

A comparative study of prior learning for serving police officers in Canada and England and Wales, UK: Bridging the academic gap

Anne L. Eason and Scott Blandford¹

ABSTRACT

The professionalisation of the police in Canada, and England and Wales has highlighted a gap in the education levels of new recruits and current serving police officers, motivating many of these officers to complete a university degree. The prior experience and training of these officers can be utilised as academic and operational credit against the learning outcomes of undergraduate programs and both countries use a system to recognise and dispense this award. In Canada this is called Prior Learning Assessment Recognition (PLAR) and in England and Wales, Accredited Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). The College of Policing also offers a system of Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) which tailors support to officers in accessing higher education programs. This paper examines how the two countries methods support the bridging of the academic gap between new recruit and long-serving officers, supporting the professionalisation transition of the police force to produce effective 21st century officers. Formalized partnerships between academic institutions and police services are rare, but the need for academic institutions to develop pathways for officers to complete higher level education is a positive step forward in the process. This review highlights how Canada has yet to engage with academia in the professionalisation process in the same way as England and Wales.

Key Words: Policing, Prior Experiential Learning, Professionalisation, Post-Secondary education, Higher Education

INTRODUCTION

Increased globalization of crime, multiculturalism, the rise of social media and technology, the integration of community-based policing as a general law enforcement philosophy and higher expectations from the community, have all led to an increasingly complex environment for police officers globally (College of Policing, 2019; Leuprecht, 2014). Traditionally modelled as a paramilitary hierarchy and amongst significant opposition from the working-class sector of British society (Reiner, 2010), police organizations have a relatively strict bureaucratic structure. Likewise, in Canada, the establishment of municipal police services were modelled on the British structure and subscribed to the tenets of Sir Robert Peel (Richardson, 2005). The current demands and the complexity of those demands upon police officers has increased greatly since the early days of policing and the need for officers to have the necessary competencies is critical to organizational success (Whitelaw & Parent, 2014) and community security. Police organizations seek to recruit the best applicants, and post-secondary education is often a deciding factor between candidates in Canada (Ontario Police College, 2013) and higher

¹ Corresponding author: sblandford@wlu.ca

education, now the mandatory recruitment pathway in England and Wales (College of Policing, 2020).

The notion of professionalism and what it means to be ‘a professional’ as previously outlined, has, and continues to be an ongoing area of deliberation. According to Bacon *et al* (2000, p.3):

Professions were historically defined as the broad and privileged class of occupations characterized by highly trained expertise, selection by merit, and subject to peer surveillance. It was thought that professional practitioners were in command of arcane and specialist knowledge; a knowledge which they controlled by the admission of only those who were like themselves and the exclusion of those who might constitute a threat or challenge’.

They would therefore occupy authoritative and powerful positions such as in law, the church, or in medicine, maintaining an air of elitism and hierarchy. They suggest that professional occupations were reserved for those from the higher classes who shared the same social and financial capital, and ensured the exclusivity of membership through the admission process; the poorer sector of society were unable to afford the required educational accreditation acquired through university nor the social connections necessary to qualify as a professional. This can still be observed today for example in the legal professions such as Barristers or Judges where the overwhelming majority are still from the richer sector of society following family traditions and who enjoy the membership of a social/professional network intrinsically connected to those occupying that sector of society. After the Second World War, there was a shift in the tertiary sector of industry moving away from manufacturing tangible goods to the delivery of invisible services such as social workers, teachers, accountants or insurance (Laffin & Young, 1990; Bacon *et al*, 2000). This Bacon *et al* suggest, legitimised the professionalisation of a wider scope of occupations and as a consequence, a shift in class-status of individuals who occupied them gradually moving away from the elitist network and hierarchy in professional occupations.

The complexity of contemporary police work requires officers to apply advanced skill-sets to their current abilities; promotion through the organization based solely on experience and seniority is not sustainable (Hay Group, 2007; Neyroud, 2011). Through post-secondary (or higher) education, police officers can develop the soft and hard skills (behavioural and technical competencies) they require to serve the public, prevent, and detect crime, and advance their careers. Competencies such as team building, communication, critical thinking, and problem solving are all fundamental to investigative success (Bonder, Bouchard, & Bellemare, 2011; Bowman, 2012). More importantly, however, they are critical to understanding the complex multi-cultural and intersectional community (Hill-Collins and Bilge, 2016) that populates 21st century society in an era of problem-oriented and community-based policing strategies (Braga and Tucker, 2019; Scheuerman, 2019).

