019). Additionally, it reinforces the importance of ongoing evaluation of new entry route programmes to ensure that there is no mismatch between core curriculum content and the learning, skills and competencies police constables need to undertake their role in practice (Ramshaw and Soppitt, 2018).

If change is to be effectively realised this new knowledge needs to be supported and incorporated into the workplace. Hallenberg and Cockcroft (2017) describe some change in attitudes to police officers holding educational qualifications, noting that this is becoming more normalised. Conversely Norman and Williams (2017) question the extent to which the wider police organisation is ready to embrace newly qualified graduates who will be expecting to impart their knowledge in practice. As Ramshaw
and Soppitt (2018) suggest if the situated realities and experiences of doing policing do not permit the use of this knowledge this will be limited. As Fleming and Wingrove (2017) argue, the wider police organisation may currently lack the culture and infrastructure to support the CoP aspirations for professionalisation.

There seems to be a reluctance among those in the police service to understand how this change will benefit them and a culture of resistance prevails around changes to police training (Griffiths & Milne, 2018). Wood (2018) argues that this may delay the full and effective implementation of the PEQF as there will not be enough internal support from officers and senior management. If the police service is to adopt this new framework there must be a clear understanding of the intended benefits and how they will be achieved. Understanding the role of education and academics within policing is limited. Much of the resistance to change may be explained through the limited experience already serving officers may have with formal education (Pepper & McGrath, 2019).

The next section outlines the methodology utilised within this research.
3. Methodological Approach

The method was a mixed methods design which was approved by the ethics committee at Canterbury Christ Church University. A national survey was undertaken and disseminated via social media, local networks within policing (such as the Police Federation) and local constabulary contacts. The survey was aimed at Sergeants who would be involved in having responsibility for the support of the new recruits. Whilst the survey received a fairly low response rate of 67, perhaps due to its heavy reliance on social media for accessibility, it did allow for some consideration of the national picture in relation to the current perceptions around the ability to support the new officers and the benefits that current supervisors feel they will bring to the police service.

The research used a convenience sampling strategy to identify five forces. Given the time scale for the research the team utilised personal networks to identify the sample sites. The original plan was to use an additional metropolitan force area; however, the permission came through too late for the research timetable. Semi structured interviews and focus groups were conducted in each of the areas. A total of 3 focus groups were completed (each with between 4-8 sergeants) in two of the forces. The sergeants were from either neighbourhood teams or response. Interviews with 15 individuals including: 8 inspectors from response or neighbourhood teams, 4 police staff involved in the implementation and delivery of the PEQF from Leadership and Development departments and 3 senior leaders who had a role in the strategic oversight of the PEQF implementation. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes to an hour and all the data was transcribed and thematically analysed using NVIVO software.

The next section outlines the main findings from the research. There were four key themes identified from both the national survey and the interviews and focus groups.

- The communication process and the implications
- The knowledge hierarchy
- Organisational risks
- Risks to the opportunity of the PEQF

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1 See appendix A for demographic information of survey respondents.

2 The forces have been identified as A B C D and E
Findings

These presented findings are based on an analysis of the data gathered from all 5 force areas. Whilst they depict the emerging themes across all areas, there were some differences between the areas which are noted in the sections. These were related primarily to where the force was with the implementation and the relationship set up with their partnering HEI.

The Communication Process and the Implications

There was a gap in knowledge about the PEQF from all of the sergeants and inspectors within forces A, B, C and D. These areas had yet to fully implement the PEQF. This was mirrored in the survey where 37 (55%) of the 67 respondents did not feel adequately informed about the PEFQ despite 46 (69%) respondents voicing that the process would significantly impact on their role.

‘I did a google search on PEQF when I knew I was coming to this interview’ (Sergeant, force A)

Importantly this was considered as detrimental to the perceived aims of the PEQF process as good communications might facilitate the selling of the concept if officers were to feel involved.

This quote from an Inspector in force B highlights this:

‘If someone came in and sold it, they (officers) might actually see the benefits of, well actually, why are we doing this? Actually, the reason we’re doing this is because we want to professionalise the organisation. We don’t want to be seen, as what used to be commonly known as plod. We actually want to be a slick, professional organisation that can deliver a service’

This was also mentioned in the survey, for example this quote from one respondent:

‘The College of Policing need to identify why graduates are felt to be the way forward, when there are no factual reasons to support this and to highlight to why the focus is on new graduates rather than those currently in the job’

Forces C and D suggested that this was partly a result of the impact of the lack of central support the constabularies had received from the CoP around the implementation of the PEQF and the time they were spending on developing relationships with HEIs etc. One representative within learning and development suggested:

