

A Systematic Review of Police Recruit Training Programmes

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Abstract An evidence-based approach to guide the proposed changes to recruit police training under the Police Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF) in England and Wales requires that changes be grounded in the available evidence on what works in recruit training. This systematic review is a synthesis of primary evidence on police academies, field training, and how police recruits learn. The purpose of the review is to learn from the evidence to inform the development of a graduate level training programme in England and Wales. The review, inspired by a realist approach, includes a total of 33 studies conducted in a number of countries. Key training contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes were examined to determine how training works, under what conditions, and for whom. Findings indicate that student-centred teaching approaches were found to promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Recruits preferred practical, hands-on training over theoretical lessons, and field training was consistently shown to have a positive impact on the process of transforming recruits from civilians into police officers. Finally, the role of academic and field training tutors was found to be of critical importance for recruits in integrating theoretical learning with practical skills. Policy implications for the UK College of Policing and police forces implementing the PEQF are discussed.

Introduction

Policing in England and Wales is undergoing a shift towards becoming a more professionalized service. An important aspect of this move includes substantial changes to police recruit training and qualifications. Neyroud (2011) in his review of police leadership and training outlined the principles of policing in the 21st Century as ensuring the police are democratically accountable, legitimate, evidence-based, nationally (and internationally) coherent, capable, competent, and cost-effective. The recommendations of this report envisioned a more professional police force, governed by a

professional body. The UK College of Policing (CoP) has upheld these recommendations, particularly by driving forward the development and design of the Police Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF). The PEQF is ‘intended to support the development of policing as a profession through the provision of a coherent national approach to recognising and raising educational standards in policing’ (College of Policing, 2016, n.p.). The PEQF specifies that all police recruits must now hold or attain a degree-based qualification to become a police officer. This is because policing ‘increasingly requires police professional to be

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able to think critically, reflect and deliberate effectively, exercise judgement, challenge accepted norms, contribute to the evolving evidence-base, work with a high degree of autonomy, communicate effectively and be independent decision makers' (College of Policing, 2018a).

Three routes into the profession have been developed and standardized by the CoP: a higher apprenticeship route than earns the recruit a Bachelor's degree on completion (police constable degree apprenticeship; PCDA), a degree holder entry programme (DHEP) or graduate conversion course, and a bespoke pre-join undergraduate degree in professional policing. These three routes are deemed to be 'functionally equivalent' on completion, i.e. produce recruits with the same level of theoretical and practical skills and operational abilities, and enable officers to obtain publicly recognized qualifications at the relevant education level.

The Policing Vision 2025 sets the overall strategic purpose of the PEQF as providing an improved service for the public. The 'translation and application of the knowledge, skills, capabilities and approaches covered by the new educational approach into effective professional performance will play an important part in delivering what Policing Vision 2025 identifies as 'a more sophisticated response to the challenges we face now and in the future' (College of Policing, 2018b, p. 13). Necessary for this transition is to take stock of where recruit training currently stands in terms of the international evidence-base, and the associated knowledge gaps.

The aim of this systematic review is to develop the evidence-base of 'what works' in police recruit training by synthesizing available evidence on police recruit training in the research literature. This is the second report from the review process, the first of which presented a systematic map that

provided an overview of police recruit training literature and described the full methodology regarding our search strategy and quality appraisal (QA) exercises (McGinley *et al.*, 2020). The map presented a summary of 109 studies on police recruit training, across a broad range of contexts and themes. The resulting systematic map grouped police training related evidence into five themes: (i) examining academic and/or field training; (ii) examining part of a training programme; (iii) how recruits learn; (iv) new learning/teaching tools and (v) recruit attitudes. Review authors were guided by the aims of the study when generating these themes inductively, in particular focusing on identifying what might be most useful for informing future training programmes (McGinley *et al.*, 2020). This systematic review has a more precise scope, expressly focussing on studies that were appraised as being of medium or strong quality and from the themes of (i) academic and field training components and (iii) how recruits learn.

Methods

This systematic review aimed to answer the question: 'What can we learn from the evidence on police recruit training that can inform the development of a graduate level training programme in the UK?', with a specific focus on academic and field training components and how recruits learn.

Our search strategy involved keyword searches of 12 electronic databases,¹ including grey literature and dissertation databases, and searches of publications by relevant government, research, and professional agencies conducted by an information specialist. We applied the following inclusion criteria when screening records for eligibility in this review:

¹ The following databases were searched using a list of predetermined search terms: Criminal Justice Abstracts, PsycINFO, Scopus, ProQuest Criminal Justice Database, Global Policing Database, Sociological Abstracts, Education Database, ERIC (Education Resources Information Centre), ProQuest Theses and Dissertations, Social Policy and Practice, CINCH, and Australian Federal Police Digest.