Often considered synonymous within the police environment, the terms education and training are distinctly different. Education is a continuous process involving the development of knowledge, critical thinking skills, and judgment that allow a person to see varying shades of grey (Saks & Haccoun, 2013). Training is targeted to help employees acquire job-specific technical knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform their role (Bowman, 2012; Paterson, 2011; Saks & Haccoun, 2013). In simplest terms, training tells an officer how to do something; education tells them why they are doing it. Police

organizations invest heavily in training for officers, but education has traditionally been left to the individual officer to pursue, and police managers or colleagues often look unfavourably on highly educated officers (Eason, 2019; Paterson, 2011). However, as noted by authors such as Eason (2019) and Hallenberg (2012), to combat societal change and the sophistication of criminal evolution, the provision of undergraduate education is necessary to provide “a rich cultural capital [that] strengthens and legitimises police expertise, market monopoly, and status in the eyes of the public, other professions and the government” (Hallenberg, 2012, p.5).

The move by England and Wales to employ higher education institutions (HEI) to work collaboratively with constabularies to deliver a range of undergraduate recruitment pathways, including apprenticeships, is reflective of this shift to academic professionalisation. In Canada, Tulloch (2017) commented that “for many people, policing is a calling in the same way many doctors are called to medicine and teachers are called to teaching. Policing should be seen as a distinguished profession” (p. 257). However, post-secondary education remains a preferred but optional route and as Ross (2012) bluntly stated, ‘if law enforcement wants to be considered a profession by others (especially the public and the politicians that fund them and whose trust they depend), then the field needs a university degree component to legitimize it’ (p. 254). The accreditation of previous experience, whether academic or otherwise, has thus gained increased importance as the professions requiring academic accreditation broadens to match the operational needs of a changing society (Konrad, 2001). The police in both England and Wales, and Canada are, albeit differing recruitment pathways, no exception as they move into the state of professionalisation. It is these differing pathways and their benefits that this paper aims to compare.

METHODOLOGY

The approach to the paper took the form of a literature review, gathering evidence from both Canada, and England and Wales on how current police services are recruiting, and the training methods in place. A detailed review of current literature and current policies and practices (Crowther-Dowey and Fussey, 2013) provided a comparable insight into the two countries recruitment and training philosophies, enhancing the authors knowledge-base around the use of prior learning as a method of promoting the academic-police collaboration . The use of secondary data is recognised as an effective research method (Cacciattolo, 2015) that supported the scaffolding of this article’s comparative analysis.

THE CONCEPT OF PRIOR LEARNING

From a broad perspective, the term “learning” can have many definitions, but for purposes of prior learning, Kolb (2015, p. 49) offered a working definition of learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience”. The concept of recognizing and building on a mature learners’ past experiential learning and work/life experiences is grounded in ancient philosophies and modern andragogic theories. The term

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is the preferred term in Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities (Ministry) defines Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition (PLAR) as:

a process that uses a variety of tools to help learners reflect on, identify, articulate, and demonstrate past learning. Prior learning can be acquired through study, work, and other life experiences that are not recognized through formal transfer of credit mechanisms (Government of Ontario, 2003, p. 1).

This definition is fairly consistent across all provinces and provides for generally three accepted methodologies for assessing PLAR, with two of these methods placing the majority of the onus on the student. The challenge process assesses demonstrated learning through a variety of written and non-written evaluation methods to award credit without requiring enrollment in a course. The second method, portfolio assessment, involves the evaluation of a catalogue of documents and materials developed by a student that identifies learning achievements and relates them to personal, educational, or occupational experiences, and aligns with the learning outcomes of courses or programs (Government of Ontario, 2003). The third method is the awarding of transfer credit based upon a student's previous work-related training accreditation. This method does not necessarily consider the nexus between work training learning outcomes and academic program learning outcomes; rather, there is generally a subjective assessment made, completely dependent upon the background and experience of the assessor. In most cases this method provides for a block credit transfer rather than specific course credit. The challenge then becomes how to professionalize policing in Canada without objective, consistent standardization of a baccalaureate degree and PLAR process linking education to policing.

In England and Wales, Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) or Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) are the terms most often used (Harris and Wihak, 2014). Both however, are used in the recognition and acknowledgement of accomplishments by the mature student in the process of widening participation (Blackman, 2017). These accomplishments can be of academic or formal training that provide an award of credit or, through work-based learning (WBL) where students demonstrate their understanding of knowledge through their application of practice and critical thinking in a portfolio of evidence.