‘More about the licensing process really, which is obviously their bit. Again just my honest view I suppose is some of the bits where we’ve really missed some centralised advice in policing was around things like the procurement exercise. And the College, it wasn’t one of the areas they were focused on, they didn’t want to be involved in that. But we felt that that was quite a risk to policing.’ (Force C)

There was however, an assumption lower down the organisation that the CoP had been communicating with the relevant departments but that the information had not been disseminated down.
‘The C of P has obviously been in communication with our L and D .... Who have all the frameworks. They’ll be pushing the degree stuff out into the organisation, but we haven’t heard nothing at Inspector level or even sergeant level’ (Inspector, force A)

‘My understanding is that this won’t have gone very far out of L and D at the moment and our senior officers. And when I say senior officers, I say the chief officer group, and maybe down to superintendent level. Below that, I think the knowledge of this process is next to nothing’ (Inspector, force A)

All the sergeants and Inspectors across forces A – D asserted that communication internally within each individual constabulary was unsatisfactory. These findings were reinforced by the survey where 51 (76%) of the 67 respondents suggested that neither central or local information had been forthcoming. Indeed 30% stated that they had received more information from the media / social media than their own force. Learning and development representatives also felt communications from the CoP was largely ineffective, but this was particularly strong in relation to the detail provided on what might be required to embed and implement the process locally. However, where relationships and contact with the CoP were integrated into a persons’ role, at a more senior level, there was clearer knowledge about the PEQF but the processes for sharing this information were limited. This is generally perceived as being related to staffing, time and workload. Local leads were attempting to get the knowledge across to staff and were aware of the detrimental effect of not doing this. As this quote evidences:

‘There’s three of us consistently doing board updates, senior leadership updates, going into individual teams. Now that’s really hard to replicate because we’re the three people that have been imbedded in this. Some of this the devil’s in the detail, and when we have done face to face what we have found is that we can switch people’s mind-sets and we can do that sort of hearts and minds piece, but it only really works face to face. And that’s a real struggle across 10,000 people’ (Implementation team, force C/ D).

In accordance with other research (Stanko and Hough, 2018) interviewees in two force areas felt they had received little central guidance about either implementation and this had further impacted on the time they had to communicate meaning about the PEQF further down the organisation. Whilst learning and development staff broadly felt confident about the detail regarding the aims of the PEQF, there was less confidence about the practical implications for the service and the staff involved. For example, the three learning and development representatives from forces C and D raised concerns about how to negotiate contracts with their HEI partners, how to construct and deliver the PEQF entry routes and develop support networks within the framework.

‘They think we are a ‘can do’ organisation but this is such an enormous change and we need far more support from the centre. All our time is taken up on managing HEI stuff and there has been no communications locally as a result’ (L and D, forces C and D)
Furthermore, forces with pre-existing relationships with their local HEI provider had encountered the least resistance in establishing their PEQF program. Understanding how universities operate due to previous relationships with them allowed for a smoother transition into the implementation of PEQF.

‘I think when I look back at some of the very early academic partnerships they often succeed or fail on the separateness of the two institutions and when it comes to the learning of those individuals you want them to be largely interchangeable. It is essential that governance frameworks are in place. We have members of our team will quite happily go to the campus and the team at XXXX university will quite happily come to us and there’s no barriers whereas I do think for some police services that have not had those formal partnerships, universities work very differently to police but the two have got to work in tandem.’ (Senior lead, L and D, Force E)

Additionally, one senior implementation lead described how limited the planning was the staffing issues for the PEQF and for those involved in supporting the new recruits such as the sergeants and tutor constables.

‘If you find anyone who’s done an organisational analysis, if you wouldn’t mind sharing it that would be great! Someone’s, one of us, is going to the national L&D leadership meeting in a couple of weeks and we’re hoping to raise this with them, one of us must have done a learning needs analysis for the rest of the organisation – we haven’t because we’re all just run ragged’ (Senior lead – implementation team, force A/B)

The area that had already started the delivery of the PCDA highlighted the importance of planning this effectively:

‘It’s worth clarifying that it’s a big investment that the service makes so the 170 tutors, this is a force that is about 1800 strength so you’re looking at pretty much 10% of the organization is carrying that role of the tutors. This enables a really professional service. All of the forces in the region have got a very embedded process. (L and D, force E)

The lack of planning or gap analysis had impacted on the individual officers’ sense of involvement and understanding of the project and, paradoxically as Hesketh and Williams (2017) postulate, some of the voids in knowledge had been filled with inaccurate detail and caused further resentment towards the PEQF. The issue of the time available to effective plan and prepare for such a vast reform programme was consistent across the five force areas. This raises interesting issues about, not simply the difficulties of introducing and implementing reform, but the lack of time and organisational resources provided to teams do the preparation effectively.

