Title: **Designing a graduate entry route for police recruits: lessons from a rapid evidence assessment of other professions**

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Abstract

Policing in the UK is currently undergoing changes to the training and attained qualifications of entry level police officers. The College of Policing is in the process of developing three entry routes into the profession, one of which is a graduate conversion course for those new recruits who hold, at a minimum, a Bachelor's degree. The objective of this research was to gather evidence on existing conversion courses to inform the development of this route. A rapid evidence assessment was undertaken to a narrative synthesis of the literature on graduate conversion courses in other professions. Fifty-one studies were identified and coded. Four main themes emerged from the available evidence as being central. These themes - learning styles, translating theory into practice, teaching methods and assessment were cross cut by pedagogical sub-themes of collaborative learning, and reflective practice. Policy and practice implications for a policing conversion course are drawn out to guide development and delivery of police training and education in the 21st century.

Introduction

Discussions regarding the "professionalisation of police" (Beckman, 1976: 316) have a long pedigree. *Professionalisation* refers to raising the level of education and training standards for new officers. During the 1960s in the United States (US), the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (1967: 109-110) made a recommendation to improve levels of higher education within the police, stating, "the ultimate aim of all police departments should be that all personnel with general enforcement powers have baccalaureate degrees". Despite the recommendation being given 50 years ago, it is still not a requirement in most countries, including the USA or the UK, for officers to hold undergraduate degrees.

Police education and training in many parts of the world are in transition, as part of a move towards modernising and professionalising the service (Cordner & Shain, 2011). In England and Wales, the College of Policing is undertaking a programme of work to design the Police Educational Qualification Framework (PEQF), which is "intended to support the development of policing as a profession through the provision of a coherent national approach to raising and recognising educational standards in policing" (College of Policing 2016: n.p.). The College has assessed police *constables* to be working to the equivalent of a (graduate) level 6 in the higher education qualifications framework. On the back of this assessment, three entry routes into UK policing are currently being developed for new recruits as part of a gradual reshaping of police recruitment in the UK. The routes are an undergraduate Bachelor's degree in Policing, a graduate entry/conversion route for graduates with a degree in something other than policing, and a higher apprenticeship route. Across all of these three routes police recruits will be deemed to be 'functionally equivalent' - i.e. have comparable competency in practical skills, theoretical knowledge, as well as operational abilities - upon completion of their training and education programme. After intense consultation with higher education specialists and police organisations, the College of Policing published curricula for recruit police training (CoP, 2017, n.p.) to be delivered to recruits through all three routes; two of which are delivered post recruitment, unlike the pre-join undergraduate degree. The proposed PEQF framework should, ideally, build in a quality assurance and assessment framework to oversee training arrangements and delivery over the different training routes. The College is, at the time of writing this paper, still in the process of finalising the curricula and delivery of the PEQF.

The College reports that 38 per cent of all current recruits hold a graduate or post-graduate degree[1]. There is therefore an expectation that there will be a substantial take up of the graduate conversion route by all police forces. Part of the College's remit is to set out the minimum requirements and curricula of a graduate conversion course that will equip graduate recruits with the requisite level of professional competence. Telep (2016) argues it is important for academics to ensure practitioners and policy makers can understand, use, and access evidence-based policing literature. This may enable policy makers and practitioners to design and implement police training programmes grounded in evidence. In that tradition the objective of this research is to assess what can be learned from the existing evidence on graduate conversion courses in other professions that might shape the structure and the content of the curricula for the policing equivalent.

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[1] The Association of Chief Police Officers Submission to the Police Remuneration Review Body (January 2015) cited in College of Policing PEQF Consultation (2016)

A rapid evidence assessment (REA) was conducted to explore what is known about graduate conversion courses for professional qualifications that gains someone entry into an occupational role.

The scoping phase revealed that while there were a number of studies on conversion courses, most of them were mainly descriptive in nature. We therefore decided to include studies that provided substantive information on any one aspect of conversion courses. During the research design phase of this REA, a list of occupations were selected to be included as a recognised profession in the UK that had gone through some form of formal 'professionalisation' process, and therefore might be comparable to policing. These were law, IT, teaching, accountancy, medicine, business, engineering, human resources, marketing, nursing, physiotherapy and social work. The database search quickly established that most of the literature relating to graduate conversion courses was from the teaching profession. Further, it was established that several of these professions, for example nursing, or physiotherapy, had replaced their graduate conversion courses with a degree-level qualification and therefore were not relevant for this evidence assessment. Professions such as medicine and engineering had graduate degrees in their own right. Other conversion courses, for example, marketing or business were often not a requirement for entry level into a profession. Following further purposive searching of the grey literature, some studies were included relating to social work and law, as these were considered to be akin to policing. As such, the results of this rapid evidence assessment contain results on these three professions: teaching, social work and law.

