

***“We do employ some morons”*: Police trainers’ opinions on recruitment procedures**

Abstract

Purpose: Police training is in a period of transition; requiring new recruits to already have, or work towards, a policing degree. However, recruitment procedures have not significantly changed in the past few decades. With psychometric testing commonplace in North America and Australasia to help ensure the right recruits are selected, this research seeks to understand if police trainers feel there is scope for a similar process in the UK.

Methodology: Twenty-five police training staff across four different police forces took part in a total of six focus groups to discuss views on this and other areas of recruitment.

Findings: Results indicated that police trainers are concerned about the quality and aptitude of recruits. Support was given for the introduction of formal psychometric testing to prevent unsuitable candidates from successfully joining and/or to give trainers better insight into the personalities of their students.

Originality: There was general concern from female trainers that the police environment new recruits entered still bore elements of covert sexism. Trainers’ views on reforms to police recruitment, the implications of this and areas for future study are discussed.

Introduction

In 2003, Mark Daly - an undercover BBC journalist - successfully applied to join Greater Manchester Police. Daly completed his initial training and spent a few months as a student officer. During his time with the police, Daly secretly recorded numerous incidents of sexist, racist and homophobic behaviour by his fellow recruits which were broadcast under the title “The Secret Policeman” (BBC, 2008c). The reaction of both the police and the public was one of widespread condemnation and resulted in the resignation of ten recruits, disciplinary action against twelve and three police training staff being removed from their posts. In 2013, Greater Manchester Police commissioned the Diversity in Recruitment report to address these ongoing issues. The report recommended recruiting officers from a more diverse range of backgrounds including gender, sexuality and race. It also sought to refine the recruiting assessment centres and training to include inputs on diversity (Harding, 2014). Although the police have since recruited officers from more diverse backgrounds, officers from minority backgrounds and women still experience significant victimisation (Brown et al, 2019; Jones and Williams, 2015). One question went unanswered in the aftermath of The Secret Policeman was: how did this many recruits with racist, sexist and homophobic views successfully manage to join the police?

One method used to potentially identify such recruits is to use psychometric testing. Around 95% of police departments in North America use some form of formal psychometric testing, with approximately 15-20% of applicants failing to meet the required standards (Roufa, 2019). Psychometric testing of police recruits is also a requirement in many parts of Canada and Australasia. Its purpose is not just to examine personality traits and their compatibility with policing – for example scoring low on conscientiousness has been linked to a greater likelihood of corrupt behaviour (Detrick et al, 2004, Melig, 2012, Arrigo & Clausen 2003), but also to assess if recruits will be able to cope with the emotional demands.

Psychometric testing of recruits in the UK is limited in comparison. Some forces now use a behavioural style questionnaire and/or a situational judgment test: however, in contrast to formal personality tests, there are multiple online resources allowing applicants to practice giving the correct responses (Dorset Police, 2021). In 2019, Hampshire Police announced plans to introduce psychometric screening into police recruitment and to extend mental health screening to all roles and ranks – not just those working in traumatic roles such as child protection (Hampshire Police and Crime Commissioner, 2019). However, no other forces in England and Wales are known to use psychometric testing in this way.

Following selection, new recruits begin their formal training. The training process itself is in a state of significant change. From 2019, recruits can enter the police through the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship scheme, be paid a salary as they learn and achieve a degree after three years (College of Policing, 2020d): the aim being to increase professionalism within the police and bring entry requirements in line with other public services that now require degrees, e.g., social workers, nurses and teachers (Heath, 2011). It is also hoped that a degree level qualification will increase the “analytic skills and independence of mind” of recruits (Hough, Stanko, Agnew-Pauley, Bellur & Brown, 2018 p20). There have been mixed opinions on this change; police in the UK are traditionally representative of society because they have been drawn from society, therefore, not necessarily degree holders. Others conversely argue that the police should be suitably qualified to perform this complex and fast-moving role (Cox & Kirby, 2018). In May 2021, the Chief Constable of Northamptonshire police voiced concerns that the recruits on the policing degree programme were lacking in life experience and were unaware that they would be expected to work night shifts (LBC, 2021).

Literature Review

Selecting the right recruits to be police officers is critical. In recent years, the police in England and Wales have been the subject of a number of high profile cases of police misconduct. In 2020, the black lives matter campaign highlighted enduring issues of racism and disproportionality in policing (Fleetwood & Lea, 2020). In July 2021, the murder and rape of Sarah Everard by serving Metropolitan Police Officer Wayne Couzens raised issues of sexual misconduct in police officers, in particular, concerns regarding recruitment processes where an officer has a prior history of sexually inappropriate behaviour. These elements of an “old” police culture e.g., racist, sexist, masculine continue to be evidenced in the research despite recruits joining from younger generations (Loftus, 2010; Silvestri, 2017). Silvestri (2017) argues that simply increasing diversity within the police is not enough to combat issues of sexual misconduct, sexism and discrimination if such attitudes are entrenched. One potential way to explore this is to understand if recruits join the police with these beliefs or will absorb them over their careers. Furthermore, the expectations of recruits going into policing careers may not fully line up with the realities of policing. Charman (2018) reported that police officers perceive their roles to be less in agreement with governmental expectations of resilient crime fighters and more aligned to safeguarding and public protection. This disconnect may have implications for both new recruits’ expectations of policing culture and the content delivered within the training environment. Cockroft (2019) expands that the typically older police trainer and the typically younger police recruit are frequently seen as negatively opposed to one another may actually be reflective of expanding boundaries of police culture.