The study should:

1. relate to an entry level training programme for new police recruits;
2. report the findings of an empirical research project on police recruit training;
3. cover substantive content on police training, i.e. should report on at least one of the following: curriculum, structure, length/duration, pedagogy, mode/delivery method, provider, assessment of trainees, evaluation of training (including outcomes), process of modernizing training course or trainee experience; and
4. be available in English.

Our search and screening phase led to the retention of 109 studies on police recruit training, which were included in the systematic map.² Studies were coded by three researchers and inter-rater reliability tests were conducted to resolve discrepancies and ensure consistency and quality of coding.³ All included studies were double-blind quality appraised and rated based on three established QA tools.⁴ Only 13 studies (12%) were of a 'strong' quality, 55 studies (50%) were 'weak', and the rest (41, i.e. 38%) were of 'moderate' quality.

Framework

This review was inspired by the realist evaluation approach (Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Pawson, 2006), which focuses on the interaction of three

components, 'Context—Mechanism—Outcome'. Realist evaluation does not simply identify whether an intervention or programme is successful, but examines 'how' it works, 'under what conditions', and 'for whom'. Using realist evaluation terminology, data extraction codes were constructed to collect key information in relation to three components: context (understanding the setting within which a change occurs), mechanism (what it is about a policy, programme, or intervention that brings about its effect), and outcome (the intended aims and subsequent outcomes of a programme). Therefore, this review focuses on the training context, relevant mechanisms, intended outcomes, as well as key implementation factors that emerged from the evidence.

Following thematic analyses using the data extracted from the included studies, five main themes and several sub-themes emerged for the systematic map (McGinley *et al.*, 2020). The first theme pertained to examining or evaluating either the academic component of the recruit training programme (e.g. the curriculum), the field training component (e.g. the tutor phase), or the entire training programme (both academic and field components). The second theme related to how recruits learned to become a police officer, based on learning theories or through cultural and/or organizational socialization. The third theme focused on how recruits learn and the fourth on evaluating

² Of the 109 studies, 56 studies (50%) collected quantitative data, 36 studies (33%) employed a mixed-methods design, resulting in quantitative and qualitative data, and 19 studies (17%) produced qualitative data.

³ Details of the methodology can be found in McGinley *et al.* (2020).

⁴ Studies were given quality ratings based on three QA tools and were rated as weak moderate or strong according to the scoring system laid down by each tool. The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (Pluye *et al.*, 2011) was used to appraise mixed-methods studies, Critical Appraisal Skills Programme Qualitative Checklist (CASP, 2017) was chosen as the tool to appraise qualitative studies, and the Effective Public Health Practice Project Qualitative Assessment Tool for quantitative studies (EPHPP, 2017). We decided to implement scoring in order to group studies according to their strength. A different scoring system to that recommended by authors was implemented for use with both the CASP and MMAT tools. 'Yes' answers received two points and 'no' and 'can't tell' answers received zero points for both tools. For the CASP tool, it was decided that from question five onwards, scoring would be changed slightly to allow the very robust studies to rate higher than studies which technically met the minimum criteria to answer each question. The 'yes' answer was changed in favour of 'yes, substantive' (giving two points) and 'yes, mentions' (giving one point). To facilitate the appraisal process using the three tools above, a bespoke instrument was created, using functionality in Microsoft Excel, to standardize the data input and logic rules to automate the ultimate quality scores. This instrument is available from the authors on request. Please see [Supplementary Material](#) for exact scoring for each of the studies included in the review.

specific teaching and learning tools. The fifth theme focused on measuring recruit attitudes on a range of issues from something as broad as police culture, or satisfaction with training more generally, to views on very specific aspects of training or policing tactics. Two studies fell outside these themes.⁵ Since the focus of the 109 studies varied considerably, to draw meaningful insights we decided to hone in on specific themes for an in-depth synthesis. Following consultation with the research project's Working Group,⁶ two of the five themes, namely, (i) academic and/or field training and (ii) how recruits learn, are focused on in this review.

This review synthesizes 33 of the studies appraised to be 'strong' (7 studies) and 'moderate' (26 studies) on methodological grounds within these two specific themes. Of the 33 included studies, 19 (58%) employed a mixed-methods approach, 13 (39%) adopted qualitative methods and one study (3%) used a purely quantitative approach. [Online Appendix A](#) provides further details on the method used, quality rating, and theme for each included study.