Background to graduate conversion courses

Graduate conversion courses are intensive courses for Bachelor degree graduates to enable them to become qualified for entry into a profession. There is limited information available on the history or development of conversion courses, however examining the development of training from the two most common conversion courses in the UK, teaching and law, suggest that these professions began establishing courses for graduates around the 1980's (Robinson, 2006; Boon and Webb, 2008). These courses are mainly vocational in nature and have a strong focus on the practical elements of training, usually involving a compulsory element of placement or work experience in the desired field. Previous attempts to compare teaching and nursing with policing found they are comparable "knowledge-based practical occupations demanding considerable skills interacting with other people" (White and Heslop, 2012). They also have a strong 'professional practice' element embedded in the course, with the aim of producing qualified, competent and professional individuals who are prepared to enter the workplace[2]. The qualifications achieved, and much of the content delivered in a graduate conversion course, are the same as a corresponding undergraduate degree, but condensed into a shorter time frame. This means that graduates of a graduate conversion course will be at the same qualification level as those who have completed the undergraduate degree in the same profession.

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[2] According to www.prospects.ac.uk/, targetpostgrad.com, www.findamasters.com, and www.allaboutcareers.com/

Methodology

This section begins the research questions followed by an overview of the strategy taken, a description of our inclusion criteria, strategy for identifying studies, search terms, data extraction and management processes and the qualitative analyses performed for the narrative synthesis.

The research questions guiding the REA are: *what is known about graduate conversion courses that are a prerequisite for entry into an occupational role? What lessons can be drawn for police education?*

Databases and grey literature

Two topic specific databases, Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC) and ProQuest Education, were searched for studies relating to teaching/education graduate conversion courses. Since no comparable topic-specific databases were available to the researchers on law and social work, the research team decided to target grey literature for these disciplines. Hence, the search strategy employed for the grey literature was purposive rather than systematic. Initial scoping of the available grey literature was conducted across a variety of sources. Studies that made it through to the second screening phase came from UK Government Publications, the 'Social Policy and Practice' electronic database, the 'Social Science' electronic database and the Legal Information Management Journal. The search terms[3] centred on two concepts: the first relating to some form of professional graduate education and the second relating to occupations that are known to require such a professional qualification for entry[4].

In selecting our studies, the following inclusion criteria were used:

1) The study should relate to a graduate conversion programme for a professional qualification for entry into an occupational role.

2) The study should have some description of programme content, pedagogy, duration, modes of delivery, outcomes, trainee experience or theoretical content.

3) The study must be available in English.

EPPI-Reviewer 4 software[5] was used for all information management in this REA. The first phase of screening involved the authors assessing the eligibility of studies returned from the searches against the inclusion criteria using the title and abstract. Single screening of the studies was undertaken with regular inter-rater reliability checks to ensure uniformity of application of the inclusion criteria. Any disagreement over eligibility was resolved by discussion between the research team. The next stage involved screening the full text of candidate studies. The final number of studies included are shown in Figure 1.

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[3] Our search syntax was: (((postgraduate OR professional OR graduate OR vocational) PRE/1 (certificate OR diploma)) AND ("conversion course"))) AND (law OR property OR psychology OR IT OR teaching OR accountancy OR medicine OR business OR engineering OR "human resources" OR HR OR marketing OR nursing OR physiotherapy OR "social work")

[4] The search terms used to search the non-education databases were closely modelled on the ones in footnote 3.

[5] This is a web-based software program developed by the Social Science Research Unit at the Institute of Education, University of London. https://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/CMS/Default.aspx?alias=eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/er4&

Qualitative Synthesis

To fit with the predominantly qualitative data contained in the included studies, this REA used a thematic synthesis approach. As stated above, we initially extracted information relating to the course content, course structure, pedagogy, modes of training, assessment etc. However, at the evidence synthesis stage, four broad themes were evident across the literature, chosen specifically since, in our opinion, they can be generalised across professions and are relevant and applicable, with some tailoring, for the proposed graduate conversion programme for policing. These were: learning styles, teaching methods, translating theory into practice, and assessment of trainees. The research team subsequently realigned the framing of the qualitative synthesis around these four main themes, with two sub-themes discussed in relation to these.

Results

Following the searches and screening, 51 studies were included in this REA. Table 1 shows some descriptive information about the included studies. Over half of these studies were from the United Kingdom (n = 30, 57.7%), mostly from England (n = 14, 26.9%). Research was predominately within the teaching discipline (n = 40, 76.9%) with other studies relating to either law (n = 6, 11.5%) or social work (n = 5, 9.6%).

Many of the conversion courses ranged between 36 weeks and one year (n = 29, 56.9%). Three courses were between 18 months or two years. Eighteen courses (35.3%) either did not provide any information or had a variable or unclear course length.

Quality appraisal of evidence

The evidence from the included studies was of mixed quality. Methods often focused on participant experience after the event, i.e. gathering data after a particular element of the course had been implemented, with limited use of a comparison before and after or with a control group. The most common methodology employed was mixed-method (n=14; 27.5%), most often where a survey, questionnaire or task was distributed to a large sample and then a smaller sample was interviewed. Questionnaires and interviews the most common method employed, however a number of studies used these methods alone without combining the two (questionnaire only n=8; 15.7% or interviews only n=7; 13.7%). Five of the included studies (9.8%) were descriptive in nature and three were opinion pieces (5.9%), meaning there was no primary data collected. Two comprehensive reviews provided a general overview of the entry routes into a profession, with limited data specifically pertaining to the conversion course route. Three studies (5.9%) reported an evaluation methodology, however this did not include any form of quasi-experimental design or experimental testing. Instead, these studies used surveys or interviews along with secondary data analysis or documentary analysis of course material or student course evaluations. Furthermore, the remaining studies also did not employ experimental designs, instead, using surveys (n=2; 3.9%), focus groups (n=1; 2%), action

research methodology[6] (n=2; 3.9%) or phenomenographic[7] methodology (n=1; 2%). Overall, sample sizes (when clearly specified) were generally small, with an average sample size of 176 when a survey or questionnaire was conducted (range=11-812) and an average sample size of 18 when interviews were conducted (range=6-42).