Research finds that the effectiveness of the trainers themselves is of great importance to the training process. Effective police trainers create a supportive and structured environment for new recruits, which increases their feelings of commitment and loyalty to the police (Chan, Devery & Doran, 2003; Chevalier et al, 2019). Berg (1990), identified that police officers who

become police trainers generally fall into two categories where their teaching style is either categorised by inclusion/awareness of higher education theory or driven by their previous working experiences e.g., teaching is based on crimes/incidents which they have personally experienced. This was thought to result in little educational benefit as it places the focus on the trainer, rather than the student. Shipton (2019), in an analysis of Australian police training suggests that problem based learning e.g., a student centred approach may be advantageous in developing the problem solving and decision making skills required in new recruits. The current College of Policing guidance on the required standard for police trainers reflects this in the emphasis placed on provision of student-centred feedback and learning through role play etc (College of Policing, 2021). Furthermore, the requirements to become a trainer focus on individual understanding of policing ethics, decision making and equality legislation and not on previous length of service or previous roles – and this understanding must be independently validated. Much previous research into the training of new police officers in the UK has focused on the experiences of the recruits, the impact of police socialisation and their assimilation into police culture (Constable, 2017; Cox & Kirby, 2018). There is little research into the trainers themselves and in particular:

- What are their feelings surrounding the police recruitment process?
- How do they feel about the standard of recruits?
- What behaviours do they see in recruits which might indicate future involvement in misconduct?

The research aims to address this knowledge gap by conducting focus groups with police training staff from four English police forces.

Method

A total of ten police forces in England were contacted initially to see if police trainers would be willing to take part in a focus group about police recruitment and training. By police trainers, the researcher requested police officers and civilian staff who are involved in the initial classroom training phase of new police officer recruits/special constables and Police Community Support Officers. Under the College of Policing policy for trainers, such officers and staff members must be trained to meet a required National standard which must be verified by an internal verifier (College of Policing, 2021). Of the ten forces contacted, six agreed to take part. Due to restrictions on time for their staff, two of these forces withdrew, leaving four forces. These remaining forces were all located in the south of England and were a mix of rural and urban forces. A total of six focus groups were conducted: two in force 1, two in force 2 and one each in forces 3 and 4. In total, 25 police trainers were interviewed: 11 female and 14 male. Twenty of the trainers were either serving or retired police officers and four were civilians. Force 1, group 1 comprised of one female and three males, force 1 group 2; two females and three males, force 2 group 1; four females, no males, force 2 group 2; one female and three males, force 3; one female and one male, force 4; two females and four males. Trainers ranged in training experience from 6 weeks to 30 years ($M=5.86$ years, $SD= 6.92$). At the beginning of each focus group, participants were asked to briefly introduce themselves and to state how long they had served as trainers.

Procedure

The training lead from each force's training unit arranged a suitable time for the focus groups. The first author advised that the groups be limited to five participants and had no control over who attended each group. The training lead was sent the participant information form in advance of the focus groups and was asked to share this with interested training staff,

advising them participation was optional. The participants were given a copy of this and had the opportunity to ask any questions when the first author attended to run the groups. The participants were given the consent forms prior to commencing the groups and ground rules such as allowing each other to speak and to free feel to discuss opinions within the group were explained.

Focus Groups

For five out of the six groups, the first author travelled to the participating forces and ran the focus groups in a quiet room within the training block. Focus group three was conducted remotely over Skype due to time constraints on the participants. The focus groups each lasted for approximately 1 hour and were designed to initiate semi-structured discussions. The police trainers were asked the following questions : How is police recruitment and training conducted in your force? What are your opinions on your recruitment and training processes and are there any changes you would want to see implemented? Prior to commencing the recording of the groups, the author(s) explained ground rules for the groups to the participants. These included: an acknowledgement that the participants were serving officers and might need to leave the group due to operational requirements (although this did not occur) and reassurance that their owning force would not have access to the recordings or transcripts. Participants were also reminded that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions and that it was acceptable for them to respectfully disagree with each other.

Analysis

The focus groups were all audio recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim. All personal and geographic details were anonymised. Data was analysed using an exploratory thematic approach – selected for its flexibility and due to the lack of previous research in this area; as such it is data rather than theory driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The

first author familiarised herself with the transcripts before summarising sections of text into initial codes or 'parent nodes' using NVivo. The content of the parent nodes was then collated to into potential themes before being reviewed to ensure that all data within was relevant. This allowed for the identification of the main themes and subthemes which were then checked against the transcripts to ensure all related data had been identified.