Knowledge of the process and individual professionalism

The lack of information provided about the PEQF process and their role within it impacted on sergeants’ perceptions of their own professionalism, in terms of their leadership ability and the level of detail they could then pass down to their teams and staff involved. As relayed above, forces B and C suggested that face to face communications was the most effective method for them but the consistent delivery of this was complicated for a number of reasons. Forces A and B discussed a
communications strategy being ‘in development’ but at the time of writing the detail of this had not been sent to the research team. The impact of a lack of inclusion within the process mirrors other research around police reform (Sklansky, 2007) and has implications for the success of the change, current staff and new recruits.

‘Unless I go onto our force website, or the College of Policing and dig into our recruitment, I wouldn’t have a clue. So I’m not even in a position, or haven’t been until recently, to advise my own staff as to how they can become a PC, and they’re already in our organisation as PCSOs’ (Sergeant, force C)

The difficulty of delivering face to face sessions across such large numbers of staff was mentioned above. Indeed, more innovative ways of delivering these messages to staff through the layers of supervision and leadership maybe a more effective method going forward. This lack of clarity about entry routes is also clouded by the number of diverse ways now people can enter policing. This further confused the landscape for officers and reinforced the need for better communications about the differences and aims of the different methods. This was voiced by sergeants particularly in forces A, B, C and D.

‘It’s going to be really difficult, because a lot of my colleagues including me, you look at Direct Entry, you look at Police Now, now you’re looking at the PEQF, it just seems like there’s so many different ways to come into the police service now that it’s getting quite confusing’ (Sergeant, force C)

All of the operational sergeants interviewed voiced some concerns about being able to effectively advise potential tutor constables about what their role will be in the new recruit support network. This is essential to the success of the project and the learning and perceptions of new officers (Charman, 2018).

‘What are the performance expectations of that tutee and how could I get that tutor constable to understand that? I think the only way you can do that is get those tutor constables to be trained not just for three hours. But whether they go away for a week and learn what those expectations are, because if you don’t know that… without understanding that, we can’t really offer the support’. (Sergeant, force D)

The concerns also related to the academic assessments and the tutors’ ability to effectively manage this if they didn’t have the academic background themselves.

‘So what training then will tutor constables get if they haven’t got degrees – how will they support this?’ (Sergeant)

‘But the sorts of things she’s being asked to do are things that we’ve never done…well all of her academic stuff isn’t something to do with us she has to fend for herself on it and she’s never asked for help with it that’s something we’ve never been given.’ (Sergeant, Force D)

This was also recognised by a senior leader in one of the learning and development departments.
‘It’s them understanding their role isn’t it? Understanding what’s expected of them as a sergeant, and what their role is in these individual programs. So what is the role of the tutor and/or a mentor or academic tutor versus what’s required of you as a line manager? That can be quite a complicated, I was going to say tripartite, but it’s probably bigger than that isn’t it, probably more like six people involved in it? So how do you make sure you’re all joined up and consistent, and the right people have the right knowledge?’ (Senior lead – implementation team, force A/B)

One area had discussed with their partner HEI the possibility of sharing knowledge from the university with other members of staff locally. This was related to issues of fairness, upskilling and development. Open access and fair distribution of information is key to staff buying into change (Williams and Cockcroft, 2019) and this might offer an innovative option to engage with staff involved. However, the resourcing issues and allowance for current staff to receive CPD was voiced both by senior people and the officers themselves.

‘When we get the PCDA curriculum all built, we can use some products for CPD. So we’ve got our new ones coming in and for our existing staff you just turn it into a CPD model, and it would be blended learning, so they can access it from the XXXX University management system. However, we’ve got a huge problem with abstraction, which everyone is struggling from. So whilst it looks okay, we can say to them all we’ve got this CPD model, this will really help you, we don’t have training days, we’ve got gaps everywhere on the front line, we can’t recruit quick enough and get them through training, so you know it’s chicken and egg’ (Senior lead – implementation team)

This same police area was in the process of developing a communications strategy as they were reflective about the lack of engagement they had with staff to date and the limited time to do so effectively. The impact of that is yet to be evaluated.

‘I just feel really exhausted at the moment. We are trying to do some communications meetings and we’ve got a PowerPoint that we wanted to, it’s a massive PowerPoint which we were going to adapt to each audience that we go to speak to, and we’re about to start that. So that’s preparing people for PCDA and DHEP and telling them what is needed and what they’ll need to do’ (Senior lead - learning and development).