Most of the available evidence was descriptive in nature. Most studies measured satisfaction levels or experience after the intervention was introduced. Consequently the strength of the evidence is rather weak. The recommendations for police training that emerge are based on the best existing available evidence and as assessed by the authors as being of relevance to police training, based on their experience of, and involvement in, police training.

Structure of courses

Graduate conversion courses in teaching, such as the Postgraduate Certificate in Education in the UK (PGCE), structure their practical training alongside the theoretical aspects of the course, with periods of university teaching interspersed with periods of practical training. This training is most often in the form of 'placements', (which is akin to the field training aspect of recruit police training, including attachments to various field units) made possible through partnerships between schools and higher education institutions. When specified, teaching placements ranged from 4 weeks to 24 weeks. The most common arrangement within these studies (5 of 14 studies; 35.7%) was that the teaching placement would comprise two thirds of the course (for example, 24 weeks of a 36 week course). The remaining nine studies (64.3%) detailed a shorter teaching placement (for example, 12 weeks) or had a varied arrangement.

Graduate conversion courses for law generally structured their courses as stand-alone training preceding practical training, as included studies did not mention integrated or interspersed practical training (Hannibal and Pope, 2005). The acquisition of professional skills and practical experience comes at a later stage in the process and is not included on the graduate conversion course for law. Most of the social work studies relating to graduate conversion programmes did not give specific details on the course structure.

The different approaches to course structures in the different professions are based on what the intended outcomes are – for teaching, the focus is on developing practical skills and associated theoretical approaches because the students possess the requisite theoretical knowledge of the subjects they will subsequently go on to teach their students, through their undergraduate degree. On the other hand, the legal profession has two distinct conversion courses that separately focus on theoretical knowledge and practice skills. Social work conversion courses are most comparable to police work, since they are seen to work best when they adopt a structure that involves the interlinked delivery of theoretical knowledge and practical skills.

The structure of these courses is made possible through partnerships between training institutions and higher education institutions (HEI). Six of the included studies made specific reference to partnership arrangements. There are a range of partnership models, with some courses having informal arrangements, or arrangements in the early stage of development and

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[6] Action research methodology is a method used within education settings usually for updating or revising a course or curriculum involving participation of the students and teachers to encourage collaboration and dialogue. It involves repeated cycles of planning, analysis, evaluation, reflection and implementation (Hramiak 2010; Trevitt 2005)

[7] Phenonography "seeks to describe the conceptions of any phenomenon by individuals in order to generate different variations in the way in which this phenomenon can be experienced" (Van Wyk 2013: 51).

some with formalised partnership models. Furlong et al., (1996, cited in Christie et al., 2004: 111) differentiate three models of partnerships in teacher education: collaborative, HEI-led and separatist:

> "In 'collaborative' partnerships, teachers and HEI tutors work together in planning and discussing professional issues. The process is characterized by a genuine search for shared understanding and mutual respect. In a 'HEI-led' partnership, assessment and the content of the placement and planning is designed by the HEI with, at most, consultation with small groups of teachers. In the 'separatist' model, each sector is seen to have its own responsibilities without any attempt at dialogue and with integration being achieved by the students themselves."

Ideally, graduate conversion courses ought to have formalised collaborative partnership models in place between training institutions and HEIs. This seems to be particularly true for police training since the theoretical and practical components can only be delivered in an integrated manner by the police and HEIs in partnership, especially as the proposed new UK graduate curriculum advocates an evidenced based approach grounded in principles of procedural justice. The division of the proposed curriculum between to the optimal delivery of the various aspects and how theory and practice can be linked would be best served if HEIs and police forces work in collaboration, not least to ensure that selected mentors are well versed in both aspects of training.

Thematic Analysis

Four main themes emerged from the evidence as being central to graduate conversion courses; these related to adapting to learning styles of students, adopting teaching methods suitable for adults, ensuring translation of theory into practice, and selecting appropriate assessment methods. Across these themes pedagogical practices of collaborative learning, and reflective practice resonated as sub-themes. This analysis will first outline the four main themes, and then discuss the sub-themes, noting the integration and interconnectedness of these.

Learning styles

The evidence indicates that graduate conversion courses need to acknowledge that applicants, as adult learners, come with a diverse range of educational and academic experiences and work or practical expertise. The literature on learning styles centred around three key points: understanding that students have different learning styles; the importance of acknowledging past learning and experiences; and taking into consideration prior perspectives and concerns.

Cartney (2000) discusses the importance of promoting the learning style the student is accustomed to using four preferred learning styles proposed by Honey and Mumford (1986): 1) activists, 2) reflectors, 3) theorists and 4) pragmatists. Cartney found that it was not necessary to have the same or different learning styles between student and supervisor, but it was important to identify the learning style early in the process, and diversify teaching methods to be accommodating of these different styles. Identifying learning styles "makes it possible for the supervisor to 'start where the worker is' in designing individualised instructive methods" (Cartney, 2000: 611).