Context

This section gives an overview of the contexts within which police recruit training programmes operate. Within the realistic evaluation framework, it is important to examine context as 'programs are always introduced into pre-existing social contexts and ... these prevailing social conditions are of crucial importance when it comes to explaining the successes and failures of social programs' (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p. 70).

There was significant variation in the context of recruit training programmes of the 33 studies reviewed here. Over half the studies (20 studies; 56%) examined recruit training programmes in the USA. Five studies (14%) examined training programmes

from the UK. Other countries examined were Australia (3 studies; 8%), Europe (3 studies; 8%), Canada (2 studies; 6%), and one each from Saint Lucia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia (country not specified).

The bulk of the evidence stems from the UK and the USA, thus the focus of this review is on studies from these two countries. Training was most commonly provided by a training academy, and often in partnership with a university or a college. Two of these programmes in the USA led to the attainment of a Bachelor's degree (Vander Kooi, 2006; Heslop, 2013).

Timing of training

Whereas recruit training occurs in the UK post-employment, the USA had both pre-join and post-join models (Chappell and Lanza-Kaduce, 2010). Heslop (2013) found that in some parts of the USA there is heavy reliance on the 'pre-join' model, whereby recruits pay for their own training before joining the police. This has economic advantages, particularly for smaller forces under financial pressure, and allows students to ascertain if they are suited to policing before employment. This research, however, did not specifically examine whether the funding model had an impact on either the motivation or achievement of recruits.

Recruit prior education

A range of pre-employment educational experience of recruits was reported in the studies. Recruits having some form of higher education degree ranged between 28 and 78% (Chan *et al.*, 2003; Novakowski 2003; Hundesmarck, 2004; Morrow, 2008; De Schrijver and Maesschalck, 2015; Deverge, 2016). Yet little else was inferred about the impact this might have had on either the quality of training, recruit success (or otherwise), or outcome/s of training. The only comparative study suggested

⁵ One study looked at barriers to women in policing, and the other was on predicting successful completion of training.

⁶ Composed of members from academia, College of Policing, and practitioners involved in the PEQF and recruit training more generally.

recruits with higher education backgrounds performed better in cognitively oriented tasks than those without a degree (Deverge 2016).

Training structure

Most training programmes (17 of the 23 studies that mentioned training structure; 74%) were delivered in standalone blocks of academic and field training components, for example, with 20 weeks of academic and skills training in a training academy, followed by 10 weeks field training at a police force (Hendricks, 2014). Alternatively, programmes were structured with the first block in the academy, second block in field training, and a final block returning to the academy (Novakowski, 2003). Five studies described training programmes with interspersed periods of academic and field training components. The field training component also appeared to be longer in the USA compared with the UK training studies (for example, 14–18 weeks for some US programmes compared with 10 weeks in some of the UK programmes). Training structure is critical for engendering the integration of theory and practice, which is discussed further in the following section. Interspersing academic content with field training, and then providing an opportunity for students to come back to the academy to reflect on their learning in the field facilitates the assimilation.

Overall, there are substantial gaps in the descriptive aspects of the training programmes in the reviewed studies. In fact, some only examined part of the programme, such as just the field training aspect and, as such, did not describe other aspects of the programme.

Mechanisms

A wide range of mechanisms were identified within the 33 studies, which fit broadly within two categories: learning and teaching strategies and integrating theory and practice. Mechanisms are the

key factors that relate to ‘understanding what it is about a program which makes it work’ (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p. 66). Of the included studies, 13 studies (39.4%) merely mentioned some mechanism/s, 14 studies (42.4%) found some evidence of effective mechanisms, and in 6 studies (18.2%) no mechanisms were identified.⁷

Learning and teaching mechanisms

At a broad level, two student-centred learning theories which contained specific mechanisms to encourage effective learning featured in the studies. These were andragogy and problem-based learning (hereafter referred to as PBL). Andragogy is a learning philosophy specifically relating to the teaching of adults, as opposed to children (known as pedagogy, Vodde, 2008). Andragogy emphasizes active, as opposed to passive, involvement of the learner in the learning process, and builds on existing knowledge and experience. Andragogy also recognizes that adults have different learning styles (Charles, 2000; Chappell, 2007; Shipton, 2009; McCay, 2011) which was identified as a mechanism in nine (27.3%) of the included studies.

PBL follows a similar approach to andragogy in that it is ‘learner-centred and emphasise[s] experiential learning with passive facilitation and active learning’ (Letic, 2016, p. 25). PBL was identified as a mechanism in five (15.2%) of the included studies and emphasizes working through problems in a collaborative way. The goal or outcome of PBL is to develop the learner’s active participation in interaction with others and developing problem-solving and critical thinking skills (Vander Kooi, 2006, Shipton 2009; King Stargel, 2010).

