

**Uniforms and Degree: Investigating Student Experiences of
Higher Education and Policing**

Journal:	<i>Journal of Criminological Research, Policy and Practice</i>
Manuscript ID	JCRPP-04-2024-0026.R2
Manuscript Type:	Research Paper
Keywords:	Higher Education, Policing, Career Development, Students, Degrees, Police

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

MANUSCRIPT DETAILS

TITLE: Uniforms and Degree: Investigating Student Experiences of Higher Education and Policing

ABSTRACT:

This paper gives an account of student perceptions (age 16+) of the value of both obtaining a university degree and how it relates to the profession of policing. Additionally, the paper details opinions of the perceived benefit of a degree with regard to potentially supporting career progression.

Participants were recruited directly, following input from a University in the Midlands at a range of outreach activities, where they completed short, online questionnaires offering their thoughts and opinions on Higher Education and policing. Study participants were from four schools and colleges within the West Midlands area, with all respondents meeting the inclusion criteria of being in the 16+ age group (Year 12 and 13).

The study yielded several key findings. First, respondents positively demonstrated an intention to progress from school/college onto university, believing that having a degree or some form of formalised training is beneficial to development. Secondly, almost half of respondents indicated that they felt a police officer should have a degree in order to properly perform their duties. Thirdly, there was a mixed response as to whether they would prefer a police officer had a degree when dealing with the public. Finally, over half of respondents felt that holding a degree would be beneficial for career development within the police.

CUST_RESEARCH_LIMITATIONS/IMPLICATIONS__(LIMIT_100_WORDS) :No data available.

HEIs and partner forces to work closely with feeder schools and colleges to provide information on the most suitable pathway into policing for potential officers of the future.

By working closely with individual students, HEIs and forces have the scope to best align a potential police officer with the 'bespoke' course for them, which should offer career and academic satisfaction.

HEIs to further develop a broad range of skills, supporting both academic credibility and career development, further embedding the value of obtaining a degree.

CUST_SOCIAL_IMPLICATIONS_(LIMIT_100_WORDS) :No data available.

This original research highlights clear evidence from respondents that there is a good deal of perceived value that can be gathered from holding a degree. This is shown from both the perspective of new recruits joining the police and to the potential as an aid to career development.

Uniforms and Degrees: Investigating Student Experiences of Higher Education and Policing**Abstract****Purpose**

This paper gives an account of student perceptions (age 16+) of the value of both obtaining a university degree and how it relates to the profession of policing. Additionally, the paper details opinions of the perceived benefit of a degree with regards to potentially supporting career progression.

Design/methodology/approach

Participants were recruited directly, following input from a **University in the Midlands** at a range of outreach activities, where they completed short, online questionnaires offering their thoughts and opinions on Higher Education and policing. Study participants were from four school and colleges within the West Midlands area, with all respondents meeting the inclusion criteria of being in the 16+ age group (Year 12 and 13).

Findings

The study yielded several key findings. First, respondents positively demonstrated an intention to progress from school/college onto university, believing that having a degree or some form of formalised training is beneficial to development. Secondly, almost half of respondents indicated that they felt a police officer should have a degree in order to properly perform their duties. Thirdly, there was a mixed response as to whether they would prefer a police officer had a degree when dealing with the public. Finally, over half of respondents felt that holding a degree would be beneficial for career development within the police.

Originality

This original research highlights clear evidence from respondents that there is a good deal of perceived value that can be gathered from holding a degree. This is shown from both the perspective of new recruits joining the police and to the potential as an aid to career development.

Key words: Higher Education, policing, police, students, degrees, career progression

Introduction

In recent years, the educational expectations of policing within the UK have undergone a number of significant shifts; two of the most impactful being the proposal from the College of Policing (CoP) of a standardised Policing Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF) (Pepper *et al.*, 2021) determining that all new police officers to be educated to degree level (Dodd, 2016), followed by the then Home Secretary in 2022 backtracking (Andrews, 2024) over the need to hold or obtain a degree.

The introduction of the three degree-based routeways from late 2018 onwards (Strong, 2019) (Professional Policing Degree (PPD), Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship (PCDA) and the Degree Holder Entry Programme (DHEP)) has meant that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have had to adapt, develop, and create bespoke programmes to fill the requirements. As such, the scale of policing education has grown, with 46 HEIs offering the Professional Policing Degree (College of Policing, 2024b) alone.

As acknowledged by Hallenberg and Cockcroft (2017) via Bryant *et al.*, (2014), policing related degree programmes largely sat within three main classifications: 1) 'in service' degree where officers study for a degree and engage with a Higher Education (HE) provider during their policing service, 2) 'initial service' whereby initial training is provided by the HEI and 3) 'pre-service' where officers commence their studies prior to their police training. These classifications largely echo the three routeways stated above, representing the type of academic courses, combined with operational policing (in some instances voluntary involvement such as joining the Special Constabulary) experience that those looking for a career in policing may choose to adopt.