Along with learning styles, it is important to acknowledge students' past experiences and initial concerns when entering the profession, particularly around the time of practical placements. Research indicates that unlike trainee teachers and nurses, student police officers "resist engagement with learning because of its perceived irrelevance to professional development and

the lack of value attached to broader educational development" (White and Heslop, 2012: 354). Overcoming officers' perception that they can be *professionals* without knowing the theory is essential to encourage learning. Bromfield (2006) suggests that it is necessary to use students' past experiences as a starting point for teaching theory and to acknowledge that students have different skills, understandings and experiences that can bring a fresh perspective to the learning experience. Tutors and educators should use this to understand the learning behaviour of students within the work context and encourage students to draw on their prior knowledge in order to build the capacity to reflect. It is also important to be conscious of the values students enter a course with, and to ensure that humanistic values and enthusiasm are maintained. As Bromfield (2006: 189) notes, trainees "often enter the profession with idealised notions of what being a teacher is and that this is changed by the realities of teaching practice".

Students of graduate conversion courses not only bring prior experiences, but also concerns and fears surrounding entering the workforce. Capel (2001: 260), argues that trainee teachers have "different levels of knowledge, understanding and experience about teaching, schools and pupils which may result in different causes of concern for students". It is important for courses, and educators, to provide opportunities for students to identify and address individual concerns so that they might develop as professionals.

The evidence indicates that conversion courses designed for adult learners must consider individual learning styles of students as well as their prior experience, preconceptions and concerns about the profession. Several police training programmes already use andragogy (a learning philosophy suitable for adults; Vodde, 2008) and problem based learning (PBL) methodologies that develop the learner's problem-solving and critical thinking skills (c.f. Vander Kooi, 2006; Shipton, 2009; King Stargel, 2010). Previous research has shown, though, that some student officers and police trainers will resist self-directed learning and PBL (Werth, 2011). Considering policing is associated with strong preconceptions, and attitudes based on prior experience, the importance of recognising adult learning philosophies is sharpened for police learners.. One potential way forward is for course tutors to identify these concerns and preconceptions about the profession early on, and address them by focusing on the theory and conceptual knowledge underlying the practice elements of policing.

Translating theory into practice

This theme refers to the division between the theoretical, academic or conceptual components of a course and the practical or field training aspects. While these two components are often referred to as separate entities, both are integral to informing the other, and as such it is imperative that these two aspects are seen as interconnected. The practical components of a course are the operational skills specific to a profession, such as use of force or investigation and evidence collection for police officers, introduced in both the fieldwork and classroom settings, whereas the theoretical components involve 'conceptual tools' which facilitate the framing and interpretation of practice, (Tang et al., 2016). Within practically orientated professions, such as teaching, social work, or policing, there is a consensus that the practical components of the courses provide students with the essential skills to be a competent professional (Wong et al., 2012; Kiggundu, 2007; Zhang, 2004a; Zhang, 2004b). Furthermore, studies have shown that students privilege the practical elements of the courses over conceptual or theoretical aspects, as this is where 'job preparedness' is established. For example, Tang et al. (2016) found that trainee teachers' engagement with practical elements of the course had a

positive relationship with perceived competence. However, as outlined above, it is the conceptual or theoretical components of training that inform these skills and provide the foundational guidelines that underpin practice. It is therefore crucial that courses emphasise the integration of theory and practice, or devise innovative ways to translate what is learnt in the conceptual components of the course to the skills acquired during practical components.

Theoretical components of a course stimulate higher order thinking, debate, theory building and discussion. Costello and Aung (2015), demonstrate how conceptual components of social work education in Myanmar guide ethical practices and alternative perspectives. This is particularly important for graduate conversion courses, as new knowledge has the ability to challenge previously held preconceptions. Referred to as conceptual change, this can be achieved when "students feel dissatisfied with their current conceptions and have access to alternatives they perceive as intelligible, plausible and fruitful" (Wong et al., 2006: 2). Without these stimulating elements of conceptual learning, students are more at risk of succumbing to institutionalised professional culture and losing their enthusiasm (Wong et al., 2006). This is not to say that students' prior experiences are wrong, or need to be disproven, but it is important that prior learning is acknowledged, alternative perspectives offered and tools provided to translate attitudes, beliefs and values into actions (Pearson, 2007).

Research indicates that police educators face an uphill task in overcoming the "theory-practice binary" between police training and engagement with HEIs (White and Heslop, 2012: 353). Some police recruit training programmes encourage application of academic knowledge by recruits to practice during the field work element, (Green, 2001; Hundersmark, 2004; Chappell, 2007) yet successful integration can happen only when the programme is designed so that theory taught at the academy complements field training (Chan 2003). Here, the role of the field tutor becomes pivotal (Chan, 2003; Thorneywork, 2004). This is of particular importance in police training, where the disconnect between field experiences and programme content remains unresolved, or is exacerbated when practitioners feel that what is taught in the training programme does not fit the demands of operational police work (Karp and Stenmark, 2010). The critical recommendation for policing conversion courses is that the integration of the practical elements of training and the theoretical elements has to be achieved in a way that ensures that the practical element, considered to be indicative of job worthiness, is not privileged over the theoretical elements, which underpin the ethos of the profession.

