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Police Education, Professionalism, and Diversity

Associate Professor Michael Rowe,
Institute of Criminology,
Victoria University, Wellington



The Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies (TILES) publishes regular Briefing Papers on topics related to the Institute's research program. This Briefing Paper is prepared by Associate Professor Michael Rowe who is the Director of the Institute of Criminology at Victoria University Wellington, New Zealand. The paper reviews some of the key developments in the relationship between University sector education and police officer training in the UK, in the US and in Australasia over the last four decades. Key debates and problems in understanding police professionalism are also discussed. This is a timely paper given the work currently being done by TILES and the School of Government at UTAS in collaboration with staff at the Tasmania Police Academy to revise the Bachelor of Social Science (Police Studies) degree to incorporate an in-service pathway for Tasmania Police recruits in the future. This paper was initially delivered at the Tasmania Police Academy in October 2008.

Roberta Julian, Associate Professor and Director of Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies

Closer integration between university sector education and police officer training has been pursued along a number of paths in various countries for several decades. As is outlined below, the diverse range of arrangements that have been developed make it difficult to comment upon the efficacy of these developments in general terms. Just as the nature of programmes and schemes has been diverse, so too have the stated, and implied, reasons for encouraging or requiring that police officers pursue tertiary level education. This briefing paper intends to review some of the key developments in this field that have occurred in the UK, in the US and in Australasia over the last four decades and to pose some important questions about the relationship between police and university educators. Previous consideration of the impact of tertiary education on policing has focused on a range of barriers and impediments relating to cultural, structural and managerial challenges. This paper accepts that such factors need to be addressed but also argues that ambiguity and uncertainty around the core notion of 'professionalism', which has promoted much of the growing integration of police training and the university sector, also makes assessing the impact of new forms of police training difficult to measure. Key debates and problems in understanding police professionalism are outlined. The paper begins by identifying current models of police education and the public sector reform that has encouraged the development of partnerships between police and universities, before reviewing some of the perceived benefits associated with an increased emphasis on officer education. It is then argued that increasing pluralisation of policing means that debate about police education needs to be broadened. While definitive answers do not emerge from this limited review, these questions need to be identified and considered carefully if effective and efficient improvements are to be made to contemporary policing.

Models of police education

Police participation in university-level education can be considered on a spectrum, from full integration such that police officers are required to complete a whole programme of study, through a range of intermediary positions where officers are required or encouraged to pursue relatively short term opportunities, to a non-integrated model whereby officers might take university courses

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Contact:

Associate Professor
Roberta Julian
Institute Director
University of Tasmania
Private Bag 22
Hobart Tasmania
Australia 7001

Telephone

+61 3 6226 2217

Facsimile

+61 3 6226 2864

Email

Roberta.Julian@utas.edu.au
tiles@utas.edu.au

Website

www.utas.edu.au/tiles
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as a matter of personal volition. The research literature relates variously to police officers entering the service as graduates, officers completing university courses as an element or totality of their probationer training, police accelerated promotion schemes that incorporate tertiary-level study, and the sponsorship of individual officers to complete post-graduate study to develop their specialist knowledge and interests. The breadth of university education on offer makes any straightforward discussion difficult.

Mahony and Prenzler (1996) suggest that this plethora of arrangements can be considered in terms of three key models of police education whereby the two 'strong constants' of the university and the police training academy interact in distinct ways. First, they identified a 'partnership of equals' such as existed, for example, in New South Wales in the 1990s. In this model, the university cross-credits police training towards tertiary qualifications and police require that officers complete university study in order to gain promotion from constable to senior constable. The partners operate fairly autonomously. The second model is the 'integrated university-academy' model, such as that existing in Queensland in the early 1990s or the Victoria Police Education Programme operated by Victoria University Wellington and New Zealand Police from 2000 to present. In Queensland, university involvement in police training was part of a parcel of reforms promoted by the Fitzgerald Inquiry in response to corruption in that state (Fleming and Lewis, 2002). In this model police training is co-provided by police academies and tertiary providers. In Queensland the first half of police training was completed entirely at university and the second half in the police academy; whereas the sequence of provisions is reversed in New Zealand. Nonetheless both partners liaise in terms of content and synthesis of courses provided. The third model does not require collaboration between academy and university but police services can make possession of a university degree an entry requirement. This condition was introduced by the Australian Federal Police in the early 1990s but has not been widely used internationally.

Police reform and structural changes in the tertiary education sector have led to a proliferation of partnership arrangements in England and Wales as probationer training has developed into the Initial Police Learning and Development Programme (IPLDP), introduced as part of wider police reform programmes that have been continuing since 2001 (Kempa and Johnston, 2005). Under IPLDP, police training has been transferred from the academy to university-sector providers. North Yorkshire police, for example, have developed a partnership with University of York, St John, such that academy instructors are now part of the teaching staff in the university and probationers are refashioned as Student Officers fully integrated into general campus life. Leicestershire Police rely on

De Montfort University to provide a 23 week foundation degree in policing that ...