A number of specific mechanisms, such as practical scenario-based learning and active involvement of learner, accorded with the principles of andragogy and PBL (Vander Kooi, 2006; Vodde, 2008; McCay, 2011, p. 87; Seggie, 2011). Studies found that learning techniques such as group discussions, simulation exercises, hypothetical case

⁷ Details can be obtained from the lead author on request.

scenarios, PBL activities, the use of the case method, and narration of stories about actual experiences, build on the experiences of the learner, thus enhancing the learning process (Poradzisz, 2004; Vodde, 2008). This echoes research on new entrants in other professions which found students prefer and respond well to practical learning, as opposed to traditional lecture-based teaching (Belur *et al.*, 2018).

The evidence suggests caution in the use of scenario-based learning, specifically highlighting that it is not to be confused with 'war stories'. 'War stories' are informal lessons told by trainers to students, and are generally considered to be a barrier to recruit learning (Chappell and Lanza-Kaduce, 2010). It was commonly found that recruits are highly receptive to 'war stories'. The content of these stories and the message conveyed are, however, often in direct contrast to the style of policing being taught in the curriculum, such as community policing (Conti, 2011; Foley, 2014; Hendricks, 2014); thus providing a distorted image of actual working conditions and job content, which is unhelpful.

Some studies emphasized the importance of constructing knowledge based on prior experiences, which involved debate and discussion to challenge recruits' prior learning and encourage different perspectives (Shipton, 2009; Rantatalo and Karp, 2016), leading to better retention, integration and application of knowledge (Lettic, 2016).

Nine (27.3%) of the included studies stressed the importance of reflection, including group or collective reflection, which involves thinking about the way things were done, what the impact was and how it could be done differently for better results (Vodde, 2008; Rantatalo and Karp, 2016). Reflection and the use of 'reality checks' challenge students' views, pre-conceived knowledge, past experiences or attitudes and re-frame them within the correct context (Charles, 2000; Heslop, 2011a).

The key to these mechanisms firing was considered to be effective facilitation and leadership by academic and field trainers and tutors. The

evidence suggests that seamless integration of andragogy, combined with learner-oriented teaching methods that encourage group discussion and reflection on practice at both the individual and collective levels is effective in delivering curricula and encouraging critical thinking skills.

Integrating theory and practice

Integrating theory and practice was mentioned as a mechanism in seven studies (21.2%); however, these were seldom articulated clearly. Mechanisms included: consistency between the academic learning component and field training component through the application of learning principles; the role of the tutor; and reflection and debriefing between the recruit and the tutor.

The evidence revealed that in designing recruit training programmes to maximize learning, consideration must be given to course structure. As mentioned previously, when combining academic and practical components of the course, an interspersed structure will provide more opportunities for recruits to apply what they have learnt in practice, and to reflect on what they have experienced operationally, to facilitate the integration of theory and practice. This can include introducing time spent back in the classroom while recruits are in the field training phase (Stanislas, 2013), or interspersing classroom learning with community placements (Heslop, 2011a). However, the timing of these interspersed periods is critical. To optimize the field training or placement, recruits should have enough understanding of the theory and context to be able to learn from observation and basic minimum exposure to operational practice, but at the same time not so early as to place them or others in any harm or danger.

During the field training phase, recruits get their first opportunity to apply what they have learnt in the classroom in practice, as well as begin to experience police socialization (Green, 2001; Hundesmarck, 2004; Chappell, 2007). It also allows tutors and trainers to observe recruits' performance and witness their development

(Novakowski, 2003). Field training ought to complement academic content, to successfully integrate theory with practice so that knowledge can be applied to practice environments and to avoid cognitive dissonance that may arise otherwise (Charles, 2000; Chan *et al.*, 2003; Hundersmarck, 2004; Chappell, 2007; Rantatalo and Karp, 2016). Integrating key themes throughout substantive modules encourages recruits to construct links between concepts and see the bigger picture of what is being taught (Chappell and Lanza-Kaduce, 2010). Thorneywork (2004) provides a specific example in Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC), which is a technique that can be used to facilitate reflection during field training and link theory and practice in a cyclical process.