Teaching methods

Methods of teaching and pedagogical practice were discussed by a majority of the included studies on graduate conversion courses. The teaching methods employed to deliver content are key to ensuring a course is effective, stimulating and interesting.

A wide number of teaching methods were discussed, all linked to different pedagogical theories. The teaching methods in the included studies encompassed: IT/VLE; the use of videos or video-papers[8],;assessment methods such as exams and written assignments; peer review; lesson planning or lesson study; portfolios; critical incident analysis; oral presentations; role play; blogs and interviews. The use of IT/VLE is a teaching method that featured in many

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[8] A video-paper is when text is accompanied by video within a single electronic document so that the reader is able to "activate different modes of presentation, watching the context in which the text is placed as well as presenting authentic examples to improve the validity of text" (Krumsvik and Smith 2009: 271).

studies (n = 21) as a tool to facilitate the teaching/learning process. Typically, a blended approach which uses both online and face-to-face teaching methods to deliver learning can be effective (Clarke and Abbott, 2008; Hramiak, 2010). Videos can also aid in peer-review (Lamb, 2015; Lamb and Aldous, 2016) and in facilitating more innovative teaching methods, such as video-papers, where literature is interspersed with videos in order to visualise the theory or bring it to life (Krumsvik and Smith, 2009).

Overall teaching methods ought to "promote cooperative, active, inquiry-based learning" (De Jong and Chadbourne, 2007: 15), and utilise the best available evidence when it comes to innovative and diversified teaching methods. Where possible, it is important to shift focus away from the traditional classroom based model of teaching, and encourage collaborative learning and critical thinking through engagement between student and teacher as well as among peers. Methods of teaching must have "a strong emphasis on inclusion, active and participative learning, student empowerment and cooperative approaches" (Ofsted, 2005). Equally important is a diverse range of teaching and learning activities to stimulate interest and keep students engaged (De Jong and Chadbourne, 2007).

The essence of this evidence review indicates that optimal teaching methods ought to be innovative, engaging and appropriate for adults; should integrate theory and practice; encourage reflection, and include a diverse range of teaching methods in order to take into account students' different learning styles. This is of specific relevance to police training, which has traditionally been organised on paramilitaristic lines, stressing discipline and unquestioned obedience from recruits (Chappell and Lanza-Kaduce, 2010). Recognition that a conversion course will attract more mature recruits with prior experience and skills, and harnessing these via appropriate adult teaching and learning techniques would be an important aspect of the reconceptualization of graduate training under the PEQF. This would involve a change in the cultural mind-set of police trainers to encourage discussion, reflection and critical thinking, as well as require them to retrain to acquire the appropriate learner focused teaching skills (Charles, 2000).

Assessment

The evidence indicates that, like choosing appropriate teaching methods, assessments of students should be based on pedagogical principles that incorporate a diverse mix of innovative methods. Aside from the necessary evaluation of student competence, assessment should also be a learning experience, have practical relevance and be guided by pedagogical principles (McArdle et al., 2010). As outlined above, graduate conversion courses consist of two essential components of theory and practice, both of which need to be assessed. Assessment, therefore, when focused on the theoretical aspect should be closely linked to innovative learning methods and, when assessing practical competency, be practically relevant.

Additionally, measures of assessment ought to diversify from a heavy dependence on traditional methods (such as written assessments and exams), and incorporate a diverse and innovative mix of assessments that promote learning and are practically relevant. Excessive reliance on written assignments that "lack relevance to practical training can be frustrating for students" (Roness and Smith, 2010: 180). Successful assessments that encourage learning include: "effective questioning, sharing learning objectives and assessment criteria, providing effective feedback about how to improve and self-assessment and peer assessment" (Winterbottom et al., 2008: 194).

Portfolios, as both a teaching and assessment method, reoccur in the included studies as a tool for showing how students integrate theory and practice, reflect critically on their learning, and demonstrate the breadth and depth of their learning (Baumfield, 2007; De Jong and Chadbourne, 2007; Jorgensen and Hansen, 2004; Mayes 2000; McArdle et al., 2010; Hramiak, 2006; Long et al., 2012). Of equal importance is assessing a students' practical competency. The most common method for this is through observation of trainee professional performance (De Jong and Chadbourne, 2007; Kiggundu, 2007; McArdle et al., 2010; Wong and Chuan, 2002; Wong et al. 2012).

The evidence suggests that assessments, when used innovatively, can evaluate student learning (Assessment of learning) in the form of summative assessments to gauge understanding at the end of the course, especially if it encourages critical reflection. Moreover, they can also promote learning (Assessment for learning) through formative assessments and through providing constructive feedback at periodic intervals during the course. Police recruit training has, historically, focused exclusively on assessing at a basic level whether recruits are achieving minimum standards required at the end of training (Green, 2001) or whether recruits are adequately equipped with skills and knowledge to function as a police officer (Vodde, 2008; McKay, 2011). The importance of innovative assessment methods for the delivery of the police graduate conversion curriculum is intensified given the massive uplift of skills and knowledge required by the new recruit training curriculum. An important aim of this redesign is to encourage skills in critical thinking and problem solving, which can be effectively promoted and evaluated through creative assessments.