Additionally, some forces reinstated the Initial Police Learning and Development Programme (IPLDP) (up until March 2024), or the 'traditional' pathway, following the Home Secretary's announcement for a non-academic route, with the new Police Constable Entry Programme (PCEP) (Metropolitan Police, 2024; Sussex Police, 2024) set to be delivered from April 2024 onwards as its natural 'non-academic' successor. This fourth entry point which encompasses a 2-year training programme and can be entirely delivered by force (Home Office, 2024) represents a significant challenge to HEI's and may impact enrolment numbers onto university courses in the coming years and is therefore worthy of further consideration.

The PEQF was introduced by the College of Policing as a way to professionalise policing and to standardise learning whilst also enabling current officers to utilise their previous experience to gain formal accreditation (Belur *et al.*, 2020). However, this has not been a linear implementation across forces, often facing caution and reluctance from within policing hierarchies. One example, as noted by Williams *et al.*, (2019) supported by other key scholars such as Wood (2020), is that there is often a disconnect between theoretical content taught in classrooms, and its overall perception of utility from senior officers, leading to its lack of application in-force by recruits, "...participants described an inability to utilise the knowledge gained from their degree due to a lack of peer support and a perception of irrelevance from more senior members of staff" (Williams *et al.*, 2019 p.24). However, the purpose of this research is not to validate these evaluations or to disqualify them, instead this paper seeks to understand the perceptions of recruits *before* they enrol onto a Higher Education course such as the Professional Policing Degree as a tool upon which HEI's can develop engagement content and support recruitment figures.

Literature Review

There is a small body of literature surrounding police career progression such as the work of Boag-Munroe (2017) with a focus on female officers and Astley (2019) who explores the derived benefits

of senior officer mentorship to enhance female officer progression, as well as that of Atkinson *et al.*, (2003) who explore the career progression of police probationers from a probationer/supervisor perspective. Jackson's (2021) work discusses the value of a degree and the changing nature of graduate roles, whilst earlier work from Tomlison (2008) proposes that employability skills need to be added to educational credentials for students to be competitive in the labour market and combined provide a candidate with a strong chance of success in the workplace. Existing literature from Wood and Tong (2009) looks at the learning requirements of police employees where they argue that there is a need to, "...externalise their learning and education. For initial police training this means pre-employment in which the status of the student officer become much clearer." (Wood and Tong, 2009: p. 303). Here they assert the need for policing organisations to invest longer-term in institutional educational requirements and that they should not simply be overshadowed by more short-term operations.

Whilst the College of Policing (2024a) provide guidance focused on career progression to support officers and staff alike with their professional development, little appears with a link to academic rigour until the role of Superintendent is reached and where a Level 7 qualification is the expectation. To date, very little exists on the perceived value of an academic degree, with particular reference to the policing profession – hence the value of this work. Within recent years, scholarly sentiment has offered mixed opinions as to the need, opportunities, and success of the PEQF on policing. For example, Honess and Clarke's (2023) work contributes to the ongoing PEQF debate highlighting some of the core issues with the integration of degree-level work combined with practical police training and how this impacts HEI providers and partner forces. A different approach is taken by Brown *et al.*, (2018) who offer their perspective from an evidence-based policing (EBP) point of view and explore how an extension of the work that EBP covers, could be applied to the PEQF framework and may be used to support syllabus development in higher level police education.

A frequently cited area of note for police forces is to be open-minded and to ensure a cultural shift is brought about (Wood, 2020). Yet, as Andrews (2023) notes, achieving this significant change within the minds of senior officers, alongside rigid operational pressures have proven difficult and has meant the PEQF has been viewed negatively within police forces. However, this research sought to understand a further potential hurdle for one aspect of the PEQF which seems to have been largely overlooked within current research, namely, the Professional Policing Degree and its recruitment of young people to universities.

Due to the changes and fluctuations with the degree-based programmes and therefore the potential appetite for both studying at university and to studying a Professional Policing Degree (or similarly related programme), it is important to ascertain student opinions and motivations of both. Therefore, it is felt that the post-compulsory age group are the best suited research participants upon which to base this study, as they will likely feed into HEI establishments across the country in the near future. It is important to state at this point that this paper does not seek to comment on police professionalism or police development via the lens of the 16–19-year-old participant group but presents new knowledge on the demand of studying subjects such as policing at university-level and how 16–19-year-olds perceive degree ownership.

Furthermore, the value of this research extends to HEI's and partnership forces for the purpose of programme development and refinement and more broadly for forces to consider how to engage with schools and colleges on a deeper level, offering the opportunity to invest in outreach and target potential staff of the future.

Methodology

This exploratory, small scale, predominantly qualitative participatory study, draws upon data generated from a relatively short recruitment window of December 2023 to January 2024, which was purposely chosen following several engagement opportunities with the target age group, post-outreach events. Participation came from four feeder schools and colleges within the broader West Midlands area, who work in partnership with the university, requesting university input for taster lectures, masterclass sessions and campus experience days. Purposive sampling (Lawrence *et al.*, 2015; Sibona *et al.*, 2020) was applied to selection criteria of participatory subjects and were two-fold: 1) they must have engaged with one of the outreach activities (as online questionnaires were shared post-session) and 2) the outreach sessions fit within the disciplines of policing, criminology, sociology, or law. The subject disciplines did not mean that all participants were driven to study policing at university but ensured that for a number of participants there was at least a loose interest in the wider criminal justice and related fields, and that participant responses would be valid.