'... has a strong local focus, an emphasis on community engagement and enables student officers with family commitments to stay close to home. The officers are required to spend at least 80 hours getting involved in community projects.'¹

As this extract from the service's homepage indicates, advantages of the IPLDP are held to be a stronger promotion of community engagement and that new recruits do not have work-life balance disrupted by a requirement to spend six months billeted away at a police college. Both proclaimed benefits indicate that this model of police-university partnership has developed alongside other reforms intended to promote diversity in policing generally, and particularly in recruitment (Rowe, 2009). This in turn reflects a wider tendency for reforms to the provision of police training to be introduced as a form of crisis response. In the British experience of recent years these changes have tended to relate to institutional racism, but in other territories, notably Australia and the US, university provisions have been introduced into training in an attempt to promote professionalism and to tackle corruption. The lack of clarity surrounding the purpose of police tertiary education is returned to later in this paper.

Historical perspectives

While particular programmes introduced in recent decades reflect local circumstances, the promotion of university education for police officers has a considerable pedigree. For more than a century a series of 'blue-ribbon' inquiries and high-level Commissions in the United States have proclaimed the value of police officer completion of university courses and made various commitments and established targets to this purpose. As long ago as 1917, the 'father of modern policing' in the US, Augustus Vollmer, against a context in which US police officers received little recognizable training of any kind, advocated that all officers be required to complete three years of university-level study (Polk and Armstrong, 2001). The benefits of tertiary-level education were subsequently restated by a plethora of twentieth century reviews of US policing, although it was not until the mid-1960s that such calls began to receive official endorsement in a raft of commissions into 1960s urban unrest, civil rights, and concerns about corruption. To take two examples, both the 1967 President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the 1973 National Advisory Commission of Criminal Justice Standards and Goals argued that a fundamental goal should be that all officers should have a tertiary degree, and that this be achieved by the early 1980s.

That these commissions, as others of a similar form, had been established to investigate problems relating to policing and civil rights and police corruption, reflects a



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wider trend for police tertiary education to be promoted as a means of promoting professionalism.

Authoritative though these demands might have been, it is clear that they had little impact in terms of police officer participation in education in the US. Carter and Sapp (1992, cited in Baro and Burlingham, 1999) reported that officers had spent an average of 13.6 years in education, a rise of only one year in two decades and that 75 per cent of local police departments had no policy linking officers to tertiary education. Baro and Burlingham's (1999) study found that only one per cent of law enforcement agencies required that recruits had a four-year degree, despite repeated high-powered demands that such standards become the norm.

Public sector reform and the growth of police education

What emerges from this brief historical review is that recent programmes that have, in the various ways outlined, integrated police training with university education have been pursued as a response to various forms of professional crisis, relating to identified problems of police malpractice, institutional racism, corruption, violence, and so on. However, the development of joint provisions cannot only be understood as a policy response to emerging problems. Similar commissions of inquiry had recommended police integrate more closely with tertiary education for many decades and yet had made little appreciable difference to actual training provisions. It is argued in the next section of the paper that the recent acceleration of tertiary-level police education has been caused by both the development of police professionalism and broader structural reforms that have been brought to bear on police services and education providers. The nature of these reforms, and their impact on police education and training, are outlined in the following paragraphs.

Although police services might have experienced reform rather later than many other agencies within the public sector, by the mid-1990s in Britain, Australasia and elsewhere, the introduction of private sector 'discipline' had meant that both police services and universities were encouraged, sometimes with carrot and sometimes with stick, to seek new markets, to develop innovative 'products' and flexible delivery systems (Leishman, et al, 2000, Prenzler and Ransley, 2002; McLaughlin, 2007). In UK universities, for example, entrepreneurial centres were encouraged to provide applied training and research capacity to private and public sector organisations that had hitherto not been engaged with higher education providers. The new entrepreneurs, eager to supply consultancy and training services, found a ready market among their public sector colleagues keen to outsource the provision of a host of services once delivered internally. These trends have not only led to fruitful relations between police and educators, but have developed along a number of lines as governments, the public sector and private industries have turned to universities to skill and re-skill workers at various points in their careers. New police recruits might attend university for part of their initial probationer training, return again as they

move up the promotion ladder, and then re-visit for further re-orientation as they seek a second career having left the service with a generous pension while still only in their late 40s. The evolution of universities as venues for 'life-long learning' means that flexible career trajectories are catered for at their various stages. From a police service perspective, fixed developmental costs associated with providing research and training inputs could be transferred to a host of subcontracted educational providers and private consultancy companies.