It was encouraging that there was a realisation about the importance of participation and engagement within this process with the frontline. As one learning and development representative stated:

‘We need to think about how our workforce planning will change, what does this mean for sergeants now, what does this mean in terms of culture. What happens when these people realistically land, are we able to realise the benefits that we think PEQF can deliver? You can design the most amazing program in the world, depending on how those people are then trained, tutored, assessed, and most importantly accepted by their peers, and allowed to do something different. We’ve got a very realistic view of this – we will either survive or die on the front line. So to me there’s a really hard reality on that that we could have put in a load of work for the last two years but actually it’s that bit that for me is our biggest gap’
Broadly this section has identified a number of inconsistencies and problems across the forces in terms of communication and engagement with current staff about the PEQF. Whilst the attendance of CoP meetings by those involved in the delivery of the PEQF provides them with information about the process, there are many constraints which limit the dissemination of this knowledge down the organisation to the frontline. The implications of this will be addressed in subsequent sections.

The next section focuses on the issue of knowledge and the perceptions of the new degree level entry.

The Knowledge Hierarchy

This section focuses on the perceptions from interviewees in relation to the new degree level entry requirements. It highlights that there is limited understanding about the PEQF and a lack of receptivity about the role of academic knowledge in policing in terms of relevance to operational work. Both of these factors detract from the ability of properly prepare and identify tangible support mechanisms are in place for these new entrants.

‘I saw some colleagues today before the interview and they asked me what I was doing here? And I said I was going for this PEQF interview. Okay, what’s that? All six of them, all six inspectors from xxxx don’t know what it is’ (Inspector, force B)

Receptivity to new knowledge

Wider issues of what constitutes policing knowledge featured heavily in the research and this further impacted on officers’ notions of being ‘professional’ as a police officer. This point about what counts as useful knowledge in policing has been written about widely by many policing scholars (Fleming and Wingrove, 2017; Mastrofski and Willis, 2016). As interviewed officers and those surveyed had such limited understanding of the purpose and aims of the PEQF and the new role of HEIs, the ability to see the benefits were limited.

Some people won’t want to be a tutor because they’ll feel like they haven’t got the academic background to support the new recruits... I’ll be honest I’ll struggle with that’ (Sergeant, force B)

‘It devalues the experience you’ve got on the job. We have learned from failures, taken the bollockings and developed ourselves’ (Sergeant, force A)

These statements reflect the receptivity to new knowledge coming in from the graduate entry scheme and are comparable with the perceptions currently serving officers who undertake degrees have of their colleagues’ thoughts on taught knowledge and its relevance (Norman and Williams, 2017; Hallenberg and Cockcroft, 2017). The applicability of ‘academic’ knowledge was not considered useful, particularly for officers involved in response work, as this sergeant articulates:

‘How do you deal with a violent person? It’s not to do with having a degree. It’s about being able to speak to people’ (Sergeant)
‘You don’t need a degree to go and shoot targets or be an armed response officer, you can’t do a degree in that really unless you’ve been in the army and you’ve handled weapons but even then it’s a whole different ball game when you come into the police you get taught by the police how to deal with the policing side of that section of the work you’re doing.’ (Sergeant, Force D)

Conversely, recognising specialist areas that are ‘outside the normal remit of police work’ was seen as something that would be benefited by academic input. This links to the purpose of the PEQF for ALL ranks and roles not being effectively communicated and the related assertion that fundamental policing skills are learnt as a craft. This was a key theme in the focus groups and as one sergeant articulated:

‘If they had a degree say for instance is if they had a degree in finance like accountancy and they went into a fraud department because the fraud in the police is probably the most under resourced, people don’t have the knowledge to deal with it and it’s one of those jobs where you go on your one file and you go “how am I going to get rid of that? I don’t know how to deal with it, I’ve not been trained to deal with it forensic accountant and all that sort of stuff” so if it was specific people with specific knowledge and specialisation to deal with specific crime like that, yes. If it’s I’ve got an anthropology degree and I want to join the police not in the slightest.’ (Sergeant, Force C)

The longer-term impact of the receptivity to the PEQF was highlighted by one senior leader. They pointed out that the entire process of this for the police is new, both in terms of the learning styles and the process of implementation.

‘It will be really interesting to see the phasing of this because I think in five years’ time when most of the people in your response teams or your neighbourhood teams have all come through these entry routes, the reception they receive potentially is going to be different. Whereas now it’s the meeting of two very different worlds’ (Implementation team, force C/D)

Recognising the long term nature of this reform was critical to this recipient of the research. Setting realistic expectations about the complexity of the change should form an important part of the communication process with current staff within the organisation.