We now turn to two main pedagogical practices that underpinned all graduate training within the literature: collaborative learning and reflective practice. These two practices were found to permeate all the themes discussed.

Collaborative learning

Collaborative learning acts as an umbrella term for a number of reoccurring sub-themes: mentoring, communities of practice, peer learning and placements. These are all examples of active engagement in the learning process between students and their peers or educators and are thus linked by this guiding principle of collaborative learning.

Mentoring is a crucial element in the teaching and learning process. This is especially true during the placement phase of training where the student is out in the field (be it a school or community), learning and honing their professional practice skills. The role of mentors is to observe, guide, support, motivate and evaluate trainees during the placement phase to foster their professional development. Maynard and Furlong (1993, cited in Christie et al., 2004), distinguish mentoring and supervision, where supervision involves the teacher observing and overseeing learnt material, and mentoring involves the teacher becoming actively engaged in the training process. Mentors are in a position to provide evidence of good practice, consistent feedback and support and to convey to students the roles and responsibilities of a competent professional (Wong et al. 2012; Carter 2015; Du Plessis et al., 2010; Kiggundu, 2007; Long et al., 2012). However it is important that mentors make themselves available to students and are clear about *their* role (Smith and McLay, 2007).

Christie et al. (2004) refer to four models of mentoring: zero level mentoring, minimal mentoring, developed mentoring, and extended mentoring. Optimally, developed mentoring

should occur where an experienced mentor's knowledge and expertise is made available to the student through a interactive process of discussion and feedback. This dialogue between student and mentor should consolidate the conceptual understanding between the theory and the practice of the profession. Mentoring will ideally occur during placements (usually outside of learning institutions) so collaboration is closely related to practical training, but it can also occur within learning institutions.

Peer learning is a further example of effective collaboration which is believed key to developing professionals. Peer learning is referenced in a number of ways in the included studies: through mutual peer dialogue and support, peer observation and feedback and peer assessment or review. Peer learning can be facilitated during the placements phase where students learn from working alongside and observing their more experienced colleagues on the job, as well as their fellow students. The demonstrable impact of peer learning in police recruit training has been discussed by Shipton (2009) and Lettic (2016). The latter suggests that recruits, through discussion and disagreements, are better able to retain information, as well as understand, integrate and apply knowledge.

Peer learning is underpinned by the concept of communities of practice. Communities of practice is a theory that states that learning and practice can be enhanced through interaction within a community that share a common passion or interest in their practice. Essential to establishing a community of practice is uniting the three core components: domain (shared interest), community (interactions) and practice (shared interest relates to the work of practitioners) (Wenger, 1998; Clarke and Abbott, 2008). Several of the included studies (n = 6) on graduate conversion courses referred to community of practice theory as a guide for enhancing the learning process, highlighting the need for interactive spaces where students can come together to reflect on and discuss practice. Yandell and Turvey (2007: n.p.) drawing on Lave and Wenger (1991), highlight the "importance of learning by doing, of embedded, context specific knowledge and of narrative as a significant means whereby knowledge is socially distributed".

Reflective practice

Reflective practice is fundamental to producing competent professionals. The literature reveals that integrating graduate courses with reflective practice would produce a range of benefits essential to enhancing the learning experience, such as integrating theory and practice and developing good practice, promoting higher order thinking, and deepening professional development. Reflection can take place through a range of different tasks or observations. Reflective practice however means different things for different professions, but Finlay's (2008: 1) definition, which involves "critically examining assumptions, learning through and from experience, gaining new insights through self-examination and critically evaluating own responses to practice situations" summarises the key aspects.

The process of observation that stimulates reflection can be distilled into three broad stages: observation, evaluation, and communication. Through different teaching methods students can be encouraged to continually *observe practice*, either of an experienced practitioner, or a peer, or a video of their own practice or exemplary cases. They are then able to relate this observation to their own practice, or context, and make "evidence based comments" and peer assessments (Coffey, 2014: 89; Lamb, 2015; Zhang, 2004b). This also enables them to reflect on what they

could have done differently or better in the next iteration of the situation or event (Reitano and Green, 2013).

The next stage of reflective practice is to employ some form of *evaluation or critique* of their observation and identify elements of good practice, or strengths and weaknesses (Coffey, 2014; Wong et al., 2006; Yung et al., 2007). Finally, students should *communicate and collaborate* both observations and/or critique with their peers or educators, to share experiences and ideas, or discuss and debate differences. This also provides an opportunity to receive feedback from tutors (Clarke and Abbott, 2008; McArdle et al., 2010; Costello and Aung, 2015; Lamb, 2015).

These reflective processes should occur continually throughout education and training, in particular before, during and after practical placements, in order to 'scaffold' or continually build on professional development (Lamb and Aldous, 2016; Coffey, 2014). Traditional police recruit training had incorporated reflective practice to some extent (Vodde, 2008; Rantatalo and Karp, 2016) to allow recruits to consider considering why something was done a certain way, what the possible impact of the action was, and if it could have been done differently.

The different stages of reflection are referred to as reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action; Taloe (2012) defines reflection-on-action as the self-evaluative thinking that students engage in after a practical session. Killen (2007: 96) explains that reflection-in-action is the student trying to understand past actions in order to shape future actions. Furthermore, reflection should occur both individually, and among peers as an outcome of collaborative learning. When discussing police recruit training Rantatalo and Karp (2016) explain the benefits of collective reflection which exposes recruits to a wider set of experiences and resources, thus enhancing peer learning.