The College of Policing also recognises prior skills and knowledge of officers' already in post and offers a structured process called the Credit Estimator, for those in force who wish to gain an academic qualification (College of Policing, 2020). It helps the officer calculate equivalent academic credits gained through their role within the Force and/or any previous training or academic qualifications they already have. They can use these towards a range of HEI programmes accredited by the college, such as a 'top-up' degree programmes to gain a recognised relevant academic qualification. This provision allows current officers the opportunity to upskill themselves to the same level as the new recruits but also, to use as a springboard towards future progression where higher academic qualifications are now required.

A well-established system of learning in many professions such as nursing and probation and more recently, becoming part of the HEI employability agenda more broadly the placement element provokes critical thinking in the application of theory to practice

(Eason and Bramford, 2018). This is particularly important in a society whose community confidence in the police has fallen dangerously below the objectivity expected in the equality of law enforcement, such as that highlighted by the Black Lives Matter global campaign and understanding of broader cultural issues including the call to defund police (Hallenberg, 2012; Scheuerman, 2019). In Canada, the issue of racial inequalities (e.g., Black Lives Matter) has been the subject of many studies and commissions. As one such commission commented, regarding the situation in Toronto, “In a city where over half the population identifies as “visible minorities,” one of the most effective ways for police to build trust is to respect human rights. Police must hold themselves to the same high standards that we expect of other public institutions” (OHRC, 2018, para. 7). These issues and the growth of more sophisticated criminality needs officers to be able to respond to incidents, people and communities, skilfully, and intelligently.

The acceptance of prior learning and life experience into higher/post-secondary education promotes the idea of lifelong learning and development, fulfilling the needs of the labour market that requires a knowledgeable and skilled workforce, whilst opening up the opportunity to gain a university accredited award to those who may not have previously been accepted or deemed such a qualification as necessary to career progression (Harris and Wihak, 2014). As more police services embrace the concepts of being a learning organization and the professionalisation of the police moves forward, so the need for continued academic development will grow.

THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF POLICING

The question of whether policing is a skilled trade or a profession is worthy of closer examination in light of the aforementioned evolving skill-sets, community expectations, and legislative changes. In both countries, police officers have long subscribed to the belief that policing is a profession and held in high esteem by the public. However, critics suggest that policing does not meet the definition of a profession (Bowman, 2012; Green & Gates, 2014) and across the general policing sector, the need for higher levels of education was not a general consideration for entry-level officers, as a consensus was that being “street smart” and common sense were all that was required (Bowman, 2012; Paterson, 2011).

Unlike other professional occupations however, the police have been traditionally employed from all sectors of society with little attention paid to the need for education or societal status (Neyroud, 2011). Indeed, police officers were deliberately employed from the wider labour market to ensure the force were representative of the community and in 1855 only needed to be ‘between 21 - and 35 years of age and “active, sober and intelligent”’ (Richardson, 2005, p.13) in both Canada and England and Wales. The entry standards continued to be focused more on physical characteristics and gender as opposed to education levels well into the 21st century. Whilst community representation is still an important issue, particularly in relation to the changing demographics of British and Canadian society and the notion of ethnic representation (Macpherson, 1999) it is only since the Neyroud Report (2011) and the Tulloch Report (2017) that discourse around the idea of professionalising the police has taken momentum. In other words, in accordance

with the idea of professionalism as stated by Bacon *et al* (2000) the police have neither had to meet the expected social standing or academic standard of other professionals until now.

According to Bryant and Bryant (2014, p.47) to define an occupation as 'professional', it requires one or more of the following; a core body of knowledge or theoretical understanding in relation to practice; entry criteria qualifications; ability to exercise discretion; self-efficacy; and hold ethical values, all of which are components of the three entry routes. A suitable candidate would also have a strong motivation for the role as a vocation rather than career and be able to self-regulate. There would also be the need for an external professional body to regulate and register the 'professional', such as the HMPPS (Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service), the executive agency of the Ministry of Justice that regulates the correctional services in England and Wales. In Canada, external professional bodies such as the Upper Canada Law Society, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the College of Nurses, and the Ontario Teachers College regulate the professions. Policing, however, still subscribes to traditional recruit training based on an apprenticeship model, that includes a balanced combination of short-duration classroom instruction (police college/academy) and on-the job learning (field training or placement) and although there have been discussions at the federal and provincial levels in regards to the formation of a professional college, the concept remains in an exploratory state. In his lengthy report, Justice Tulloch stated, "I recommend a professional body be created which is responsible for regulating and governing the profession of policing in Ontario" (Tulloch, 2017, p, 263). He went on to state that the creation of a College of Policing for the province of Ontario would standardize training and education for police officers, with an overall goal of developing a culture of professionalisation in policing.