**Likelihood of using the knowledge**

Another key point relating to knowledge concerned the ability to use it in practice. Part of the narrative used to legitimise the PEQF relates to professionalism, innovation and using different ideas in decision making (Williams et al, 2018). Officers across all forces argued that the process driven and risk averse nature of policing would inhibit the officers applying their new taught knowledge in practice. Organisational readiness arguably does not simply relate to staffing issues but also the structures and processes that guide officers’ behaviour and culture (Silvestri, 2018). Officers argued that the
increased use in tool kits and prescriptive guidance documents would hinder the effective application of this element of the PEQF as officers do not feel able to try new things.

‘The job has become so much more prescriptive, you go to a domestic and you fill in a form. You go to another job and you do that again regardless of the circumstances. The discretion is drifting away and that comes from the senior levels – I do not think there is anything wrong with going in with a qualification and you will have the mental capacity to do the job at a higher level but you won’t able to use it in practice’ (Sergeant)

The importance of police constabularies understanding the impact of their internal processes on the implementation of the knowledge that features in the PEQF is key to success and it is here that local learning and development departments would benefit from further advice from the centre – CoP about what would work best in this context. Officers were aware that without this it is likely decision making will remain as ‘business as usual’.

**Effective support for graduates**

The knowledge base required for the tutor constables who will be responsible for supporting the officers was a key concern for the interviewees. The issues here are multi-faceted and relate to sergeants perceived ability to provide the input to their staff, the investment the organisation is putting into their training tutors, continuous professional development and the academic knowledge tutors may have in terms of understanding how new recruits can apply their new knowledge. 52 (78%) survey respondents had significant concerns about the impact of training and development on their role in the new recruitment plans. 58 (87%) respondents in the survey reported to have had no training about how to support new entrants and 36 (54%) believed they would not be able to support them sufficiently in terms of being able to use the learning gained through their academic learning.

As one senior lead states the importance of getting this role is key for the experience of the recruits coming into the service:

‘There has been a realisation that not everybody who is in those roles at the moment will be best suited to what the requirement’s going to be. Whether it’s capability, or whether it’s believing in the programs. And again, we’ve experienced that with Police Now, depending on who that tutor is if they don’t believe in that program, that individual can have a really negative experience which isn’t great, that’s their first ten weeks, eight weeks in the organisation’

Indeed, these perceptions were mirrored by sergeants:

‘There’s an expectation that the tutor is there to lead, and in certain circumstances it might be the other way round that the student has more knowledge because of better training that they’ve had, so that’s why I think it’s imperative that we do look to update the tutors before to make sure that doesn’t happen’
The plans in one force aimed at upskilling tutors were progressive and yet officers did not know of these plans further down the organisation. An evaluation of these types of schemes and their working in practice would be beneficial for learning nationally. However, there remains issues around how forces will fund this training for their staff.

‘We’re looking at a coaching concept. So tutor constables generally have a day but we are looking at a course, and at the moment that course is coming in at about five days, which is a huge abstraction but we looking then to see if we could get them a qualification. Unfortunately, the apprenticeship levy doesn’t have a coaching qualification which is a shame, because if that were a level 5 apprenticeship levy we could use the levy for that and people would get a qualification. We wanted something really practical for coaching’ (Implementation lead).

There are a number of implications for the PEQF and the officers raised from the points above and officers at all levels were aware of those risks. The risks arising as a result of negating the new knowledge has been raised in other research (Williams et al, 2018). Other issues are addressed in the next section.

**Organisational Risks**

Other organisational factors were raised in the survey as acting as barriers to the ability to effectively support new graduate entrants. These related to resources, time (71%), training (39%), demand (77%), resources (65%), understanding academic knowledge (49%) and critically the lack or organisational receptivity to the PEQF (63%). This last issue is critical to understanding the successful ‘landing’ of the PEQF.

**Undervaluing current staff**

Officers raised a number of organisational risks resulting, in part to some of the issues noted in the previous two sections. One of the biggest risks relates to the perceptions of current, serving officers. With the PEQF delivering what was the police training in conjunction with the relevant academic qualifications, some interviewees highlighted that staff may feel a sense of being undervalued as a result of the new graduate recruits receiving more certified qualifications than them. This is mirrored in other research on perceptions of direct entry (Williams and Norman, 2017). Whilst the issue of their knowledge was raised above this more specifically relates to the value their workplace places on their training and knowledge.