Debriefing is considered to be another useful field training technique to encourage the integration of theory and practice. This involves the tutor discussing a practical experience with the recruit, encouraging the recruit to first reflect on their practical experience (for example, after an incident) and then a competent tutor giving constructive feedback (Green, 2001; Chan *et al.*, 2003; Thorneywork, 2004; Chappell and Lanza-Kaduce, 2010). Encouraging recruits to reflect and improve on their experience with their tutor, who is encouraging, supportive, and friendly rather than overly critical, is important in accustoming recruits with the cyclical feedback process that is an inherent part of problem-solving (Green, 2001; Chan *et al.*, 2003; Thorneywork, 2004; Chappell and Lanza-Kaduce, 2010).

The evidence consistently suggested that the importance of the tutor's role during this phase cannot be understated, as the field training officer (FTO)/tutor has a 'long term impact on the recruit' (Novakowski, 2003, p. 147). Furthermore, 'tutors are seen to be the bridge linking the training environments where the students have to contend with group dynamics and the realities of policing' (Thorneywork, 2004, p. 48). Tutor's approaches to their role can either be authoritative or facilitative, with the latter producing more effective

outcomes for the development of a professional police officer.

Implementation

Implementation is a vital element in any intervention, including police training: 'For both successful and unsuccessful initiatives, it is important for the practitioner to know what was done, what was crucial to the intervention and what difficulties might be experienced if it were to be replicated elsewhere' (Johnson *et al.*, 2015, p. 468). The factors identified in this section were considered important for the training to achieve its intended outcomes. Poor implementation can result in mechanisms 'backfiring', or unintended consequences. The two key areas of implementation were organizational buy-in and the role of the trainer/tutor.

Organizational support and buy-in

Most of the studies that discussed implementation were examining the introduction of andragogy or PBL into police training (or a combination of the two overlapping principles). Charles (2000, p. viii) refers to implementing a new learning model into police training as requiring 'an organisational transition of epic proportions'. This study revealed that an appropriate change in traditional police culture (founded in the 'paramilitary model' of traditional training) is essential if the transition to an andragogical and learner-oriented model is to succeed. The 'paramilitary model', characterized by hierarchy, obedience to authority, isolation, stress and discipline, was identified as a particular barrier to recruit learning (Conti, 2000; Chappell and Lanza-Kaduce, 2010; Stanislas, 2013). The influence of police culture was similarly identified as an impediment to newer, more innovative models of policing in that there exists a 'subcultural preference towards traditional policing' over new models such as community policing and problem-based policing (Chappell, 2007, p. 501). This suggests that

an appropriate change in police culture is an essential pre-requisite if training reform is to become embedded.

Police culture has a natural impact on how recruits are socialized into the organization. Recruits are receptive to the environments within which they experience operational police work (Conti, 2011), and the effect of 'traditional' police socialization, characterized by obedience to authority, stress and hierarchy, is contrary to the academic development of the independent, critical thinking and problem-solving recruit (Conti, 2000; Chappell and Lanza-Kaduce, 2010; Conti, 2011). Integrating theory and practice was often forfeited within the training programmes, whereby operational policing, often referred to as 'real police-work' (Chappell and Lanza-Kaduce, 2010, p. 195), was privileged over academy work that was 'scenarios' and 'made up reality' (Chan *et al.*, 2003, p. 155), indicating a lack of understanding of these teaching and learning techniques. Moving away from the 'traditional academy model' is one way to counteract the negative aspects of recruit socialization and police culture, which have been shown to hinder recruit learning. Other benefits include exposing recruits to varied environments, such as schools, hospitals, and charities helps recruits to understand diverse communities and the workings of allied organizations similar to those they will eventually work in (Conti, 2000; Vodde, 2008, Heslop, 2011a).

Another barrier that can arise from a lack of support from the organization, or poor implementation, is a lack of adequate resources for recruits (King Stargel, 2010; Stanislas, 2013; Foley, 2014). This can include equipment that aids recruits in their learning, such as access to computers or a library, as well as physical attributes of the learning environment. Facilitation of specific learning activities, such as group discussion and debate, is aided or obstructed by conducive physical environments. Importantly, organizations must avoid the 'quantity over quality' policy, whereby students are over-recruited, thereby limiting staff-student ratios and

putting pressure on existing resources (Foley, 2014, p. 207).

The importance of field training in facilitating the integration of theory and practice, as well as exposing recruits to operational police work and socialization into the culture, cannot be stressed enough. Organizational buy-in ensures that field training is organized and delivered to be effective. The most significant factor in field training is a supportive and effective tutor constable or FTO. Failure of field tutors/trainers to acknowledge academy learning, or actively privilege operational training over academic learning, was argued by a number of studies as being counterproductive and detrimental to the training process.