From an HEI perspective, outreach activities with schools and colleges forms a considerable part of their recruitment and engagement strategy and which can significantly influence application rates (Zacharias and Mitchell, 2020; Gumaelius *et al.*, 2016). The Midlands based University recruits approximately 60% of its student cohort from the local area, the importance of engagement with feeder schools and colleges is incredibly important, again adding to the validity of this research paper.

In total, $n = 89$ responses were returned, with all 89 responses deemed to be useable. The responding group consisted of 71 x who identify as female and 18 x who identify as male, with all participants fitting into the 16–19-year-old age bracket, thus meeting the intended target audience. Therefore, these responses clearly speak to the different thoughts and opinions of the topic of Higher Education (HE) and policing, offering a vital input from the age range potentially looking to university as the next step to develop their academic skillset and enhance future career prospects.

Questionnaires were chosen as the research method of choice for a number of core reasons. First, it was anticipated that respondent numbers would be in the 50+ category offering a realistic sample size (Dawson, 2009) for the type of research and without being bound to the potential time constraints of interviews for example. Furthermore, due to ethical considerations such as age (many respondents being under 18), and access to participants, interviews and focus groups were discounted. Secondly, and one of the most important drivers for the research, was that a potentially willing participant pool had already been identified (Rowley, 2014), therefore offering researchers access both short-term for the first phase of the project, and more longer-term, for later iterations of the study should they choose to be explored.

Finally, the questionnaire itself suited the research parameters of obtaining student opinions of Higher Education and policing. This was applicable for the researchers themselves, as well as the respondents, with due care being given to the consideration of factors such as the completion time of the questionnaire (Revilla and Ochoa, 2017), to the appropriateness of the questions, and to ease of comprehension (Sharma, 2022). Moreover, it was important to have participant willingness to complete the survey as without their input the results would not be as enriching and beneficial to a relatively under-researched discipline.

The online questionnaire containing 16 items consisted of two main parts – the first section asked general questions related to studying at university and potential career prospects, whilst the second

section looked more specifically at interest levels in policing as a profession and as a subject to study. This helped to focus the research, refining (Cauldfield and Hill, 2018) questions to best serve the aims and expected outcomes of the study.

Whilst no set framework or methodology was adopted, the questionnaire used a number of checkbox and Likert style questions and statements which are common in educational research (Norman, 2010), plus participants were encouraged to make use of the 'free text' comments boxes, prompting further development of answers (Rich *et al.*, 2013) and chance to elaborate on thoughts and opinions. Although some responses within the comment's boxes were brief (with some offering simple yes or no answers), many participants embraced the opportunity to make their individual points, adding depth and credibility to the work, therefore strengthening the validity of the study.

Data was thematically analysed (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and highlighted four broad themes; 1) ascertaining participant intention to go to university; 2) necessity for police officers to have a degree; 3) preference for a police officer to hold a degree and 4) degrees equate to career progression.

Findings

Theme 1: Intentions to apply to university

The following details responses from one of the initial questions (question 7) posed to participants, asking, "Do you intend to go to university?", with 70% of respondents noted they did indeed wish to attend university, 20% undecided and the remaining 10% noting they did not intend to apply. Building upon this question, question 8 seeks to understand the respondents reasoning for why they did/did not wish to attend university. The following discussion analyses the participants responses, the responses that characterise these results to gather underlying reasons for this data.

Reasons to attend university

Firstly, it should be noted that several responses were somewhat vague, such as answering with "I want to" and with two respondents leaving the section blank. In these instances, the researchers have utilised responses from question 10: "*what are the positives (if any) of going to university?*" to draw out additional information. From this position, it allowed for a more educated assessment as to the reasons behind vague answers (Wang and Ziano, 2023), whilst accepting that this approach may still be somewhat prone to over/incorrectly assessing responses. Of the 70% of respondents who noted they wished to attend university; the following responses were the most frequent from survey participants. Ten respondents noted they wished to obtain a degree qualification, 32 stated they felt a degree would lead to career progression, often imperatively so, two were specific about the location of the university, and 15 stated their decision was due to a desire to study deeper into a particular topic.

Of the remaining respondents, these varied from wanting to strive for a Masters, whilst two others noted it had always been their wish to attend. The most common of these responses, a purported opportunity to advance within potential careers, is a common theme throughout the findings of this research, particularly in relation to student's opinions as to police career progression once in-force. Firstly, this demonstrates the views of young people in relation to university, as whilst recruitment for universities is expected to be down sector wide in 24/25 (Jack, 2024), it is evident young people wish to seek Higher Education, suggesting police forces may need to continue targeting these spaces for recruitment.