‘Some of them will argue well actually I’ve not had the opportunities that, for example a Police Now or a Direct Entry, is getting. Because they are getting all the courses first. Why, how? What’s the rationale behind it? And as a line manager, as a second line manager I haven’t got the answers’ (senior lead – learning and development)
Whilst one key element of the PEQF is the recognition of current officers’ skills and knowledge (College of Policing, 2016), this is not something that officers were consistently aware of. The importance of accessing this opportunity was raised by interviewees both in relation to fairness and the recognition of the level of their experience and learning:

‘Irrespective of any entry processes that we put in place, those officers are acting at degree level. It may in the past not have been a formal certificate with the word degree on it and a mortarboard being thrown in the air, but they are operating at that level and dealing with incredibly complex situations within their communities. So the arguments that come out from the public and in policing itself of oh you’re going to need a degree now, I think we’ve always been operating at that high level and I think sometimes people do themselves a great disservice by not recognising that’s the level that they’re working at. I think it’s kind of like a perception that when we talk about the professionalization of the police service it implies they’re not professional already’ (Senior lead – learning and development)

‘It would be nice to have within the job and that’s the way I see it you get rewarded you’ve been in the job a long time you’ve done all the nuts and bolts stuff all the gritty stuff you go up and up and up, you specialise that’s when I think the police should invest in you if you need this specialist qualification to do this specialist role there you go.’ (Sergeant, Force C)

Moreover, this may create a further divide between new recruits and serving officers which could potentially cause tension amongst officers in their working environment. The need to inform staff about the Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL3) strand of the PEQF in their communications is central here and information about what forces will be doing to support officers should they chose to access academic qualifications through this route. The need to invest in current staff is critical.

‘They want us to professionalise our decision making and our processes, so why not reward us too at the end of it with some sort of recognition for that that we can use when we retire?’ (Sergeant)

As mentioned above, time problematises senior leaders’ opportunity to communicate effectively to their staff about the PEQF. However, there are other factors that impact on this which relate to growing demand and ongoing reviews of police organisations.

Priorities and ball juggling

The growing number of ‘priorities’ for the police was raised as an issue in enabling an effective planning process for the PEQF. Senior leaders were aware of the issues with CPD and the consequences of not offering this to current staff. However, the vast amount of work, change and the

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3 See [https://profdev.college.police.uk/recognition-prior-experience-learning/](https://profdev.college.police.uk/recognition-prior-experience-learning/) for more detail
way in which priorities are decided impacted on the ability they had to do ‘everything’ properly. As one officer from the implementation team argued:

‘We are developing CPD officers, but we deliberately call them CPD officers for the culture change. But then the bit that is really difficult is the other stuff this competes with. DA matters are really important, safeguarding is really important, disclosure’s really important. We’ve got all these big legislation things that HMIC’s beating us with, and then we’ve got the organisational development stuff like the PEQF and transformation. The we’ve got the leadership capability assessment that we’re doing. Police officers will only focus on the legislative piece. So the biggest challenge is getting them to understand everyone’s own professional development. It’s not just about catching baddies in policing because your organisation still needs developing’

These factors also have significance for police wellbeing. The reality of policing demand in the current climate was raised by sergeants and learning and development representatives in forces A-D, particularly in relation to the role they have in managing this for both new and current staff.

**Wellbeing**

Wellbeing in the police has recently been a huge debate both in media and in academic work (Hesketh and Williams, 2017). Policing as a profession has unique stresses and the wellbeing of individuals at all levels of the organisation is of paramount importance for productivity and resources (Williams and Hesketh, 2018). The added strain the PEQF may have on the tutors’ workload was raised in the interviews. A point that was frequently mentioned was the establishment of effective support networks for those involved in the new PEQF scheme as tutors or supervisors. Considering the normal stresses of the job, workforce planning and pastoral team care, it should be recognised that the introduction of the PEQF will add other stresses to the individuals involved. This quote from a sergeant highlights the inconstant approach to this important issue and how it is really down to individual officers to review this in the context of their role:

‘My intention is to look at current issues from a wellbeing aspect, to consider what is already causing frustration, stress, not being able to perform in the way they want to perform or not able to do the fulfil the role that they want to. What will the impact of PEQF going to be when that lands? Is it going to be better or worse, and what can we do to close the gap? So I’ve spoken to our wellbeing lead about how we might do that, because we’ve never done a wellbeing impact assessment, I’m not sure whether I’ve made it up but I just thought it might be a good thing to do. To me, as a sergeant I’ve never done that role but in the future you might have 20 people across a number of different rotas who have come in via five different entry routes, they have different shift patterns, they have different protected learning time, they’re learning at different speeds, they’ve got different requirements for when they go out on tutor in terms of what jobs you need to get exposure to. That’s quite a headache when they’re already dealing with, actually what they say is just resourcing my team takes up a lot of my time, so I’m thinking how do we make this easier? And then the other thing then is the how do we close that gap in terms of what we could invest in them, and how we could use our university partnership to help with that. So are there some bespoke training packages for
instance, so that a) we help them to close that gap but b) we get over those cultural hurdles about all of the investment we’re making is in new entrants not in existing officers?"