Reflexivity

The first author was a police officer who joined the police in 2004 and worked mainly as a uniformed response PC. Her only experience of the police training environment relates back to her own training. She was in the penultimate group of police officers in the South-West region to be sent to a residential training school. During her training, she was aware of one recruit from another force who was dismissed for sexual misconduct. The first author advised the participants of her policing role before commencing the interview. This was beneficial as the first author was able to understand the use of police terminology without the need to interrupt the flow of the focus groups; it also assisted in the building of rapport with the participants. The first author also emphasised her role as a researcher but was aware that her policing role may have biased her interpretation of the data. The first author has attempted to reduce the effects of any bias by coding the first two interviews with the second author initially. When the first author had completed the data analysis, the second author then validated the codes.

Results

Trainers are referred to by their participant number, a breakdown of participants across their respective forces is shown in table i.

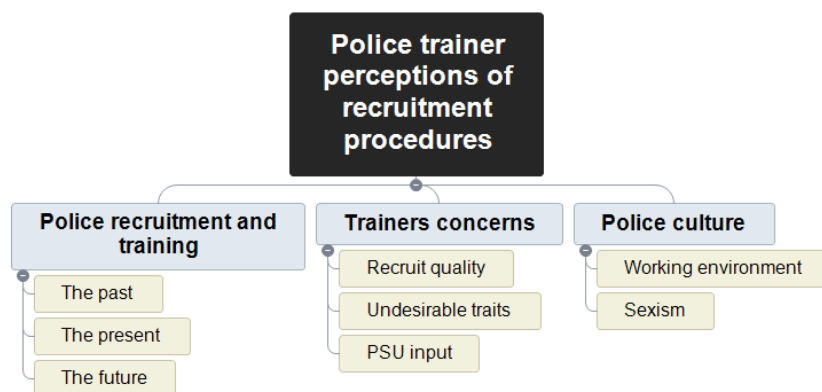
Table i: Participant demographic information

Table 1 here

The overall cohort was comprised of 14 male officers and 11 female officers, and the majority were involved in the training of police officers and, held the rank of Police Constable themselves. Forces one and four had included training staff who specialised in training front-facing civilian roles such as Police Community Support officers. Of note is that all forces except force two, included an officer at a management level in one of the groups. Further to this, one group in force two comprised of officers who had less combined experience as police trainers than was the case the other groups.

The main themes and subthemes identified by the analysis are presented in figure i.

Figure i – Main themes and subthemes



Police recruitment and training

The past

For nearly all the trainers, their own experience of police training had been at the residential centres – these were replaced in 2006 with in-force training. Trainers felt the level of discipline at these centres was greater than it is now. Trainers described tasks which were perceived as harder than those given to recruits today – tasks designed to be applied and therefore potentially more stressful and to provoke genuine reactions. Higher standards in appearance, language and behaviour were expected historically; however, recruits still sometimes engaged in misconduct outside of the classroom.

You are given some equipment and told you have to cross the river with crocodiles in and you are given a certain amount of time with bits of pieces of rope and tyres on board to cross the river... we were talking about being put under pressure, when you are put under pressure, the mask slips. P21

I think possibly there is not the discipline that there used to be. Going back to my time; you couldn't say certain things; you could not do certain things. You would march, you were parading, you saluted to senior officers you had to do those things and you knew that you could not do anything beyond all of that. P16

The present

In all but one force, trainers expressed concerns over the current police recruitment process in that the current system does not go far enough to prevent unsuitable recruits from getting into the police. Trainers described how the process has not been significantly changed for many years and that it is possible to buy books online to coach recruits through the role plays and interviews. The majority feeling is that the process was too easy and did not do enough to uncover the true personalities or motivation for joining the police. The force which did not note this had added an extra interview to the recruitment process and participants here believed this allowed them to explore a potential recruit's personality more fully. This was

particularly evident in recruits coming from a policing role such as former Police Community Support Officers and Special Constables – some of whom had a reputation for under-performing yet were successful in their police interviews.

You don't get to see someone's true personality, you go to the recruitment day, you can say the right words because you bought the book on Amazon that tells you what to say. You can have an interview ...It's three questions ... very much look up our vision and values on the force website and you say the right buzzwords and then just tick tick tick.

P14

But you also know afterwards, someone might say "oh, I know that person, they had an interview" and you go over and say, "what you think of them?" And the response you get is "oh my God, they're awful, absolutely awful" but they passed the interview so what do you do? P20

In this force, we've introduced another interview stage to make sure that these recruits are absolutely the right candidates. As I'm sure you know, the assessment centres are quite clinical and very methodical, and you'd never really get a chance to just have a chat. I just think by introducing that, we are having far less ne'er-do-wells than we did

P18

The future

The first author initiated a discussion on police recruitment in other countries – specifically, the usage of personality and aptitude testing which is more commonly seen in North America and New Zealand. The first author invited the participants to give their opinions on whether or not they thought that such tests could be used as part of the police recruitment process in England and Wales. The first author summarised the findings of Detrick et al (2004)

where psychometric testing had been used on a cohort of police recruits and had successfully identified all but one of those who were later dismissed for misconduct as an example where personality testing had been used in recruitment but emphasised the relatively low sample size and that this was a US study conducted some years ago. The first author also summarised the work of Arrigo and Clauson (2003) where various psychometric tests were assessed for suitability in identifying traits. This was presented by the first author in terms of: other countries use these tests, but we know that there is still misconduct and corruption within the police despite their usage, however there is some research to suggest there may be traits of interest.