ENGLAND AND WALES

In England and Wales, the drive to professionalise the police in line with other public sector agencies is being coordinated by the College of Policing established in 2012, the role of the College is to provide the skills and knowledge officers need to be effective in their role and who developed the PEQF (Policing Education Qualifications Framework) to support the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners Policing Vision 2025 (NPCC, 2016). This forms the curriculum basis for the three new training routes which all new police officers must now undertake (College of Policing, 2015). The emergence of evidence-based policing (Sherman, 1998) as the best approach to informed decision-making and problem-solving is central to the College of Policing curriculum (Police Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF)) for new recruits (Braga and Tucker, 2019; Brown, 2018; Ramshaw & Soppit, 2018). Acknowledging the benefits of theoretical concepts that underpin practice and inform policy and guidance form the requirements of each of the new three recruitment routes; The Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship, the Degree Holder Entry Programme and the Pre-Join undergraduate programme which all lead to the BSc (Hons) Professional Policing (College of Policing, 2019). In all programmes, recognition of prior skills and knowledge can be mapped against the programme outcomes that may exempt the candidate from specific modules of work.

The current move prompted by Neyroud (2011, p. 129) from "being a service that acts professionally to becoming a professional service" inevitably has implications for both

those officers already employed who have no formal qualifications and those new recruits who now travel through the academic route. Current serving officers may be disadvantaged by their lack of academic knowledge that underpins continuous practice issues such as alleged institutional racism (Palmer, 2016; Chapple et al, 2017; Black Lives Matter, 2020) and new crime concepts such as terrorism and cybercrime (Brown, 2018). It could also hinder their promotion prospects in view of graduate schemes and qualification hierarchy. The move by the College of Policing to incorporate a route of academic learning through AEPL, is thus a welcomed addition to the new academic strategy.

CANADA

In Canada, there is a growing trend for police recruiters to place greater emphasis on higher levels of post-secondary education at the entry level, which can result in a latent barrier to applicants (Bowman, 2012; Hay Group, 2007; Leuprecht, 2014), but there is no national model relative to education beyond the completion of high school for entry-level officers or those in leadership positions. Provincially and within individual police organizations, the education levels vary widely. Although claiming to be learning organizations and valuing education, the majority of organizations leave officers to pursue post-secondary education on their own. Currently there is no linkage between the education requirements for police officers and the post-secondary education system, through which standards and competencies can be articulated and developed. The nursing profession underwent a similar dilemma, and in the late 1980's there was a move to raise the entry-to-practice requirement to a baccalaureate degree; specifically, a degree in nursing (Baker, Jorgenson, Crosby & Boyd, 2012).

Tulloch (2017) suggests that policing should have “a similar degree program with well-defined expectations and consistent standards [that] will lead to better accountability, transparency, and legitimacy of police services” (p. 261). In the past decade there have been some shifts in the entry level requirements for police officers to possess some level of postsecondary education, but not relative to a specific field of study. This shift at the entry level has created pressures on mid-career practitioners to upgrade their credentials to, not only improve opportunities for promotion, but also remain current in their competencies. For this reason, the PLAR process to provide advanced standing in degree programs has taken on a sense of urgency in Canada. However, standards of PLAR for advanced standing in policing related academic programs are not universally mapped across all universities and colleges, nor is there a connection to any form of external oversight such as the College of Policing.

Recently, the Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act, 2019 (Government of Ontario, 2019) received Royal Assent and is awaiting an implementation date. This legislation requires new police officers to have some measure of post-secondary education, whether it is a college diploma (2 yrs. of education) or a university or college degree (4 yrs. of education). Therefore, this simultaneous movement of both England and Wales, and Canada of working towards the same goal of police professionalisation through academic accreditation learned through a programme of study at HEI, is clearly evident. However, the emphasis of collaborative study differs significantly, as does the uplifting of current officers' qualifications that incorporates experiential learning. The trend towards

professionalisation of the police, although outwardly similar, appears to have taken quite a different guise in England and Wales, than in Canada.

