

A critical exploration of the PEQF – considering how recruits learn to be police officers and the influence of informal learning on their development

Following the journey of 19 PEQF recruits in a medium-sized force, examining their motivations, learning, experiences and socialisation.

Key details

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Police region	South East
Level of research	PhD
Project start date	June 2021
Date due for completion	September 2024

Research context

The aim of this research is to critically explore values, perceptions and experiences of police recruits since the implementation of the policing education qualifications framework (PEQF), understanding the influence of formal and informal learning.

Historically, research on police training has identified its inconsistency and lack of depth. The PEQF is a significant change to policing training and involves new relationships with universities and a degree-level qualification. Although policing has changed over the last 20 years, recruits still join with idealistic views and become cynical over time. This can affect:

- how they police
- their own wellbeing
- the service they provide to their communities

According to Charman (2017), recruits learn policing and their identities are shaped significantly by their peers and coaches (informal training). These experiences, external to their formal training, influence how they view and value training, the police organisation and the role of policing in society.

It is for this reason that this research is being conducted, to establish whether the PEQF – which aims to develop critical thinkers and reflective practitioners – will influence how recruits learn to be officers and whether it will have any impact on police culture.

There are four main objectives that this research will consider.

1. To critically examine and synthesise existing theoretical perspectives and wider associated literature on police training, socialisation and culture.
2. To critically explore recruit motivations for joining the service and to what extent their experiences of policing match their preconceptions prior to joining the force.
3. To use an interpretative, qualitative approach to explore the values, attitudes, perceptions and experiences of police recruits and others directly involved in their learning, focusing on their socialisation since the introduction of the PEQF.
4. To situate the research findings within existing theoretical frameworks, contributing to academic knowledge and police professional knowledge understanding of how recruits learn to become a police officer.

This researcher is supported by the [College of Policing bursary scheme](#).

Research methodology

This longitudinal research is exploratory and interpretative in nature. It will critically explore the values, perceptions and experiences of recruits on the PEQF and how they learn to be police officers.

According to Ashforth and Mael (1989) researching those new to an organisation over time provides an insight into how and when aspects affect personal changes, which is fundamental to

this research. An interpretative approach understands 'values, beliefs and meaning of social phenomena' (Hussain and others, 2013), correlating directly to this research. The ontological view is subjective, as reality is observed and construed by the individual. The epistemological view is that knowledge is formed and deciphered by both the participants and the researcher.

The theoretical framework for this research will be based on organisational socialisation and social identity theory. According to Ashforth and Mael (1989), organisational socialisation and identity are woven together. They argue that developing who you are depends on where you are and what is expected of you. Policing has many groups and roles with differing values, norms and beliefs.

The research will be mainly qualitative. The research involves non-probability sampling of recruits on either the degree-holder entry programme (DHEP) or the police constable degree apprenticeship (PCDA).

The researcher works within policing and uses a gatekeeper to contact recruits – preventing any conflict of interest and eliminating unnecessary ethical issues. This maintains transparency and professionalism throughout.

Participant uptake was initially slow. But after the first couple of interviews the researcher identified that 'snowball sampling' was more effective than the initial letter recruits received.

The research will involve semi-structured interviews being conducted with the participants at different stages of their learning journey and will be supported by a short questionnaire. The research is ethical and adheres to research governance at the University of Portsmouth. Interviews will be analysed using thematic coding and use NVivo.

Tags

- [PEQF](#)
- [PCDA](#)
- [Bursary scheme](#)