Equally, it is worth noting that 15 respondents alluded to an expansion of their knowledge as their primary motivations which suggests ambition may not always be a driving factor for some young people when making career decisions. Overall, it is evident university is the clear aim for a number of the post-compulsory education (16+) participatory group and HEIs should continue to seek, engage and inspire their potential future students.

Reasons not to go to university

Eight respondents to the survey noted their intention not to attend university, particularly for three main reasons. Firstly, the potential toll university can have mentally on young people was of concern among respondents, with one respondent noting:

“I believe Uni will be too stressful for me and my mental health and I want to leave education as soon as”
(R23)

Who went on to further state:

“the cost is too expensive and I don't want to feel stress anymore as I already have”. (R23)

In addition to this, whilst some respondents did not state stress and mental challenges as firm barriers to applying to university, it was noted on numerous occasions within question 11, which sought respondent’s opinions as to the negatives of university. Whilst this is not a key finding directly related to this paper, it does raise a potential opportunity for future research and of work that HEI’s could do to support the transition between post-compulsory education, and HE study.

Secondly, the most common factor for why respondents stated they did not want to attend university, or stated a clear negative towards Higher Education, was the perceived costs involved. This was the overwhelming answer for question 11, highlighting a clear challenge for the College of Policing’s PEQF which may be difficult to overcome without a concerted effort to tackle these perceptions. Notably, this challenge arises amidst a sector-wide decrease in university applications, largely attributed to the perceived heightened costs alongside a tightening of budgets due to a cost-of-living challenge for families.

“Cost of the course is concerning” (R34)

“I am concerned, perhaps more so nervous about the academic study level and how I will finance student life even with a job. I am worried that because i will be working trying to earn money i will have less time to focus on my studies.” (R64)

Finally, whilst some respondents who noted in their answers that they did wish to join the police and also attend university, other respondents stated that they did not wish to attend university *because* they were going to join the police. This perhaps underscores the importance of highlighting the variety of routes (College of Policing, 2024d) into policing that are available – most suitably done at outreach events and taster days – so potential officers of the future can be best informed about which pathway would be the best fit for each individual.

Theme 2: Necessity for police officers to have a degree

Participants were asked to comment upon whether they felt a police officer should have a degree to do their job, with the question being chosen to provide the link between academia and professional policing practice, and to gauge the opinions of the target participant pool. The data showed that just under half of respondents (46%), believed a degree to be a necessity for the role of a police officer,

with 28% detailing it was not necessary and with the final 26% fitting into an 'other' comments section to be further explored below.

Positive responses

From the outset, it was clear to see a significant difference in the depth of responses received from participants, with some offering positive but basic answers such as:

"Yes" (R's 18, 19 and 20)

"yes to know what they are doing" (R78)

"I guess yeah" (R88)

To those offering more developed opinions, with a willingness to further elaborate on their answers. Participants made insightful comments, clearly considering the roles and responsibilities of a police officer and the impact of their actions. This was shown from the responses below, with particular note being made to the comments of R49, who states that the police hold power over the public and with that comes the responsibility to earn community trust – clearly a driving factor and top agenda of a modern-day police force.

"Yes so they can properly state reasons for arrest and if issues do happen they are confident in their ability" (R5)

"yes. They need to know of procedure and how to approach things in beneficial ways. Like how to keep a situation calm, how to do deal with high risk situations" (R28)

"yes, they hold lots of power when it comes to dealing with the public and also have a huge responsibility so should be as qualified as they can possibly be. It also helps to add trust in the community when those upholding the law are highly qualified." (R49)

Of note, some respondents stated that they felt police officers should have a degree, merely because it was a pre-requisite of the job and not necessarily an asset or qualification that was required based on the role of a police officer. Contrastingly, R71 looked at the necessity for potential officers to have to work hard to get a job within policing, stating that it is an earned right and not a simple expectation, showing that they value the commitment (Gloucestershire Police, 2024) needed for the profession.

"To an extent as I don't believe everyone deserves to be a police officer, you should have to work hard to get into policing." (R71)

The comments of R82 (below) offer a real insight into perceptions of policing, recognising that as an officer you can have a significant impact on an individual and their life and that both a strong educational background and preparation for the challenges of police work are important qualities for those in the profession to hold.

"yes as they can have a big impact on someone's life and they should be highly educated and prepared before being able to do so" (R82)

Negative responses

Again, there was a clear difference in the depth of the 'no' responses received – some participants offering single-word answers, whilst others offered more considered and detailed opinions. The

breakdown of this section of negative responses largely fit into three sub-categories, being split as follows: 1) *the physical traits needed to complete the job*, 2) *that degrees restrict the people who could apply to be a police officer* and 3) *abilities and experience are seen as being more valuable than an educational qualification*. These responses provided clear evidence that not all respondents felt that a police officer needed to have a degree, offering a significant insight into the topic from the 16+ year old age category. The responses from R13 and R45 provide evidence that some consider the practical, hands-on nature of police work as more important than holding an academic qualification.

