

# **Are UK forces graduate friendly and evidence ready ?**

**Tiggey May and Gillian Hunter  
Institute for Criminal Policy Research  
Birkbeck, University of London**

# What I'll cover

- What did the graduates learn about evidence-based policing at the Summer Academy?
- How do graduates learn the craft of policing?
- From graduate to police officer – the transition
- How do graduate police officers apply their critical skills, gleaned from their university study and the summer academy, to their neighbourhood police work?
- Are UK forces graduate friendly and evidence ready?

# Methods

- 60 in-depth interviews with 45 PN participants
- 13 interviews with police line managers of graduates
- Eight in-depth interviews with PN staff
- Seven observations of PN training days and 100-day impact events
- Two focus groups to examine perceptions and usefulness of training on evidence-based policing
- Content review of 30 PN Graduates' 100-day impact projects

# The PN Summer Academy

- Interviewees spoke positively about the training they received at the SA; most were supportive of the use of serving police officers as presenters
- Interviewees did, however, find the six-week course intensive and exhausting, some noted that the balance of learning was biased towards lecture-style teaching rather than the practical field training, which they largely preferred
- Interviewees tended to fixate on learning the 'craft of policing' and being seen to be patrol status ready
- Interviewees struggled to understand how the theoretical/lecture based parts of the SA related to the craft of policing – translating knowledge to practice baffled graduates

*The days were so long; sometimes you were in one room for five hours with hardly any breaks. Your brain just can't concentrate for that long. A lot of stuff you don't even remember because there were just so many talks, so many lessons and so much sitting and listening that it just all kind of merged into one. We didn't get much reflection time at the SA. [PNG09]*

# From graduate to police officer

- Interviewees from Cohort 2 and 3 had mixed experiences of their transition from SA to their local Force
- Most reported a *relatively* smooth transition, in that their new colleagues were aware they were arriving; others, however, described this aspect of the programme as poorly managed and their team and line managers as ill-informed about PN

*I don't think anyone was aware I was arriving... My new sergeant is very anti PN [PNG19]*

*Yes, my team were aware, which is always a good thing; in fact most of the station was aware that a PN graduate was arriving, my colleagues were also aware of what PN is [PNG17]*

# From graduate to police officer

- Experiences of the 28-day force immersion were varied
- Graduates were expecting to be supported in their neighbourhood teams, in the first instance, by a trained mentor/tutor
- Unfortunately, not all graduates were assigned a mentor, few were trained mentors and some reported only limited access to their mentor

*They [team members] were welcoming, but it would have been nice to have a mentor, or someone who pointed out what I was doing wrong, or spent a little bit more time with me explaining things. I felt quite frustrated in the first few weeks, because I didn't really know how to use any of the systems on the computer. Almost, you feel like a bit of a burden continuously asking questions. You don't want to ask the same person questions so many times, you are just a bit useless. [PNG41]*

# Integrating into the neighbourhood team

- In some cases, interviewees described how they sought to manage the perceived stigma of being a graduate entrant and underplayed any sense of difference between themselves and colleagues

*The stigma that comes with being a graduate is the idea that you think you know everything and you think you know how to be a police officer. I was so conscious that I didn't know how to be a police officer, I didn't want to give them any way of being able to say, "Oh well, she just comes in and thinks she knows everything. She can't even do a proper stop and search. [Participant, Focus Group, 1]*

- Most interviewees were keen to defer to their colleagues' professional experience and to acknowledge the importance of that experience for informing their day-to-day work and their PN impact assessments

# The role of evidence-based policing

- PN graduates appreciated the importance of informing their neighbourhood work through an evidence-based approach and valued the PN evidence top-up session. Officers did, however, also identify a number of barriers to embedding evidence into their day-to-day work, namely: time constraints, team strength, team willingness, and line manager and colleague cynicism

*I think [EBP] is really important, because that's the only way that workplaces change. If everybody goes by what our predecessors do, it ends up being quite a backwards organisation that doesn't take on new things. I think it's good to let new people have a say, from a fresh, outsider perspective of what needs to change, or what needs to be done. But, it is difficult being vocal in that sense, because you are new. [PNG41]*

*The feeling I got was that most people in policing don't know what it is [EBP]... that it's difficult in a day-to-day policing world to use it... It is quite difficult to sometimes put it into practice. [PNG09]*

# The role of evidence-based policing

- Interviewees' perceptions of the value placed on evidence-based practice by their neighbourhood colleagues often underlined the disconnect between the learning and practice environment

*No one, which amazes me, is particularly strongly subscribed to evidence based policing, which when I was at the summer academy and we were talking about evidence based policing I was like, "why are spending so much time on this? It's such an obvious concept. Obviously, we should be doing things that are proved to have worked. Why would we be doing anything else?" But when you come into [neighbourhood team], it's not like that. [PNG18]*

- Some interviewees, however, suggested that in some areas and with some police managers, the interest in evidence-based practice *had* taken root and was being supported both in practice and through additional training given to graduates, there was just no overall consistency in the PN graduates' experience

# Key Learning Points

- Giving graduates the time to reflect and guidance on how the theoretical aspects of their training informs and complements their policing practice, is likely to improve a graduate's understanding of their professional policing role
- Common concerns about a lack of practical knowledge and skill, might best be addressed through better coordination between course provider and host force about the aims of the initial immersion and mentoring period
- Clear plans for how a graduate's practice will be developed both in force and though top-up training need to be put in place

# Key learning points

- Clear lines of communication between course providers, headquarters training staff and front-line staff who manage and provide graduates with support is essential to ensure the success of any graduate conversion programme
- For evidence-based practice to take root at a local level, it needs to be promoted and supported by Senior Command Teams and L and D departments. Providing support at a local level, and encouraging the use of evidence champions, is vital if EBP is to be embraced by local officers rather than viewed as another passing fad