Key to effective field training is that recruits remain with the same tutor for their field training period. This involves having adequate number of tutors available to meet the demand of recruits, and appropriate scheduling. Continual change of tutor and environment is suboptimal for recruit development (Green, 2001). Field tutors need to be carefully selected, choosing officers who are motivated individuals with adequate expertise, training, and motivation to teach (Novakowski, 2003). Ideally, tutors/trainers should volunteer for the role or show an interest in teaching (Green, 2001; Vodde, 2008), or alternatively be selected by their superiors, who recognize their ability and potential (Thorneywork, 2004; Hendricks, 2014).

Another essential component of the field training phase is management by shift supervisors. Managers must recognize the needs of recruits, and as such be allocated shifts or jobs that are beneficial to their development. The pressure to resist mismanagement or organizational demands lies with the tutor (Green, 2001, p. 13), which can often produce professional dilemmas for them, especially if resources are limited. It is important that adequate time is allocated for recruits and tutors to engage in reflection or de-briefing, during this crucial phase. Implementation of the field training therefore requires support and coordination between all agencies, including the academic

institution, the field training provider, and all training staff (Novakowski, 2003, p. 152).

Trainer/tutor role

The instructor's role within both andragogy, and PBL, is notably different to the traditional lecture-based, teacher-focused model of police training. Andragogical (adult education) models require in-depth knowledge of student-centred learning methods that would often be contrary to the model under which trainers or tutors were themselves trained (Charles, 2000; Lettic, 2016). Similarly, the teacher's role within PBL is to 'live in the background ... which is a difficult role to assume when the instructor is used to be the focus of the students' (King Stargel, 2010, p. 140). The evidence suggests that trainers during the academy phase, and tutors, during the field training phase, both need to be sufficiently trained in order to deliver a student-centred learning model and to understand their role. This is essential to avoid recruits' frustration with their instructors who attempt to teach without the proper training and a visible lack of 'buy in' from instructors (Lettic, 2016).

Trainers also must develop specific facilitation skills (Shipton, 2011), for example, withholding immediate answers to encourage students to find information themselves (Lettic, 2016), and also be conscious of when to 'check in' with students to ensure they are finding and understanding the right answers (Charles, 2000). Key to note is the importance of both academics and practitioners working to deliver training in partnership.

The evidence indicated that the training for educators is inconsistent, with some receiving no new training (Chappell, 2007), and others receiving training that was as variable as 8 h, 2 days, 1 week, or up to 140 h. These studies, however, did not indicate the quality of the training received, or if they trainers/tutors felt this was adequate to perform their role.

Training aims and training outcomes

To synthesize the outcomes of the training programmes reviewed, it was first essential to establish what the training aims were and whether the studies were measuring related outcomes. The wide ranging focus of the 33 included studies meant that outcomes were seldom comparable, chiefly because the aims themselves were hugely variable. Fourteen (42%) studies did not provide any detail regarding training aims or intended outcomes of training.

Most studies did not specify the training aims, tacitly assuming it was not necessary to define specific aims because police academies are legally required to teach a curriculum with well-defined subjects. Some authors provided a list of topics that were seen as important, such as 'police integrity, the code of ethics, police misconduct, police organizational values and their discretionary power' (De Schrijver and Maesschalck, 2015, p. 105) or 'policing activities, police technology, tactical intervention, crowd control, and commitment to training' (Deverge, 2016). Others presumed that the general aim of academies was for recruits to ultimately pass formal examinations and progress to become police officers, equipped with the skill sets and competencies needed to function as a police officer (Green, 2001; Vodde, 2008; McCay, 2011). This assumption was made without specifying what knowledge was required (Heslop, 2011b) or whether the success in exams translated into behaviour in practice.

Chan *et al.* (2003, p. 44) explains the general aim of the Police Recruit Education Programme (PREP) was to produce 'reflective practitioners' who were accountable, effective decision-makers, and operationally independent. Similarly, Conti (2011, p. 411) notes recruits must meet performance requirements for 'physical fitness, self-defence, fire-arms, and the like' and 'demonstrate that they are worthy of an eventual elevation to the status of police officers'. Aims for specific parts of

the training, such as field training, were as ambiguous as producing constables fit for independent patrol status (Green, 2001) or 'to reach a level of competence in the workplace to the satisfaction of their tutor constable' (Thorneywork, 2004, p. 2). Aims of academies that incorporated a community-oriented approach were said to produce officers capable of developing rapport and building trust with local communities, having strong officer presence, and being decisive and assertive (Chappell, 2007).