This REA shows that allowing time for reflection gives space for both students and trainers to consider how prior experience and learning styles will impact on the understanding of new knowledge. This cognitive space to reflect also helps develop the capacity to build on and integrate both old and new knowledge and to translate theory into practice (Bromfield, 2006; Lamb and Aldous, 2016; Taole, 2012; Coffey, 2014). Reflection is a defining characteristic of higher order thinking and critical thinking, as a student's ability to compartmentalise knowledge and draw on different forms of knowledge and experience in different contexts is the mark of a competent professional (Jorgensen and Hansen, 2004; McArdle et al., 2010; Costello and Aung, 2015). Processes and tasks that employ an element of reflection also make for effective assessment methods, drawing on both assessment for learning and assessment of learning (Lamb and Aldous, 2016; Winterbottom, 2008). Students' ability to do this can in turn lead to student empowerment and maintained enthusiasm and interest in the course (Van Wyk, 2013).

Discussion

The main findings to emerge from this REA were that graduate conversion courses ought to be framed by evidence of best practice from the four main themes that emerged from the literature. These were: student learning styles, the integration of theory and practice, teaching methods and assessment. Courses need to be designed with the student in mind, and be inclusive of different learning styles and be aware of prior learning experiences. Courses also need to have both a strong theoretical and practical component, and develop mechanisms to integrate theory and practice. The most commonly used mechanisms are collaborative learning through

communities of practice, peer learning and mentors or tutors in the field. Teaching styles and assessment must use innovative and diverse methods in order to be effective and stimulating. Despite the importance of these themes, there was little information about how any of this good practice was intended to achieve the ultimate outcome, i.e. the creation of a qualified professional.

Process models as precursors of logic models might fruitfully be developed to lay out the sequence of how these varied teaching and learning methods are posited to work. Furthermore, process models help to identify and test achievement of set interim outcomes to assess whether particular mechanisms work better than others and to systematically evidence best practice. For example, whether a police graduate conversion course should front-load some of the classroom based theoretical and conceptual teaching before releasing the students to the real world of practice (as is the case with Law courses mainly) is better than interspersing short periods of classroom based teaching with practical sessions in the real world situation (as is the case with most Teaching courses) would depend on what the short term and final intended outcomes were. The REA revealed that a total of twelve studies mentioned measuring outcomes. Most of these studies focused on measuring professional performance (Du Plessis et al., 2010; Kiggundu, 2007; Fry, 2005; Fancourt, 2004; Saunders, 2004; Mayes, 2000) or academic performance (Jorgensen and Hansen, 2004; McArdle et al., 2010), and four talked about measuring students own attitudes or self-assessed knowledge (Owen-Jackson, 2008; Winterbottom et al., 2008; Capel, 2001; Yandell and Turvey, 2007). Specifying the overall intended outcomes of these conversion courses (as well as the interim learning outcomes, inherent in every academic programme) would help to reverse engineer the course structure and content to ensure that those outcomes were achievable. Incorporating tests at appropriate points in the model can check whether one structure/or design works better than the other in certain contexts and professions.

Figure 2 presents a high level process diagram to illustrate the various steps that any police graduate conversion training programme should pay specific attention to. These steps are derived from our findings from the REA and some important gaps in the literature (identified below) that we suggest would significantly contribute to the design of a graduate police recruit training programme. Adapting the process diagram to recruit training under PEQF highlights the need for the various entry routes to have comparable outcomes and assessments to ensure functional equivalence between the three entry routes to UK policing.

Figure 2 Process diagram to aid design of a graduate conversion course for police recruits

While the assessment of available evidence revealed a number of important guiding principles, there was a lack of substantive evidence on the specific design of graduate conversion courses or what differentiates these from undergraduate degrees. In terms of advising the design of a graduate conversion course in policing, the evidence indicates that factors guiding the creation of any conversion course include:

- Articulating assumptions that are being made about the students' critical thinking abilities, relevant skills and profession-related preconceptions that the students might initially have. This helps curriculum developers and those involved in delivering the

training to understand the needs of the prospective students and address omissions at the outset. For example, it is essential to understand students' perception of the police as a service to engender a discussion about the purpose and role of the police (exposure to various policing theories) which could usefully underpin the purpose and raison d'etre of the training programme.

- Understanding that different individuals have different learning styles and adapting suitable teaching methods for adults is essential for delivering the theoretical and conceptual learning, as well as operational skills required. Although the concept of adapting teaching based purely on different types of learning styles has recently been questioned from an evidence based perspective (Newton & Miah, 2017), it has been shown to have some value in higher education (Kolb and Kolb, 2005).

  Furthermore, modern day policing challenges demand a new policing model and policing approaches to emerging problems (Ransley and Mazerolle, 2009). There is also a need to move away from the traditional paramilitaristic model of training that perpetuates the hierarchical nature of the organisation and the cultural expectation of unquestioning obedience to authority (Chappell and Lanza-Kaduce, 2010). Thus, adopting a student centred approach which encourages reflection and critical thinking and encourages problem solving skills would appear to be more effective way of engendering that much needed change in the organisational culture and established responses to these emerging challenges. However, it is also important to accept that certain aspects of police training necessitate rote learning (for example, laws and procedural manuals) using traditional learning techniques.