‘We’ve got a Police Now candidate and she is brilliant she’s really bright she works really hard but she is fundamentally struggling to get the basics of getting all the extra assignments she was given and then trying to get the one file done she’s up to the nose on it and then she had all these presentations and extra things she had to go off and do... I’m just using it as a juxtaposition with something where we’re loading more onto somebody there’s a live example right here of somebody who is actually really achieving in the workplace and all of that is really pulling her down.’ (Sergeant, Force D)

Whilst this again highlights the need for high levels of investment and planning around the role of the tutors and indeed, their sergeants, it also reinforces the importance of experience within this context. Officers pointed out that the experience they had of the impact of shifts, overtime and work stresses meant they were in a better position to help plan these processes for new recruits. The survey also raised issues around resilience and wellbeing with 47 (70%) raising wellbeing and morale issues and 56 (84%) the impact of new recruits and learning time on team resilience.

The force who had started delivering PEQF stated that wellbeing was one of the key reasons why they had prioritised the role of the tutors.

‘If you do have that problem you have that meltdown or that stumbling in your learning your tutors the first person you go to. It’s very stressful for the tutors especially if your student is struggling, our tutors struggle as well, because they’re carrying the extra burden on top of their day job and it puts a lot of stress on them which again comes back to us we’re there to make sure that if our tutors are struggling we’re there to support them as well as the students’  (Sergeant, force E)

One inspector (force D) raised the issue of input into this area on an academic programme and the subsequent expectations the new recruits might have of the role in practice. Knowledge of the programme content may help them plan effectively around gaps in knowledge and practical application.

‘I’m not sure how much input they get in terms of wellbeing, the stress of the job, and those kinds of things. Because you can easily learn from a book. Someone could be stabbed outside this door here and you might look at me and say what do I do, and I could give you a book and say follow those points, and you’d be able to deal with that. But what about the wellbeing of you, the officers dealing with such an incident, all those kinds of things. I think it’s good that we’re professionalising the job but I don’t know how they’d deal with those other important issues just because of the variety of things that you can deal with and the way that impacts on you as an individual, and wider than that, how it might impact on your family and the community as well’

Establishing an effective method for assessing the tutors work and a support network within the system as part of the implementation of the PEQF can help to ensure the welfare of both the tutor and student.
‘We’re overseeing, we’re quality assuring what the tutors are doing and also their welfare we take that into account as well, tutor and student. So, we have quite a good tutoring system set up in xxxx to be fair.’ (Sergeant, Force E)

The final theme relates to how the issues raised above may further impact on the success of what is already perceived as a controversial change for the recruitment of police officers.

**Risks to the opportunity of the PEQF**

Those interviewed had concerns about the type of officers who would enter policing under this scheme and what individuals may be put off joining as a result of the changes to the profession. Concerns related to access for older applicants, single parents and those with wider experiences, however the most common issue raised was about academic cops.

The lack of an evidence base for the programme was also raised by officers in the survey. For example:

‘We need to consider a trial period using different sized forces. Then make a decision based on all the evidence, instead of pushing it through with little support

‘Why hasn’t there been a pilot’

‘Why have we not had better insight into how the training was planned and a more pragmatic description of content and methodology’

Whilst this may further relate to the lack of knowledge the officers had of the purpose and content of the PEQF curriculum, it was also influenced by their perceptions of academics verses cops. Indeed, just 13 (19%) survey respondents believed new graduates would offer new insights into policing.

‘The difference between these individuals and individuals who have come through the normal policing process is massive. Because it seems like they just want to employ management instead of street bobbies. Because these people with degrees don’t want to be street bobbies, which is what we’re lacking’ (sergeant, force A)

Whilst this has been alluded to above the dissociation of academic learning and the knowledge it can impact is likely to impact on the way that new recruits learn from their tutors (Charman, 2018; Chan, 1997).

‘I joined in 1992 with people who had degrees. Did they have any common sense, some of them? None. Did they have any street skills? None. Now, to a degree, I was dragged up in some of my younger life, so I had those street skills, I had those life experiences which to a degree I could have done without having when I was a young kid growing up. But you know there are some people who can’t deal, doesn’t matter how much classroom education you have, you put them in front of someone, what we call an angry man. That hostility, that’s when you realise what you need’ (Inspector, force B)

The personal discontentment from some about the new system was discussed in relation to the wider police culture within which the new officers will be operating in. Indeed, if officers’ wider perspectives are that taught knowledge will not give officers the real experiential knowledge and perspective they
need to be a police officer there is a risk that the value of PEQF knowledge and opportunity will be negated as they enter the organisation. This mirrors other research in this area (Chan, 1997).