On the other hand, some programmes focused on specific aspects of training reportedly increased specific skills or qualities, for example, increase in knowledge of code of ethics (De Schrijver and Maesschalck, 2015) and problem-solving and critical thinking skills (Vander Kooi, 2006). However, not all outcomes measured were positive or achieved the intended outcomes. For example, Heslop (2011a, p. 340) found placements which took training out of the classroom and into the community 'had only a limited effect'. Foley (2014, p. 194) found training produced physically fit recruits, but recruits felt they had 'little or no acquisition of skills but knew how to take a direction from authority'.

Given that many studies did not even identify clear training aims there was under-reporting of training outcomes within the 33 studies. Of those that did provide this information the outcomes provided by authors were mixed, ranging from successfully completing the training (Chan *et al.* 2003), to achieving some skills or qualities as a result of training (Vodde, 2008; McCay, 2011).

One of the biggest gaps in this evidence review, therefore, was the lack of evaluation of overall training outcomes. Without the articulation of specific training aims, the evaluation of outcomes was scattered and disparate. We were therefore unable to synthesize the training outcomes in any meaningful way to be able to conclude whether any training programme, or part of it, 'worked' or not.

Discussion

Here we discuss the findings in terms of the context of the training, understanding how the training works and whether there are any specific conditions under which the chances of success are maximized. We also highlight limitations of the evidence and draw out the implications of the findings to guide future implementation and evaluation of the DHEP under the PEQF in England and Wales. Prior to highlighting the limitations of the evidence base as a whole in this area, we first acknowledge the limitations to this review. Our criteria for inclusion in this review had the common exclusion policy of studies in languages other than English. This decision was made due to resource constraints in translating non-English studies. This has however biased our findings in obvious ways. That said, we believe these biases are not detrimental to answering the UK-focused question guiding this review: 'What can we learn from the evidence on police recruit training that can inform the development of a graduate level training programme in the UK?'

Context

In describing the training programme context, the overarching aim was to investigate the relationship of the context to the outcomes of the recruit training, and how decisions about the design or delivery of a recruit training programme can affect its effectiveness. Context matters to 'the extent to which these pre-existing structures "enable" or "disable" the intended mechanisms of change' (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p. 70). Our findings, however, showed that much of the available information on the contextual factors of training was purely descriptive, and studies did not specifically look for, or find a relationship between the contextual factors and outcomes related to recruit training. The sole contextual factor that emerged as relevant to the DHEP was the importance of an integrated programme structure, whereby academic and field training components are interspersed, as opposed to being delivered in standalone blocks.

Mechanisms

Few studies explicitly referred to the mechanisms that ensured training effectiveness, and only a handful of studies attempted to evidence these. Nevertheless, we inferred a number of implicit mechanisms from the included studies. Overall, mechanisms were broadly grouped into two types: learning and teaching mechanisms; and integration of theory and practice—both of which aimed to enhance a number of outcomes for students.

Learning and teaching models such as andragogy and PBL were found to contain a number of specific techniques that aimed to optimize learning and teaching for recruit training. These included scenario-based teaching methods that encouraged active participation, reflection, and peer learning. In particular these methods were found to increase recruits' problem-solving and critical thinking skills that are needed to overcome the challenges operational police officers are faced with on a daily basis (Vander Kooi, 2006; Lettic, 2016).

Successful integration of theory and practice is key to ensuring the success of any police training programme. This could be partly engendered by judicious design and structure of the course, whereby there are built-in opportunities for incorporating theoretical inputs into operational practice. Especially important is the field training aspect which, arguably, is the most important period of initial training in the process of becoming a police officer (Hendricks, 2014). Both academy instructors and mentors need to have the right attitude, be knowledgeable, highly skilled, and experienced, and be perceived as such by the recruits.

Implementation

A number of implementation factors were mentioned as being important to delivering effective training. At a high level, philosophical and pedagogical changes made to a training programme require thorough commitment from the organization, key decision makers and

implementers, to the reform. This includes, at the organizational level, the introduction of policies and changes to training structure that are necessary for the change to be successful. It also requires organizations to carefully select appropriate trainers and tutors, as well as investing in training to equip them with the necessary knowledge. This ensures that training is delivered by highly skilled and motivated trainers that have 'bought in' to the changes in the curriculum and teaching and learning methods being introduced. Furthermore, students also feel this investment, so that they understand their role within their training environment, and they too can 'buy in' to the training. Changing recruit training from paramilitaristic models to encouraging independent thinking and problem-solving necessitates a change in the organizational culture, which has traditionally valued operational expertise over theoretical knowledge. Any change in police culture is a long-term process. Nevertheless, evaluations expect to measure immediate results of changes in training. It is, therefore, worth noting that thorough implementation of any new learning model can take time, and the results might not be immediately apparent (Charles, 2000; Chan *et al.*, 2003).