"No. It's more of a physical job. I don't believe they should require a degree but it should be judged more on their abilities and performance whilst working as an officer" (R13)

"not necessary because it is more of a hands on job" (R45)

Whilst some participants stated that the physical traits and hands-on nature was of great importance to the role, others demonstrated a recognition that it was not necessary for a police officer to have a degree and in-fact, having a degree could be a barrier (Adderley and Mold, 2023) to people joining. It is worth noting here that whilst the question asked participants to consider if a police officer needed a degree to do their job, many of the responses seemed to be derived from the academic pathways into joining the police, more than a holistic take on the welcomed skills, qualities, and attributes of a police officer.

"No because even people without a degree can do police training." (R22)

"no, because not everybody has the dedication to stay in education for 3 extra years. Some people may not be intellectual enough for university, but are dedicated to joining the police" (R51)

"not necessarily, the university side may put a lot of people off joining the police if this was made mandatory limiting the audience a job in policing would target." (R39)

Other responses

There were some suggestions that the requirement to study for a degree may put people off applying to become an officer, citing the intellectual expectations and time commitment (Bellare et al., 2021; Spitzig and Renner, 2022) of attending university, as factors with the potential to negatively impact recruitment. R39 raises a valid point, that the necessity for a degree could limit the audience applying for the police, which in turn could mean that outstanding candidates would be missed. Further responses detailed that sound training and strong morals were deemed to be more important than an academic qualification, which as stated by R32 could be developed with sufficient training and correct observation of officers, ensuring competence with staff.

"No as long as they have the proper training and morals" (R16)

"I do not think that a degree is necessary in order for a police officer to do their job. I think that sufficient training and observation will ensure competency of a police officer." (R32)

"no, I believe that there are other ways of achieving the profession rather than education for example experience is more important." (R79)

Finally, within this section, there were the responses fitting into the 'other' category and predominantly detailed that whilst they felt a degree was not necessary, some form of formal training and time spent on relevant and applicable courses were necessary for the role.

"I don't believe a specific degree is necessary, only the correct police training." (R89)

1
2
3 *"Yes and no, I think police officers should have at least some degree of higher education where they*
4 *learn more about their field and become experienced, however I don't think degrees are suited to*
5 *everyone and there should be options that do not require a degree."* (R65)

6
7 *"Not necessarily a degree but some form of training or education over the course of a couple of*
8 *years"* (R74)
9

10
11 As shown from R65 and R74, they felt that whilst a degree was not needed, a prolonged period of
12 training or education over a couple of years was important, potentially alluding to the ongoing two-
13 year probationary period and associated portfolio of evidence, or indeed, a significant amount of
14 education and training, potentially echoing what a degree may entail.
15

16 **Theme 3: Officers with degrees**

17
18 The research also sought the opinions from respondents as to whether they would prefer an officer
19 to have a degree in their interactions with the police. From the responses, 15.7% of respondents
20 noted a disagreement, whilst 6.7% selected a strong disagreement. When combined with the
21 responses from the question prior, *"Should a police officer have a degree in order to do their job?"*, it
22 could suggest that respondents see the clear value of police training (over and above an academic
23 qualification) as previously stated by R16, further supported by R21 and R8 as evidenced below:
24

25
26 *"They shouldn't need to have a degree I feel as if them being professionally trained is what matters"*
27 *(R21)*
28

29 *"No as long as they have the training and knowledge of the subject provided to them through the*
30 *training. However it depends on the lengths the job will take them to and what they will have to deal*
31 *with."* (R8)
32

33
34 On the other hand, 24.7% of respondents stated they agreed that they would prefer to deal with an
35 officer with a degree, and 9% noted a strong agreement. The remaining respondents, 43.8% neither
36 agreed nor disagreed. Similarly to those who disagreed, the prior question highlights underlying
37 reasons as to why respondents opted for their answers. Those who agreed with the statement felt a
38 degree afforded officers a higher level of competency, particularly in relation to their knowledge of
39 the law.
40

41 *"I feel like it definitely helps as you are going to have more legal knowledge and perform your duties*
42 *correctly"* (R9)
43

44
45 What these responses demonstrate, is that whilst the figures for those in agreement were higher,
46 there was not a considerable difference as to whether young people prefer an officer to have a
47 degree in their dealings with them; further emphasised by the 43.8% of respondents who neither
48 agreed nor disagreed. What can be surmised however is that there is a clear split within the minds of
49 the respondents to a broader point around competency, specifically what prior steps are needed for
50 an officer to be effective in their role. Indeed, when comparing these results from answers given to
51 the question regarding respondent's willingness to attend university, 70% of which were in favour, it
52 speaks more to their view of Higher Education more broadly as a necessary stepping stone to
53 desired employment, whilst other reasons such as the opportunity to become more knowledgeable
54 appear secondary.
55

56 **Theme 4: Degrees equate to career progression**

57
58 Participants were asked to comment upon the following statement, *"I believe that if a police officer*
59 *had a degree, it would help them progress in their career"* and used a 5-point Likert scale ranging
60

from strongly agree to strongly disagree, to gauge student responses. Simple statistical analysis (Vetter, 2017) was used to ascertain respondents' feelings towards the statement, being broken down into the following percentages below.