Five of the six groups showed support for the introduction of psychometric testing as a means to know more about a recruit's personality before the commencement of classroom learning, and to prevent potentially undesirable recruits.

I think we get enough people apply that we can afford to lose one or two that didn't deserve to get in. If every 10 we get rid of that potentially could go on to do things like that, even if we get one get booted out of the application process, it is a bit of collateral in a way then yeah, I don't mind. P15

Participants in the dissenting group were concerned that the results of tests might not truly indicate if a recruit was suitable or not, if, for example, they were nervous or stressed when taking the test, e.g., they were concerned regarding the tests' validity.

I wouldn't want to see it personally. I think it's a bit hit and miss. You might turn down people that will actually, with a bit of training and things might be good police officers
P1

Interestingly, participants had different opinions on when psychometric tests should be used: with approximately half stating they would want the tests to be used as a screening

measure prior to recruitment and the other half preferring to use results to dismiss recruits only after there were concerns raised. However, it is very unlikely it would be ethical to make such a request. Recruits may also be advised by the Police Federation not to complete it under such circumstances.

If someone joined the organisation and there were alarm bells, we could say that we have concerns, take this test, and then “look, the results don’t come in as we thought, we might have to look at your future here”. P24

Trainer concerns

Quality of recruits

Participants across five of the six group felt that the quality of recruits had declined over recent years

Maybe I’m just becoming old and miserable, but I do think we employ some morons. The requirement for us is that you had a GCSE, you didn’t have to be a mastermind at anything to get in. If you’re breathing, you’ll do. If there is a bottom of the barrel, we are scraping it. P16

Participants felt this was due to a lack of standards in recruitment. A lack of research by the recruits into the realities of policing was also frequently raised across all groups with some recruits expressing surprise and disbelief that they would be required to work night shifts, over public holidays or weekends.

They’d start and they’d get the uniform and its week one and they’re horrified to learn that they’ve got to do shift work! Obviously, a lack of research from them but no one tells them, I mean they should realise what they’re getting into you know. P18

Undesirable traits

Many trainers reported certain personality traits which they had repeatedly observed in recruits who were subsequently involved in misconduct. This included arrogance, over confidence, being very sensitive to criticism and having little respect for authority. In three cases, trainers described having a gut feeling or intuition that there was something different about a certain recruit which they could not quite describe, and they were therefore unsurprised when that recruit came to their notice as the subject of a complaint.

Sometimes it's your intuition. You can't quite put your finger on why you would feel such a thing, but there was just something about his behaviour that just made you go "this is what's gonna happen" P1

We are saying this is something you need to improve on, and they don't want to accept it. There's definitely something in professionalism and being receptive to feedback. P25

Young in-service officers with a very different attitude and very cocky, which I struggled with massively. It often comes across as a lack of discipline and lack of respect for senior officers. So, when an Inspector comes in and turns around and says, "how are you?" and they go, "yeah alright mate" and you think, really? P16

Input from Professional Standards

Trainers from every focus group described how all recruits are now given mandatory inputs on misconduct from the force Counter-Corruption Units (CCUs) or Professional Standards Units (PSDs) at the very beginning of their training. In all forces, these units provide extensive guidance to the recruits on which behaviours would constitute misconduct. They also include advice on how to use social media – for example, not using full names on

Facebook/Instagram accounts to make it harder for members of the public to identify and contact them.

If there is anyone who's been on the naughty list, we can look back and then see what training they had up here so that we can say that they were aware of what was appropriate before they did it. P11

Such inputs provided strong warnings of the ramifications of misconduct to policing, the individual police force and the recruit themselves.

They have a whole afternoon of PSD in the first week of every course; about the standards of behaviour expected of them. That's why our training, on the opening we say, "you will be nodding this week, then we tell you about having to behave, and yet in a few weeks' time, I'll be standing in front of you saying that a few of you haven't listened." I say that people who have gone on to lose the jobs have sat here nodding just like you are now. P18

Trainers were generally supportive of this, although there were concerns across all forces that the message was an intimidating one to receive on the first week of training. It was also raised that despite these strong warnings, some recruits would still go on to be involved in misconduct.

But what we find that sometimes with the recruits they're actually too scared to do anything and we try to point out that you shouldn't be too frightened to do your job. It can be counterproductive in terms of this, we don't want people to be frightened to open their mouth when they're having a normal conversation or to be frightened to do their job. There is some staff in there (PSD) who I think are a bit excessive in their delivery.

P3

Police culture and sexism

Temporal changes in the working environment

Older police participants with longer police service level (approx. 17 participants) described how the working environment had changed for new recruits in comparison to their own experiences as new officers. Those who had joined the police in the 1980's and 1990's described how recruits back then would have to go through 'initiation' ceremonies to be accepted by their colleagues. Sexual initiations involving new male recruits having sex with members of the public were also described. Participants related how the atmosphere in stations has gradually changed over the years from convivial and often boisterous parade rooms, van crews and station bars to a more subdued working style.

When I joined, this kind of behaviour was commonplace, and it wasn't even really frowned upon at all. I remember that when I had been in 10 weeks, I was with a different tutor, and he got a phone call from one of the other tutors to meet in this particular car park by the woods. So, we ended up turning out and so it happened that the first tutor pulled up in a car full of girls and they were all there to have sex with all of them. P17

It wasn't unusual back in the 80s when I was in a different force to see initiation ceremonies and things like that back in the day, which was horrendous looking back.