- The most important aspect of a successful professional conversion course is its ability to integrate theoretical learning in practice. This can be achieved through the use of various teaching tools, resources and opportunities to put theoretical learning into practice under the supervision of a capable mentor as well as being provided the space for reflection on the experience and how it can be improved.

  The important role of the field training officer has long been recognised in police training (Chan, 2003; Marenin, 2007; Getty et al., 2016) but their specific contribution in ensuring continuity and integration of academic inputs with operational practice for recruit police officers is highlighted by the evidence in other professions. The academic and field training tutor need to work in close collaboration.

- Conceptualising appropriate assessment so that it is a tool to enable learning (assessment for learning) as well as test learning (assessment of learning) and ensuring that the assessment is quality assured and validated by objective experts is another crucial aspect of curriculum design and delivery. The importance of ensuring that there is adequate dovetailing of the assessment of academic and practical elements of the profession cannot be stressed enough.

  Close collaboration between the academic and field tutors to design and conduct appropriate assessments for police graduate conversion courses. The need for an independent body to quality assure and assess is also fundamental, especially since the PEQF lays down a requirement for police forces to collaborate with HEIs in partnership to deliver recruit training at level 6 via three different routes.

- Finally, laying down the specific outcomes which training should achieve in terms of practical and practice skills that students should master is essential for any successful training course. With respect to the police, articulating specific practical skills (i.e. how to communicate with the public or safely put handcuffs on someone) as well as practice skills that they should possess as a professional (i.e. conduct is underpinned by the understanding of how this will lead to building public confidence and enhancing legitimacy) is important. Focusing on practical skills, to the detriment of practice skills, as has been the case in traditional police training, may be counter-productive in the long run for the prospects of professionalising the police. Thus for the police conversion course, specific skills and behaviours expected from police constables identified by the College of Policing[9] provides the template for measuring articulated outcomes of training.

Limitations or gaps in existing evidence

There were a number of limitations to this evidence review and gaps in knowledge about graduate conversion courses that emerged. Firstly, most of the studies included in the review were descriptive in nature, with only a few reporting primary data. Secondly, included studies did not contain substantive information about a number of areas identified as being relevant to graduate conversion courses. This included information about evaluation of trainers, prior training experience or training of the trainers, course evaluation by trainees, quality assurance of courses, mechanisms for updating course content, and arrangements for continued professional development of trainees. While some information was available on the outcomes measured, these were more in reference to specific academic or professional outcomes, rather than overall intended outcomes for the course. Furthermore, one of the biggest gaps identified was the lack of information about dropout rates and student satisfaction levels with content and structure of conversion courses. Similarly, the theoretical underpinnings of the structure and content of conversion courses were seldom addressed. While we acknowledge that this information might exist, there was unfortunately no evidence of this in the literature reviewed. Thus, based on the limited methodological approaches of a majority of the studies included in this evidence review it is clear that the reliability or validity of the findings are weak.

The areas identified by the REA, where the biggest knowledge gaps exist, provide a clear research agenda for future research in the area of graduate training for police recruits. Thus, questions that need a clear response are:

1. What basic assumptions are being made about graduates' abilities and skills that form the basis of the intensive and condensed curriculum design?
2. What is the underpinning rationale behind choosing any particular course structure and delivery method?
3. How is the distribution of assessment of the various theoretical/conceptual and practical components achieved between organisations/employers and HEIs?

Conclusion

The aim of this rapid evidence assessment (REA) was to synthesise knowledge about graduate conversion courses (more broadly) to inform the development of a graduate conversion course

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[9] See College of Policing: Professional Profile Police Constable at
https://profdev.college.police.uk/professional-profile/police-constable/

in policing. Based on the findings of this evidence review, and identifying the gaps in the existing evidence in the literature, a process model to guide the three phases of the proposed graduate conversion course for the police under the PEQF is proposed. Best practice from similar courses in other professions indicates that five main factors should be taken into consideration while designing, delivering and assessing graduate conversion courses in policing. These factors are: first, articulating assumptions about what critical thinking and problem solving skills the police would like their graduate recruits to possess pre-employment. This would, in turn, influence the second factor; the design of the course and the selection of appropriate andragogic approaches to suit adult learners with different learning styles. The third important factor is integration of theory and practice, reinforced through the interlinking of academic learning with practice skills by tutors, especially during the placement stages for guiding the fourth factor, which is delivery of appropriate field training for recruit officers. Finally, having a clear conception of what the end product is, i.e., the ideal police officer qualities that the training aims to produce, and designing appropriate assessments to evaluate whether these intended outcomes are achieved, are vital for the success of any training programme. Thus, ensuring that the assessments for 'functional equivalence' for each of the three entry routes into policing under the PEQF are appropriate should be a priority for any agency overseeing quality assurance for the various training programmes.

This REA identified several gaps in the evidence on best practice and until further research can fill some of these gaps, designing and delivering a graduate conversion course for police recruits will involve trial and error on the part of HEIs, force training departments and recruits, but hopefully will be grounded in the evidence based practice from other professions.

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