Implications for policy and practice

The review of the available evidence in other vocational professions such as teaching, social work and law on 'what works' suggests several important policy recommendations for guiding the design and delivery of a graduate level conversion training programme (Belur, 2018). However, since many of the studies on police training in this review did not mention training aims or focus on evaluating overall training outcomes, the evidence on whether training 'works' is insufficient. Training success (or otherwise) has traditionally been measured in terms of trainee satisfaction with the training or trainer, and/or their performance in exam related tasks. Thus, conclusions about whether or not the training 'works' have been based on 'artificial' assessments and scarcely focused on the intended

outcome of improving service to the public, if that could be assumed to be the ultimate goal of producing a professional police officer in a liberal democracy (Marenin, 2007).

Clearly almost all the studies looked at traditional recruit training which seems to be on par with level three⁸ training in the UK. However, the increased level at which the CoP are aspiring new recruits will be able to operate at, envisages a sea change in not only the content but also the teaching and assessment methods. Close collaboration between forces and Higher Education Institutions will bring about a shift in conceptual and cultural attitudes towards training that should assist the implementation of the new curriculum and training under the PEQF. However, in order to evaluate whether this 'uplift' in training has the desired impact, it is first important to articulate what the desired outcomes are and work out the steps through which the proposed new training will achieve these intended outcomes. We, therefore, recommend that the CoP, police forces and Higher Education Institutions involved in the delivery of the PEQF look to the available evidence in other professions, similar to the degree conversion courses referred to earlier, to guide the apprenticeship and pre-join degree courses for recruits.

Further, in order to test whether recruit training is working in the way it was conceptualized to achieve intended outcomes, the development of a theory of change is essential to underpin any new training programmes. We suggest a theory of change or well-articulated logic model, currently missing from existing training evaluation literature, would provide a good basis for evaluating the interim and final outcomes of the training programme and identifying what is working and how.

Finally, the evidence suggests that existing recruit training evaluation is restricted to the first two levels of Kirkpatrick's training evaluation

model (Kirkpatrick, 1959), focusing on eliciting trainee reaction (to the trainer, in the first instance, and then the content of the training) and assessing learning outcomes. However, none of the evaluations included in this review assessed the effect of training on behaviour modification, and ultimately on whether they improved policing outcomes in the medium or long term. Given the introduction of PEQF in England and Wales, which is a radical reconceptualization of police training, it would be in the interests of the CoP and various police forces to ensure that the 'uplifted' training programmes are indeed achieving intended outcomes. We suggest that future evaluations need to incorporate and extend beyond Kirkpatrick's four levels, to a fifth level of training evaluation, which measures contribution to society (Kaufman and Keller, 1994). This would provide the requisite rationale to justify the investment into uplifting recruit training to a graduate level.

Conclusion

This systematic review synthesizes the available evidence contained in 33 studies on police recruit training across various countries. Inspired by a realist approach, the review views the evidence within the Context-Mechanism-Outcome configuration to elicit conclusions about whether recruit training works, and if so, for whom and under what conditions. In doing so we revealed that the wide range of evidence is scattered and diffuse. Although studies described the context, rarely did they associate it with the implementation or mechanisms linked to the success of the training. Underdeveloped theory guiding police training has meant that mechanisms are often left unarticulated, and even if they mentioned, are rarely tested. Finally, findings on the studies' programme aims and outcomes were

⁸ Referring to the difficulty of the qualification (<https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean> (accessed 02 February 2019)).

disappointingly thin. Aims were often poorly articulated and we have been unable to say anything of significance about outcomes. The lack of any specific conceptualization of training aims and outcomes in the medium and short term has meant that success has been measured in terms of student satisfaction or ability or successful completion of the training. As the available studies on the impact of police training are weak and inconclusive, further research might explore the wider literature on occupational training and education in other professions and more generally.

There is an urgent need for a proper theory of change and the design of logic models to guide the design and implementation of the three training routes under the PEQF. Eclipsing this, it is critical that a theory-based evaluation of the proposed training is conducted to compare and contrast outcomes of training associated with each entry route and further, to establish whether and why any particular route has been more 'successful' (or not) than others.

The landscape of recruit training is changing rapidly, however, exigencies of delivering an ambitious overhauled training programme within a short time period and with limited resources, should not allow the lessons learnt from the evidence to fall by the wayside.

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Supplementary material

Supplementary data are available at *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice* online.

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