Fleming and Rhodes (2005) have described the movement from bureaucratic to contract government, such that new modes and mentalities surround the provision of public sector services to the public, but also new forms of governance exist within public-sector internal markets and between agencies in the public sector. In the context of policing in England and Wales, the devolution of policing to Basic Command Units (subdivisions of the 43 constabularies), 'hollowed' out central police HQ that came to adopt a role as provider of support services: human resource functions, financial controls, infrastructural and technological support, estate maintenance, and training. Crucially, these services are procured by central constabularies, who may not be involved directly in the delivery of these services. With particular relevance to training and tertiary education, a British Home Office circular describes the police service role in managing police learning and training in terms of specifying the training or learning requirement, using the National Training Costing Model to identify the costs of annual training plans, developing a business plan that will manage the learning and development, and ensuring that programmes are effectively evaluated. Although much police training continues to be met it is clear that services are intended to adopt a procurement role rather than a provider role (although some of that may be done).

In their analysis of police 'shopping' for external providers of goods and services, Ayling and Grabosky (2006) suggested that contracting out was pursued for a combination of economic, ideological and pragmatic reasons. Perceived benefits to police services related to the skills and expertise of external providers, gaining independent perspectives and a better quality provision. Part of the process of developing professional policing is to develop evidence-based practice that draws, in part, on research and analysis that can be generated by police-university partnerships. All of these factors might account for the outsourcing of police training to Universities but it is also clear that some other potential benefits might also be identified from the perspective of the tertiary education sector such that advantages from external resources, benefits of prestigious partnerships and the development of research programmes provide considerable synergy between the real and perceived interests of police service and university alike. Ayling and Grabosky (2006) also suggest a range of risks police associate with outsourcing of goods and services, including those relating to cost, dependency on external providers, and impact on internal staff and capacity, which also seem likely to apply to the co-production of training and educational programmes. It is beyond the scope of this briefing paper to

develop an evaluation of how potential benefits and risks have been experienced in actual links between police services and tertiary education providers, but it is noted that consideration of the impact of these arrangements needs to begin from an understanding of the structural and institutional changes in public services that have, in part, motivated the expansion of police engagement with the university sector.

Considering the impact of education on policing

Having described some of the ways in which police education has been transformed since the 1990s, and argued that this needs to be understood as a result of structural as well as ideological or pedagogic trends, the paper now critically reviews some of the advantages that are claimed by advocates of police participation in university education. Although the benefits of tertiary education for police are not always articulated, it is clear, as has been noted, that a desire to increase professionalism has underpinned much of the recent expansion of police participation in university courses. Much of the research evidence suggests that police education, broadly, has a positive impact in terms of reducing complaints about officer behaviour and consequent reduction in police service liabilities and compensation payments to the public (Paoline and Terrill, 2007). It also appears that participation in university education is associated with personal attributes valued in police officers, such as enhanced communication and critical thinking skills, and higher levels of job satisfaction (Breci, 1997). Interpreting these trends is made difficult, however, as studies are rarely able to address questions about the direction of these positive relations. In other words, it might be that officers who have a more reflexive attitude towards their role in society might be more likely to communicate effectively, to have stronger critical thinking skills and be more empathetic with members of the public and that these characteristics also make them more predisposed to pursuing university courses.

Understanding professionalism

Judging the impact of education on police work is also made more difficult since it remains unclear whether professionalism is best understood in terms of the integrity of individual officers or whether it needs also to be considered in respect to officer *performance*. As Wimshurst and Ransley (2007: 107) noted 'there remains widespread uncertainty in the research literature about what a university education means in terms of doing a "better" job of policing'. Individuals who have completed tertiary study might be more satisfied in their work, communicate better and have better interaction with the public; given the importance of public reassurance these gains are not negligible. It is less clear, though, whether officers perform better in

terms of crime investigation than might otherwise be the case. Partly this is due to the methodological limitations of much of the research evidence. For one thing, police education, as we have seen, tends to be introduced or re-engineered during periods of reform following crisis. Training and educational interventions are a favoured solution to problems of corruption, investigative failure, and so on (Wimshurst and Ransley, 2007; Rowe and Garland 2007). It is also difficult to isolate the impact of education from other factors such as prior learning experience or previous employment which may also influence officer attitudes and behaviour. Similarly not enough is known about the ways in which educational experiences are mediated by other crucial factors relating to the age, gender and experience of officers. For example, Paoline and Terrill (2007) found that officer experience explains much of the variance between officers in terms of the use of force, which might suggest that benefits from educational experiences depreciate over time. As with officer education and training more generally it seems likely that officer experience in the classroom will be mediated in the practice of policing by a host of operational, cultural and contextual factors that shape the practice of police work. Chan (2003: 85) noted that the Police Recruit Education Programme operational in New South Wales, which did not involve tertiary education provisions, succeeded in producing reflexive police practitioners, but any advantages that this offered were 'overwhelmed' by traditional hierarchical management styles. Similarly Garland and Rowe (2003) found that police community and race relations training in England and Wales often met its own goals in terms of encouraging officers to reflect upon issues such as institutional racism but that this tended not to be translated into operational policing because of inadequate management provisions.