Things like date stamping female officers' backsides, that kind of thing. P19

However, although participants were glad to see the end of clearly inappropriate behaviour, they were concerned that recruits were entering into an environment where colleagues are extremely guarded in what they say for fear of causing offence.

Everyone is offended by everything, and people know that so, people tend to be a bit more careful of how they behave I think because there is always someone who is offended. P2

Sexism

In three of the four forces, the female participants raised concerns about sexism in the police they have been witness to or victims of – both from the recruits and colleagues in the wider police environment. When male trainers spoke of sexism, it was in terms of what was acceptable behaviour in the past. Female trainers could provide recent examples of sexism – often to the astonishment of their male colleagues. However, where the male trainers' examples were of inappropriate touching or language, the female trainers described more insidious examples. The current behaviour experienced by the female trainers was more covert and harder to define – in turn making it harder to complain about. Trainers were concerned that recruits with sexist views had been recruited, that other male recruits would believe it was acceptable and commonplace after training, and how this would impact upon the female recruits.

Sometimes I experience different treatment because I'm a female trainer. Students will tend not to believe what you said and to challenge that. So, I had somebody that challenged me and said that "you're being just a woman" those were the words used. 'You're just a female trainer, you've got no experience of real life.' This was "as a woman how do you know?" and that was the exact phrase. P3

I think in 18 years I've had just as many difficulties with what I have deemed to be sexist behaviour in police officers as I did when I joined 18 years ago. Instead of it being a very overt boys club, it is now very covert, and they make you feel excluded to the point where you are excluded. P10

It's predominantly the male officers where I've seen it in. Silly things like being called "Doris" and stuff like that. They will say 'Doris make the tea' and they like go, "no make it yourself." "Doris it's your turn to get the food shopping." And they will also

go, “no it’s not” and they will throw it back but unfortunately, they do still tend to succumb in the end. P15

Discussion

Police trainers are concerned that the current recruitment processes are not sufficient to prevent unsuitable recruits from successfully joining the police. There is support for a change to these processes and/or the addition of psychometric testing during the recruitment phase. Trainers encounter many recruits who join with little understanding of the requirements of the role and some who display personality traits which are undesirable. Trainers felt that over time, the working environment of the police has changed, from sociable and boisterous to more subdued. However, despite this change, sexism was perceived to still be prevalent and was demonstrated by male recruits during their training.

Police recruitment and training

For many of the longest serving police trainers, their own experience of training was different to recruits today. The residential training centres move to in-force training was completed by 2006 as Centrex considered residential training unnecessary and not compatible with policing a 21st century society (BBC, 2005d; Heath, 2011). Certainly, there are aspects of training school teaching which were lost when the centres closed, such as compulsory marching. Additionally, the behaviour of recruits staying within the accommodation blocks was monitored even after the lessons finished - something which is no longer possible.

Despite trainers’ feelings that police training of the past was harder and more disciplined, they were still able to provide plenty of examples of poor behaviour from this period. This suggests that despite the change in setting from residential training schools to in-force and a less controlled/monitored environment, recruit misconduct still occurs. Police

training has gone through many evolutions in the past few decades with the introduction of community-based learning (Heslop, 2011), changes to teaching styles (Seggie, 2011) and the case for university-based learning (Macvean & Cox, 2012). These changes have been employed to counter the negative cultural aspects of the police such as sexism and racism, however, this research suggests some negative aspects still exist.

It is interesting to consider that although police training has undergone many changes, trainers felt that the recruitment process itself had not. Since 2003, the recruitment process across England and Wales has consisted of: application form, numeracy and literacy tests, a 20-minute structured interview and four role play scenarios (College of Policing, 2020e) with numerous books available to coach recruits. Since 2017, many forces have introduced a behavioural style and/or situational judgment tests into the application process which asks questions such as “I always put maximum effort into tasks I am set” and the response is scored on a 5-point Likert scale. Three out of the four forces involved in this research use such tests, but the trainers were unaware of how recruits scored. This is possibly because the purpose of the tests is to quickly reduce the large volume of applications for policing roles to a more manageable level (Police Oracle, 2015).

The majority of trainers supported the introduction of personality testing during recruitment as they felt it could be used to identify unsuitable recruits from an early stage and to give them more of an insight into the characters of their students. Psychometric personality testing of police recruits is commonly used in North America and Australasia. However, there is no standardised approach with different states using different tests (Arrigo & Clausen, 2003). The most frequently cited in the research are the NEO-PR-I (the “big five” test), the Inwald Personality Index (IPI) and the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). Of these three, only the IPI was designed for a law enforcement population. There is research to support the use of all three tests, alone or in combination to identify unsuitable recruits (Arrigo &

Clauson, 2003; Detrick et al, 2004; Simmers, Bowers & Ruiz, 2003) and evidence to suggest that police forces are taking notice of the results by not employing those with questionable test results (Weiss & Inwald, 2018). Newer tests designed for law enforcement, such as the M-PULSE are increasingly being used in North America and have an advantage over older tests, as the decision to employ or not is made by the police, not a psychologist (Weiss, 2010). Any personality test considered for use in police recruitment in the UK must be thoroughly validated against the native policing population, however, this could be considered.