Strong evidence in support of a degree contributing to career progression was noted, with over 50% of respondents responding favourably to the statement posed. Results showed that 10.1% of respondents strongly agreed, with a further 44.9% agreeing that holding a degree would prove to be of benefit to an individual and their career progression. These results are significant as they show a positive correlation between degree ownership and occupational development, indicating that school/college age students do see the value of further academic study and what it may mean to their own prospective career journeys.

The work of Atkinson *et al.*, (2003) which explores the career progression of police probationers through a probationer/supervisor lens, corroborates these findings from the perspective of the probationer, who link educational qualifications as the likely predictor of future career advancements. Conversely, supervisors saw more value in occupational and relational skills, "...for predicting career advancement of probationers under their supervision." (Atkinson *et al.*, 2003: p.43), underpinning a difference with new recruits and serving officers.

Further analysis detailed that 25.8% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed (NAND) to the statement which suggests that either participants held no strong opinions on the topic and thus, it was the most suitable response, or that it may have been selected as they did not want to form an opinion, nor did they want to impact the results. Munoz van den Eynde and Lobera (2022), explore the notion that some respondents will select the middle NAND option as they may not have enough knowledge to feel that they can fully comment, or may choose it to express their uncertainty without having to show ignorance (Sturgis and Smith, 2010). Regardless of their reason, this number is significant, in the sense that respondents may find additional information on the topic in the future beneficial to allow them to better form an opinion, and therefore that it is indeed possible for the rating on the scale to alter and change later.

Finally, the responses detailed a figure of 13.5% who disagreed with the statement, with the remaining 5.6% strongly disagreeing that a degree would be beneficial for career progression. From these figures, what is not known is the justification for the chosen placement on the scale, though what can be derived from the results is that less than 20% of student respondents feel that a degree is not beneficial for career progression opportunities of police officers. The College of Policing (2024c) acknowledges that for certain ranks (Superintendent and above), there is an educational expectation that the applicant will hold a Level 7 qualification (post-graduate, master's or PhD) alongside the ability to achieve Level 3 across all areas of the Competency Values Framework (CVF). In most instances, this will be twinned with operational policing experience, though in the case of direct entry to the Superintendent rank, this may not be the case. This serves to underpin the notion that the police value academic attainment as a determining factor to career progression (albeit at a very senior level), offering clear evidence to the value of academic qualifications.

Conclusion

This article has explored the thoughts and opinions of the post-compulsory education sector, those participants being over the age of 16 and in Year 12 and 13 of school or college, on the topic of Higher Education and policing. The study contributes to our understanding of the interests and motivations of a valuable sector of society, particularly when considering that many of the study group will likely move onto universities/Higher Education and study related courses in the future.

1
2
3 Importantly, this work has given an insight and overview into what may drive their academic and
4 career choices in later years, reaffirming its importance as an exploratory piece of research of
5 particular value to HEIs and policing organisations.
6

7 When seeking the opinions of respondents as to their intentions of applying to university, 70% of
8 respondents were in favour, with a majority stating its perceived ability to enhance their prospects
9 at achieving a desired employment role. In relation to policing however, the research also found that
10 whilst more respondents agreed that they would prefer an officer to have a degree when dealing
11 with the police than disagreed (33% to 22%), there was not a significant enough difference to
12 demonstrate the value of a degree held by an officer from the 16–19-year-old participatory group.
13 This ultimately suggested respondents saw greater value in Higher Education as a tool to achieve a
14 job role, rather than viewing their degree as a tool to be better in that role.
15
16

17 As shown, there is clear evidence that participants see value in studying for a degree (Brooks and
18 Everett, 2009) and the potential implication it may have to career development and progression, and
19 whilst not all are in favour of the approach, the statistics demonstrate that there is a benefit to
20 obtaining a degree, with particular reference to the police. Almost half of all respondents (46%) felt
21 that policing should be a degree-based profession, with other opinions formed that if not a degree,
22 then at least a substantial period of enhanced training. This helps add credibility to the value of the
23 different pathways into policing, demonstrating that to some level, all pathways (PPD, PCDA, DHEP,
24 IPLDP, PCEP plus specific detective derivatives) offer a credible route for all potential police
25 applicants, with at least one suiting individual need.
26
27

28 A key finding at over 50%, was that participants felt that holding a degree would be beneficial to
29 career progression and prospects of police officers, reaffirming the earlier work of Atkinson *et al.*,
30 (2003) and is an important consideration for academic institutions and partner forces to further
31 explore. Not only could this information support recruitment initiatives and career development but
32 may provide applicants (both academic and police related) with the confidence in their future
33 decision making. Whilst this research did not consider the value of holding a degree for other
34 professions outside of policing, additional exploration may be able to ascertain the value from a
35 wider spectrum of curricula, again adding further depth to this work.
36
37