‘I think the trouble is you come into a culture that’s already formed. To be able to bring in new ideas and get those changed I would say is probably really minimal. I know a few of my colleagues at XXXX and they have said that the new people who are coming out now are almost told what not to do, not what they can do. And they’re frightened, and a degree’s not going to help them when they’re in the middle of a fight on a Friday night. It’s being able to work with your colleagues, it’s being able to make sure everybody’s safe and that type of thing, and I don’t think that can be taught in a classroom, really’ (sergeant, force A)

A key point to highlight is the cultural change required for this to be successful and to achieve this you need the buy in from the officers already working in it (Williams and Cockcroft, 2018). in order to ensure the new recruits, feel comfortable to use their knowledge and be respected by their peers there needs to be a wider shift in thinking about learning and the value of other knowledge within the policing sphere. The risk of the system becoming divided between the ‘old from the new’ might be negated by dealing with some of the issues officers have raised themselves in this research. Valuing both taught knowledge and experience, and the relationship between these two issues is critical to this.
4. Recommendations and concluding thoughts

There is some important learning raised in this research both for local police service areas and for the implementation team at the CoP. Moreover, the issues have implications for the health of the police service, the ongoing relationships with HEIs, current and new police officers and, more broadly, the success of the PEQF longer term and the perceptions of the CoP.

This section outlines some recommendations based on the findings of this work.

*Communication processes & Implications*

1: Central advice for local forces from the CoP regarding implementation, perhaps utilising insights from the review of the Police Knowledge Fund to identify good practice when implementing partnership relations with HEIs.

2: Delivery of a series of roadshows across each BCU in force. This could be delivered jointly with HEIs and representatives from learning and development with senior level expectations that key staff are expected and supported to attend. For example, attendance from all front line supervisors would be critical. Events could feature how supervisors are expected to relay information to their teams.

3: The establishment of a PEQF champion for each command unit. Similar to some forces’ EBP champions their role would be to disseminate information and liaise regularly with learning and development teams to gather updates and feedback any issues from the front line regarding concerns and key issues. Their role would include disseminating any marketing material from the CoP (post should be Inspector level or above).

4: Given the onus here on communication, responsibility should be allocated and written into a chief officer strategy. Given the findings for this research the development or further development of a communications strategy is vital to the success of the implementation of the PEQF.

5: More guidance is required about investment in tutor constables and their supervisors. Courses prior to taking on apprentice/DHEP officers is important. Courses should be delivered outside of the police culture and should focus on the benefits of the PEQF and these officers’ central role within this process.

6: Practical guidance and knowledge concerning workforce planning and dedicated learning time is central as this is something many officers feel uninformed about. This was considered vital in terms of wellbeing of all officers and needs to be a priority for the police service.

7: Organise workshops to capture good practice for implementation / tutor constable training and ensure this is disseminated nationally through the PEQF local champions. This could be supplemented by the development of a national digital platform aimed at learning and development staff, tutors, course designers, educators, trainers, senior management and CoP staff to share local best practice for national learning.
8: Provide a risk assessment and needs analysis template for services to identify consistent and local challenges to implementation that can be used before and during implementation but used as a tool for continued assessment. It is critical that populating such templates is a bottom up process and that officers’ concerns and issues are captured in this data capture.

Knowledge Hierarchy

1: Identify good role models to showcase examples of where research / learning has assisted in working practice (utilise local EBP champions to hold local events for front line staff).

2: Identify evidence that demonstrates really good outcomes for the partnership of 'taught knowledge and experiential learning' then market it internally through a coordinated strategy. The CoP are looking at a National Group to monitor implementation which may be a forum for facilitating this option.

3: Explore with local providers the options of sharing aspects of the PCDA curriculum with acting officers to raise their knowledge of the content and the practical application. This was being discussed in two forces in this research and might be something to review further if it is implemented and agreed with the HEI.

Further Research

1: Revisit forces in 12 months and consider issues raised in the research around communications and tutor training etc.

2: Extend research to collect information from the HEI perspective and their thoughts on implementation and joint design.

3: Develop funding options for research with tutor constables and the student officers to gather their perspectives of the process when the process is established in service.

4: There are limitations to this research as it is only based on 5 police areas. Undertaking this work in a wider number of areas would be beneficial to see if the findings are similar nationally.
References


College of Policing, 2019. Supporting police officers and staff to achieve an academic qualification, Coventry: College of Policing.


### Appendix A - Demographics for Survey Respondents

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