So the specific benefits of officer education prove to be elusive. One reason why it is difficult to assert with any certainty that tertiary education enhances police professionalism is the distinct lack of clarity about what 'police professionalism' actually means. As Chan (2003) has noted, 'professionalism' has become an important principle in the regulation of police behaviour that has developed alongside bureaucratic and market-style mechanisms by seeking to enhance the entry and training requirements of police work, an emphasis on political independence, accountability, and continuous improvement in terms of technological innovations. In other respects though, calls for police to act with professionalism are distinct from discourse about *being* professional and relate to more nebulous concerns about officers behaving ethically, courteously and efficiently when interacting with the public and with other agencies. By some crude measures the occupation of police officer is not considered as a profession. It is not classified such in census occupational categories in many liberal democratic societies, for example. Regardless of that, though, society expects the police

to act with professionalism, in that they are expected to operate according to identified policies and practices, without prejudice and on the basis of independent expert knowledge. Herein lies the rub, of course, as it might be that it is the failure to do this, historically, that has prevented policing developing a professional status.

Diverse policing of a diverse society

Another theme in the promotion of police professionalism suggests that enhanced educational opportunities are required if officers are going to develop effective responses to more complex and demanding challenges emergent in contemporary society. 'Problem-solving' policing that responds to crime problems that are more intractable as offenders become more sophisticated, and cross-border and internet-related offending become increasingly significant, demands that officers develop new techniques and skills attainable from university courses. Apart from responding to specific criminal incidents, policing has become increasingly concerned with managing fear of crime (Fielding and Innes, 2006). Policing is increasingly a response to public insecurity, recognised as a problem relatively autonomous of actual crime levels. When understood as a form of 'communicative action' that can provide reassurance, authority and regulation for neighbourhoods, police work requires officers to have professional skills and techniques relating to risk analysis, communication with diverse communities, and management and networking techniques related to working in partnership with local public, private and voluntary sector agencies. Mahoney and Prenzler (1996: 298) suggest that increasing officer presence in the university lecture hall is related to the emerging complexity of police work:

born of greater sophistication in criminal activity, increasing fear of crime in the community, and a greater community sensitivity to civic rights, as well as increasing social diversity and sometimes civil discord. It is also a response to the creation of expert standing commissions ... concerned with organized crime, fraud, evaluations of police performance, and controlling police corruption or other misuses of police power.

The changing terrain of crime and law enforcement might demand that officers engage more closely with university education but also highlights emerging issues relating to the promotion of professionalism among a wide range of policing agencies, beyond the police service itself. Debates about the extent to which policing has become pluralized in 21st century late modern societies continue (McLaughlin, 2007). Some argue that trends toward engaging private sector agencies in policing is over-stated and others note that pluralisation represents something of a return to pre-modern diversity of policing (Jones and Newburn, 2002). If policing has become, or is becoming, pluralised then debates about training, education and professionalism that have been applied to the public police service need to be extended to the new plethora of wardens, non-commissioned staff, private security guards, and community support officers and the like that people contemporary society. It has been

shown that structural changes in education and policing help to explain post-1990s growth in police education. Similarly, the changing context of policing - the growing recognition of pluralisation as organisations above, below and beyond government (Loader, 2000) are involved in police work - means that discussion of police education needs to be about much more than the commissioned officers. The education of police civilian staff and those working for private security companies are two high-profile cohorts of 'new police' that have been over-looked in much discussion of police education and professionalism.

Three themes emerge from this review of the development of police university education. First, that while efforts to promote police professionalism have motivated many of the programmes developed in the previous two decades, similar arrangements were proclaimed and suggested by police reformers for a much longer period. The reasons why new partnerships emerged relatively rapidly in several jurisdictions since the early 1990s can only be understood in relation to broader structural reforms both in policing and higher education. Secondly, issues such as cultural resistance, management failure and the predominance of crime control models of policing have been cited as obstacles to success for police education programmes. However, it is also evident that evaluating their impact is made more difficult because there is no coherent understanding of what 'police professionalism' actually constitutes. Compounded by methodological challenges, this lack of consensus on whether professionalism should be evident in beliefs and values or in behaviour, or if it is a matter of regulation or rhetoric, makes definitive assessment of the contribution of university education difficult to measure. Finally, consideration of the structural changes affecting police services and the new landscape of police-public relations, criminal activity and law enforcement activity suggests that attention also needs to turn to the role of university education in relation to pluralised policing.

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