38 Finally, this study forms part of a wider ongoing project to ascertain student thoughts and opinions
39 on Higher Education and policing and will continue to be driven by outreach events with the feeder
40 schools and colleges to the Midlands based University. As such, it is anticipated that over time that
41 there may be a shift in student responses which may be impacted by a range of factors such as
42 perceptions of the police and the policing profession, government apprenticeship initiatives (Gov.uk,
43 2024), plus the recent introduction of the Police Constable Entry Programme (PCEP), offering a non-
44 academic pathway into policing. Further to this, there is planned scope to widen this research on a
45 national level, engaging with schools and colleges across the country, highlighting if any core
46 differences appear based on location, outreach activities or engagement with local police forces.
47
48

49 *Ethics approval obtained:*

50 This study was approved by the Business, Law and Social Sciences Ethics Committee (approval
51 number: 12132)
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

References

Adderley, N. and Mold, S. (2023), [Online] “A degree doesn’t make an excellent police officer”. The Times, Wednesday 1st February 2023. Available from: [A degree doesn’t make an excellent police officer \(thetimes.com\)](https://www.thetimes.com) (Accessed 14 August 2024)

Andrews, T. (2023), Perceptions of student officers of the police constable degree apprenticeship, *The Police Journal: Theory, Practice and Principles*, 0(0), pp 1-24

Andrews, T. (2024), Public expectations of police education in England and Wales, *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, 18, pp 1-9

Astley, J. (2019), Power Relationships within the UK Police Service: Towards Enhanced Female Career Progression, *International Journal of HRD Practice, Policy and Research*, 4(1), pp 59-70

Atkinson, P., Barrow, C. and Connors, L. (2003), Models of police probationer career progression: preconceptions of the psychological contract, *Human Resource Development International*, 6(1), pp 43-56

Bellare, Y., Smith, A., Cochran, K. and Garcia Lopez, S. (2021), Motivations and Barriers for Adult Learner Achievement: Recommendations for Institutions of Higher Education, *Adult Learning*, 34(1), pp 30-39

Belur, J., Agnew-Pauley, W., McGinley, B. and Tompson, L. (2020), A Systematic Review of Police Training Programmes, *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, 14(1), pp 76-90

Boag-Munroe, F. (2017), Career Progression Expectations and Aspirations of Female Police Officers in England and Wales, *Policing*, 13(4), pp 426-440

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006), Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), pp 77-101

Brooks, R. and Everett, G. (2009), Post-graduation reflections on the value of a degree, *British Educational Research Journal*, 35(3), pp 333-349

Brooks, R. and Youngson, P. (2016), Undergraduate work placements: an analysis of the effects of career progression, *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(9), pp 1563-1578

Brown, J., Belur, J., Tompson, L., McDowall, A., Hunter, G. and May, T. (2018), Extending the remit of evidence-based policing, *International Journal of Police Science and Management*, 20(1), pp 38-51

Bryant, R., Cockcroft, T., Tong, S. and Wood, D. (2014), Police Training and Education: Past, Present and Future. In Brown, J. (ed.), *The Future of Policing*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp 383-397

Cauldfield, L. and Hill, J. (2018), *Criminological Skills and Research for Beginners: A Student’s Guide*. Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis Group

College of Policing (2024a), [Online] Career pathways. Available from: [Career pathways | College of Policing](#) (Accessed 26 March 2024)

College of Policing (2024b), [Online] Universities offering a professional policing degree. Available from: [Universities offering a professional policing degree | College of Policing](#) (Accessed 26 March 2024)

College of Policing (2024c), [Online] Superintendent. Available from: [Superintendent - College of Policing](#) (Accessed 25 March 2024)

College of Policing (2024d), [Online] Joining the police as a new police constable (PC). Available from: [Joining the police as a new police constable \(PC\) | College of Policing](#) (Accessed 16 August 2024)

Dawson, C. (2009), Introduction to Research Methods. A practical guide for anyone undertaking a research project, 4th ed. London: Constable & Robinson Ltd

Dodd, V. (2016), [Online] 'New Police Officers Face Degree Requirement', *The Guardian Online*, 15th December 2016. Available from: [New police officers face degree requirement | Police | The Guardian](#) (Accessed 16 August 2024)

Gloucestershire Police (2024), [Online] Police officer. Available from: [Police officer | Gloucestershire Constabulary](#) (Accessed 15 August 2024)

Gov.uk (2024), [Online] Apprenticeships. Available from: [Apprenticeships, Academic year 2023/24 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#) (Accessed 26 March 2024)

Gumaelius, L., Almqvistb, M., Arnadottir, A., Axelsson, A., Conejero, J., García Sabater, J. and Klitgaard, L. (2016), Outreach initiatives operated by universities for increasing interest in science and technology, *European Journal of Engineering Education*, 41(6), pp 589-622

Hallenberg, K. and Cockcroft, T. (2017), From Indifference to Hostility: Police Officers, Organizational Responses and the Symbolic Value of 'in-service' Higher Education in Policing, *Policing*, 11(3), pp 273-288

Home Office (2024), [Online] Police Uplift Programme: entry routes of officer recruits. Available from: [Police Uplift Programme: entry routes of officer recruits - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) (Accessed 16 August 2024)