Trainer concerns

Recruits who were underprepared for their future roles were a concern to participants across all forces. This is an interesting finding given that there is a vast amount of accessible material online to advise those who aspire to be police officers on all aspects of the job – including the need to work anti-social hours (College of Policing, 2020f; Join The Police, 2020). It is therefore possible that some recruits do not research the role before applying, perhaps because they believe they already know what it entails.

Trainers felt that recruits were getting younger, and their attitudes and behaviour were immature in comparison to older recruits. There is some evidence to support this: in 2017, the total number of police officers in England and Wales who were under the age of 25 was 5%, this rose to 7% in 2019 - earlier figures are not publicly available (Home Office, 2019b). This immaturity in some recruits might also account for a lack of research of the role prior to joining.

Some PCSO's and Special Constables (SC's) who were joining as new police officers were often criticised by the trainers in this study for their complacency in the classroom. As both of these groups would have already undergone similar, albeit shorter training courses themselves, possibly in the same classrooms and with some of the same staff, they may have an increased level of confidence in their ability than those from non-police backgrounds – this

is especially true if their own training was recent (Dobrin, Wolf, Pepper & Fallik, 2019). Additionally, coming from a working background where PCSO'S and SC'S are sometimes taken for granted by their warranted officer colleagues, suddenly being a room with recruits with no policing experience may encourage over confidence (Moore & Schatz, 2017; The Guardian, 2016).

Trainers could sometimes identify personality traits in recruits who went on to be involved in misconduct; the most frequently cited qualities being arrogance, overconfidence and not being receptive to criticism. Previous research into the personalities of police recruits in the US appears to support the trainer's opinions. Detrick et al (2004) used NEO-PR testing on a cohort of police recruits and found that 11 of the 12 non-graduates had notably different scores – namely, higher neuroticism and lower conscientiousness. The conscientious domain and facets of the NEO-PR includes being “thin-skinned” and sensitive to criticism. The neuroticism domain also includes elements of taking criticism poorly (Costa & McCrae, 1995). Arrogance and overconfidence belong in the agreeableness domain (Piemont & Weinstein, 1993), which, along with low scores of conscientiousness and higher scores of neuroticism may identify unsuitable recruits (Melig, 2012). The NEO-PR test is sensitive to cultural differences and as the baseline guidance scores for law enforcement are derived from US police, further research would be required for a UK police population.

The final aspect of trainers' concerns centred on the warnings given to the new recruits in their first week of training. Counter-Corruption Units or Professional Standards Departments gave comprehensive advice on the standard of behaviours expected with clear examples of conduct which could lead to disciplinary action. Despite this, a few recruits would still go on to be involved in misconduct, suggesting that these warnings have had little or no effect. Whether or not these recruits intended to break the rules on joining is unclear, but they may therefore fall into the definition of a “bad apple”- a morally questionable individual attracted

to power and status of being a police officer (Melig, 2012). Furthermore, some trainers felt that the warnings regarding conduct at the beginning of training were leading to recruits being too scared to perform their roles. Keesman (2022) documents police officers' experiences of freezing and describes this a temporary loss of being in their present reality which could be due to a violent situation, or more often, not knowing what to do. Keesman (2022) suggests that this response can be stigmatising and shameful to officers as it is a visible indicator that they are overwhelmed. It is therefore suggested that such strong conduct warnings are not delivered at the very beginning of the classroom training phase.

Given that trainers believe the current recruitment process does not allow for a thorough exploration of a recruit's motivation, ethics, or personality, this provides a case for psychometric testing in the UK and/or reform. The one force who had included a second interview into the recruitment process, for example, felt this gave them the opportunity to understand more about the recruits and in doing so, they believed they had reduced incidents of misconduct. Another suggestion could be to request that recruits sign a declaration that they understand and will abide by the police code of ethics.

Police culture and sexism

Trainers were very reflective of their own time as new police officers and how, in their opinion, the working environment had changed over time. This appeared to be a change from some extreme sexually inappropriate behaviour and initiation ceremonies to a more subdued environment, where officers are wary of engaging with new arrivals for fear of offending them. The change in police culture from the preserve of the white, heterosexual male to a far more diverse environment through gender, race and sexuality are well documented by the research. For many present day officers, the behaviours of the past as described by the trainers would

not be acceptable today (Loftus, 2010). Despite this however, an undercurrent of sexism remains.

The training environment is designed to be supportive, and recruits tend to build strong bonds with each other (Doreian & Conti, 2017). Once assigned to a squad and out of this supportive environment, recruits could potentially struggle if their new squads are as subdued as the trainers describe. Camaraderie and social support are important aspects of police work and may provide a protective effect from the stressors of the role (Jenkins, Allison, Innes, Violanti & Andrew, 2019; Stanley, Hom & Joiner, 2016).