Honess, R. and Clarke, S. (2023), 'It's Not "Uni" Work, it's Essential Learning to be a Police Officer': Examining the Higher Education Elements of Police Education Qualifications Framework Programmes, *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, 17(3)

Jack, P. (2024), UK university applications down for third year in row. *Times Higher Education*. 15 February 2024. Available from: [Ucas: UK university applications down again | Times Higher Education \(THE\)](#) (Accessed 26 March 2024)

Jackson, D. (2021), The changing nature of graduate roles and the value of the degree, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 43(2), pp 182-197

Jacob, M. and Klein, M. (2019), Social origin, field of study and graduates' career progression: does social inequality vary across fields? *The British Journal of Sociology*, 70(5), pp 1850-1873

- Kato, T. and Miura, Y. (2021), The impact of questionnaire length on the accuracy rate of online surveys, *Journal of Marketing Analytics*, 9, 83-98
- Lawrence, P., Horwitz, S., Green, C., Wisdom, J., Duan, N. and Hoagwood, K. (2015), Purposive sampling for quantitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research, *Adm Policy Ment Health*, 42(5), pp 533-544
- Metropolitan Police (2024), [Online] Police Constable Entry Programme (PCEP). Available from: [Police Constable Entry Programme \(PCEP\) | Metropolitan Police](#) (Accessed 28 March 2024)
- Munoz van den Eynde, A. and Lobera, J. (2022), Analysis of the tendency to select the “neither nor” option in agreement/disagreement scales on a low-salience topic: The contribution of individual differences, *Methodological Innovations*, 15(3), pp 289-302
- Norman, G. (2010), Likert scales, levels of measurement and the “laws” of statistics, *Advances in Health Science Education*, 15, pp 625-632
- Pepper, I., Brown, I. and Stubbs, P. (2021), A degree of recognition across policing: embedding a degree apprenticeship encompassing work-based research, *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, 14(1), pp 35-45
- Pepper, I. and McGrath, R. (2019), Embedding employability within higher education for the profession of policing, *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 9(3), pp 319-328
- Revilla, M. and Ochoa, C. (2017), Ideal and Maximum Length of a Web Survey, *International Journal of Market Research*, 59(5), pp 557-565
- Rich, J., Chojenta, C. and Loxton, D. (2013), Quality, Rigour and Usefulness of Free-Text Comments Collected by Large Population Based Longitudinal Study – ALSWH, *PLoS One*, 8(7), pp 1-11
- Rowley, J. (2014), Designing and using research questionnaires, *Management Research Review*, 37(3), pp 308-330
- Sharma, H. (2022), How short or long should be a questionnaire for any research? Researchers dilemma in deciding the appropriate questionnaire length, *Saudi Journal of Anaesthesia*, 16(1), pp 65-68
- Sibona, C., Walczak, S. and White Baker, E. (2020), A Guide for Purposive Sampling on Twitter, *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, 46, pp 537-559
- Spitzig, J. and Renner, B. (2022), Student Engagement and Retention of Adult Learners at Community Colleges, *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, pp 1-18
- Strong, J. (2019), [Online] Research & Policy Support Briefing Paper, *Policing Education Qualification Framework (PEQF) implementation Frequently Asked Questions*, February 2019, V2. Police Federation. Available from: [policing-education-qualifications-framework-faqs.pdf \(polfed.org\)](#) (Accessed 16 August 2024)
- Sturgis, P. and Smith, P. (2010), Fictitious issues revisited: Political interest, knowledge and the generation of nonattitudes, *Political Studies*, 58(1), pp 66-84
- Sussex Police (2024), [Online] Police Constable Entry Programme – PCEP. Available from: [Police Constable Entry Programme – PCEP | Sussex Police](#) (Accessed 28 March 2024)

Tomlinson, M. (2008), 'The degree is not enough': students' perceptions of the role of higher education credentials for graduate work and employability, *British Journal of Sociological Education*, 29(1), pp 49-61

Vetter, T. (2017), Descriptive Statistics: Reporting the Answers to the 5 Basic Questions of Who, What, Why, When, Where and a Sixth: So What?, *International Anaesthesia Research Society*, pp 1-6

Wang, D. and Ziano, I. (2023), Give Me a Straight Answer: Response Ambiguity Diminishes Likability, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, pp 1-15

Wood, D. (2020), Embedding learning and assessment within police practice: The opportunities and challenges arising from the introduction of the PEQF in England and Wales, *Policing a Journal of Policy and Practice*, 14(2), pp 374-382

Wood, D. and Tong, S. (2009), The future of initial police training: a university perspective, *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, 11(3), pp 294-305

Williams, E., Norman, J. and Rowe, M. (2019), The police education qualification framework: a professional agenda or building professionals? *Police Practice and Research, An International Journal*, 20(3), pp 259-272

Zacharias, N. and Mitchell, G. (2020), The Importance of Highly Engaged School-University Partnerships in Widening Participation Outreach, *Student Success*, 11(1), pp 35-45