The second concern trainers had regarding new recruits was the presence of sexism in the police. When the male trainers raised the issue of sexism, it was almost always used in the context of sexist behaviours of the past; in contrast, the female trainers described current examples. Female trainers used the phrase “covert” sexism to describe their experiences of being excluded by male colleagues or treated differently by them – this was both by recruits and established officers, but not from within their training teams. Examples of sexism ranged from individual examples such as female recruits being referred to as “Doris” and being expected to make tea and get food shopping or having their training credentials questioned based on their gender. There were also examples of organisational sexism where female officers were allocated incidents involving the care of children. Although defined by the trainers as “covert”, some of these examples are more suggestive of overt sexism and, in any case, both types are as damaging to women as high workloads and poor working conditions (Sojo, Wood & Genat, 2016).

Although the female trainers were able to challenge sexism, they were concerned that new female recruits were not able to. In the example of recruits being called “Doris”, the trainer who related this stated that recruits protested several times before accepting the behaviour. This

suggests a level of persistence by the male officers in making their new female colleague accept that her status is beneath theirs. Similarly, where new recruits openly question the credentials and experience of the female trainers, this was perceived to be a way of making them feel inferior to their male colleagues.

Despite reforms within the police to address sexism, the findings of this research suggest it is still present and that some recruits with questionable beliefs towards women can join the police (Metcalf, 2017). Brown et al (2019) suggests that as policing moves to a graduate profession, there is a risk that police sexism will persist as some men try to preserve the male dominated culture of the past.

Limitations

The main limitation to this research is the number of focus groups conducted and all forces involved were in the southern half of England. The results of this research may therefore not be generalizable across all forces in England and Wales. A greater number of forces were approached to take part; however, their operational demands to ensure the new policing degree programme prevented other forces from taking part. Had the timing of this research been different, more forces might have been able to participate. In three of the focus groups, the participants' supervisor was present and taking part within the group. Although it was beneficial to be inclusive of them, it might have had the effect of preventing their colleagues from speaking as freely had they not been present.

Future research

A larger study based on the results of this research would be recommended to include training staff from different regions of the UK. It would also be beneficial to include trainers from forces which use both the behavioural and aptitude tests during recruitment to understand

if trainers have the same concerns. A possible future study could involve the psychometric testing of recruits and comparing their results against those of the current recruitment elements such as the interview and the role play scenarios. This may provide insight into how the current recruitment process could be improved. Hampshire police are planning to introduce psychometric testing into their recruitment process – a future project could focus on the opinions of police trainers on the standard of recruits both before and after its implementation. Another consideration would be to understand the level of research undertaken by recruits prior to joining the police. Comparisons could then be made to understand if those who commit more time to research and/or volunteering for the police before joining experience the training environment in a different way to those who do not.

Another area of consideration for future research would be to compare the frequency of police officer misconduct in forces who had implemented the extra recruit interview with forces who used the standard interview approach. Participants in forces with this extra interview felt it was effective and such research may be able to validate this.

Conclusion

The police trainers in this study have concerns regarding the quality of police recruits and how prepared they are for life as a police officer. Trainers are aware of the traits of arrogance, over confidence and poor acceptance of criticism in recruits who commit misconduct during training. Although trainers can identify this early, these recruits were still able to pass the recruitment tests and make it into the training phase. Trainers with support from Professional Standards and Counter-Corruption units heavily emphasise the expected standards of behaviour from a very early stage. Some recruits however will fail to live up to these standards. Trainers were generally supportive of the idea of psychometric testing of recruits as they felt it might prevent unsuitable recruits from joining the police and might help

them gain a better insight into the personalities of their students. As police training transitions into its new, graduate-based approach, perhaps it is also time to consider reforms to recruitment to ensure that only the most suitable recruits have the chance to become police officers.

References

- Anonymous. (2016). I may be taken for granted, but there is nothing like being a Special Constable. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/public-leaders-network/2016/feb/27/special-constable-volunteer-police-officer>
- BBC News. (2008, October). *The Secret Policeman*.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/panorama/7650207.stm>
- Chan, J. B. L., Devery, C., & Doran, S. (2003). *Fair Cop: Learning the Art of Policing*. University of Toronto Press. <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442674783>
- Charman, S. (2018). *FROM CRIME FIGHTING TO PUBLIC PROTECTION: THE SHAPING OF POLICE OFFICERS' SENSE OF ROLE*. University of Portsmouth.
https://cleph.com.au/application/files/7315/1633/8276/perspectives_on_policing_officers_sense_of_role-FINAL.pdf
- Chevalier, S., Huart, I., Coillot, H., Odry, D., Mokoukolo, R., Gillet, N., & Fouquereau, E. (2019). How to increase affective organizational commitment among new French police officers. The role of trainers and organizational identification. *Police Practice and Research*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15614263.2019.1658582>
- Cockcroft, T. (2019). Police Culture and Police Leadership. In P. Ramshaw, M. Silvestri, & M. Simpson (Eds.), *Police Leadership* (pp. 23–45). Springer International Publishing.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21469-2_2
- College of Policing. (2020a). *Join the Police*. <https://recruit.college.police.uk/Pages/home.aspx>
- College of Policing. (2020b). *Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship*.
<https://www.college.police.uk/What-we-do/Learning/Policing-Education-Qualifications-Framework/Entry-routes-for-police-constables/Police-Constable-Degree-Apprenticeship/Pages/police-constable-degree-apprenticeship.aspx>

College of Policing. (2020c). *Recruit Assessment Centre for Police Constables*.

<https://recruit.college.police.uk/Officer/after-I-apply/Pages/Constables-Assessment-Centre.aspx>

Constable, J. (2017). *Continuity and change in initial police training: A longitudinal case study*.

<https://core.ac.uk/reader/153516620>

Costa, P., & McCrae, R. (1995). Domain and Facets: Hierarchical Personality Assessment Using the Revised NEO Personality Inventory. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 64 (1), 21–50.

Cox, C., & Kirby, S. (2018). Can higher education reduce the negative consequences of police occupational culture amongst new recruits? *Policing: An International Journal*, 41 (5).

Detrick, P., Chibnall, J. T., & Luebbert, M. C. (2004). The Revised NEO Personality Inventory as Predictor of Police Academy Performance. *Criminal Justice and Behaviour*, 31 (6), 676–694.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854804268751>

Dobrin, A., Wolf, R., Pepper, I. K., & Fallik, S. W. (2019). Volunteer Police: What Predicts Confidence in Training? *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 30 (7), 1010–1022.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0887403417749875>

Doreian, P., & Conti, N. (2017). Creating the thin blue line: Social network evolution within a police academy. *Social Networks*, 50, 83–97. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2017.03.011>

Ewart, B., & James, N. (2017). *Understanding Situational Judgement Tests*.

https://www.policeoracle.com/news/Understanding-Situational-Judgement-Tests_95830.html

Government. (2001). *Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001*.

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2001/16/contents#Legislation-Preamble>

Heath, L. (2011). Preparing new police officers for their careers: In-house training or university education? *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 13 (2), 105–123.

<https://doi.org/10.5456/WPLL.13.2.105>

Heslop, R. (2011). Community engagement and learning as ‘becoming’: Findings from a study of British police recruit training. *Policing and Society*, 21 (3), 327–342.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2011.592585>

Home Office. (2019). *Police workforce: England and Wales, as of 30 September 2019*.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/861800/police-workforce-sep19-hosb0220.pdf

Hough, M., Stanko, B., Agnew-Pauley, W., Belur, J., Brown, J., Gamblin, D., Hunter, G.,

McDowall, A., McGinley, B., May, T., & Tompson, L. (2018). *Developing an evidence-based police degree-holder entry programme*. Home Office Police Innovation Fund 2016-18.

<https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/27509/1/Developing%20an%20evidence%20based%20police%20degree-holder%20entry%20programme.pdf>

Jenkins, E. N., Allison, P., Innes, K., Violanti, J. M., & Andrew, M. E. (2019). Depressive

Symptoms Among Police Officers: Associations with Personality and Psychosocial Factors.

Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology, 34 (1), 67–77. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-018-9281-1>

Join the Police. (2020). *Could you make a difference?* <https://www.joiningthepolice.co.uk/>

Loftus, B. (2010). Police occupational culture: Classic themes, altered times. *Policing and Society*,

20 (1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439460903281547>

Macvean, A., & Cox, C. (2012). Police Education in a University Setting: Emerging Cultures and

Attitudes. *Policing*, 6 (1), 16–25. <https://doi.org/10.1093/police/par060>

Metcalfe, T. (2017). Shifting the blame: Towards a self-reforming police service in England and

Wales. *International Journal of Emergency Services*, 6 (3).

<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/IJES-06-2017-0035/full/html>

Moore, D. A., & Schatz, D. (2017). The three faces of overconfidence. *Social and Personality*

Psychology Compass, 11 (8), e12331. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12331>

- Piedmont, R., & Weinstein, H. (1993). A Psychometric Evaluation of the new NEO-PIR Facet Scales for Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 60 (2), 302–318.
- Roufa, T. (2019). *What to know about the psychological screening for police officers*. The Balance Careers. [10.3138/9781442674783](https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442674783)
- Seggie, B. (2011). *Initial police training for the 21st century*. University of Southampton. <https://core.ac.uk/display/269939?source=3>
- Simmers, K. D., Bowers, T. G., & Ruiz, J. M. (2003). Pre-Employment Psychological Testing of Police Officers: The MMPI and the IPI as Predictors of Performance. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, 5 (4), 277–294. <https://doi.org/10.1350/ijps.5.4.277.24928>
- Sojo, V. E., Wood, R. E., & Genat, A. E. (2016). Harmful Workplace Experiences and Women's Occupational Well-Being: A Meta-Analysis. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 40 (1), 10–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684315599346>
- Stanley, I. H., Hom, M. A., & Joiner, T. E. (2016). A systematic review of suicidal thoughts and behaviours among police officers, firefighters, EMTs, and paramedics. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 44, 25–44. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2015.12.002>
- Weiss, P. A. (Ed.). (2010). *Personality assessment in police psychology: A 21st century perspective*. Charles C. Thomas Publishers.
- Weiss, P. A., & Inwald, R. (2018). A Brief History of Personality Assessment in Police Psychology: 1916–2008. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 33 (3), 189–200. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-018-9272-2>
- William, H. (2014). *Diversity in recruitment final report*. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/5umy4c90amv2f0s/Diversity%20in%20recruitment%20final%20report%20-%20January%202014%20%281%29.pdf>