DISCUSSION

Policing in Canada, at best, can be considered as a paraprofessional service; for recognition of police organizations as a true profession, there must be a paradigm shift and realignment of internal policies and organizational strategies. The College of Policing introduced the CKP (Certificate of Knowledge in Policing) towards a Diploma, however this was at level 3 (pre-HEI), well below the average undergraduate degree at level 6 required to qualify in other professions such as solicitors, nurses, probation officers and teachers at level 7 (post-graduate). Unlike other professional occupations however, the police have been traditionally employed from all sectors of society with little attention paid to the need for education or societal status (Neyroud, 2011). Indeed, police officers were deliberately employed from the wider labour market to ensure the force were representative of the community. Whilst this is still an important issue particularly in relation to the changing demographics of British society and the notion of ethnic representation (Macpherson, 1999) it is only since the Neyroud Report that discourse around the idea of professionalising the police has taken momentum. In other words, in accordance with the idea of professionalism as stated by Bacon et al (2000) police in neither country have had to meet the expected social standing or academic standard of other professionals until now.

This “raising of the bar” to require pre-entry post-secondary education is consistent with a number of study recommendations (Flanagan, 2008; Neyroud, 2011; Tulloch, 2017), as well as the anecdotal comments from police recruiters that applicants with a post-secondary education had a greater likelihood of being hired. This shift at the entry level has created pressures on mid-career practitioners to upgrade their credentials to, not only improve opportunities for promotion, but to also remain current in their competencies.

Given the expectations of police organizations to be reflective of the citizens they serve, and the increased interactions between police officers and professionals (often university educated) within the community, the need for post-secondary education becomes that much more relevant. The increased operational and administrative demands facing contemporary police organizations are consistent with the behavioural competencies advocated in the competency-based human resources management model for policing (Police Sector Council, 2013), yet this model only provides a guideline and is not universally implemented across Canada. In order to ensure a linkage between police experience and academic credit transfer (PLAR), the competencies required by police officers at entry level, and at various ranks, need to be standardized across all police services.

The challenge for post-secondary institutions in either country is to fairly and accurately assess a mature student’s experiential learning for conversion to academic credit. It must be noted that the term “mature student” can be somewhat nebulous, as maturity can be influenced by many intrinsic and extrinsic factors. For purposes of this discussion, the mature student is defined as an individual who is currently working in the field of policing and has gained a level of experience and training to support the PLAR/APEL process. In many cases, the student’s experiences and learning occurred in a

field or discipline that is different from the proposed course of academic study. In Canada, assessors may not have the necessary expertise to correlate the student's experiential learning to academic study; conversely, the students challenge is to integrate their experiences and training into the learning outcomes asked of them by the institution. If the competencies or police officers are standardized, then academic institutions would be able to map those competencies to course learning outcomes, in order to make an accurate and objective assessment for PLAR.

The introduction of an apprenticeship assists in the widening participation agenda by attracting and recruiting applicants who would not be eligible for admission to the traditional undergraduate degree. Furthermore, as Brown (2018) suggests, just being in the university environment exposes officers to different attitudes and perspectives and although there is both Canadian and English research to suggest that any benefits of higher education can be overridden by cultural influences of the police occupation, the opportunity to develop intellectual capacity in the rise of evidence based policing, 'what works' and wider academic research; the desire to raise the professional status of policing 'the delivery of PEQF programmes can bring many positive features to the development of newly recruited police officers, who will become the experienced officers of the future' (Ramshaw and Soppit, 2018, p,248).

There is some resistance to the new recruiting process from within the constabulary with anecdotal cultural opposition and one Constabulary, from the 43 across England and Wales, making a legal challenge (Lincolnshire Police, 2019). The challenge identifies issues such as abstraction, a negative impact on the diversity of applicants and failure demand (the number of students who fail to graduate); Lincolnshire police have criticised the College of Policing stating that they have not provided definitive evidence to support their claim that having an undergraduate degree will improve operational policing citing the work of Brown (2018) and others in their appeal. Fleming and Rhodes (2018) suggest that the social science evidence-base is limited and that local knowledge, craft skills through the process of subjective reflection, is more important to effective operational decision-making.

Nevertheless, the uptake of all other constabularies to work with local HEI providers in developing programmes that attempt to overcome these issues, is evidenced in those that have commenced and those that continue to go through the accreditation process. Moreover, the outcome of Lincolnshire police's request for Judicial Review was refused for the second time in December 2019 (College of Policing, 2019a) and they are now actively recruiting for the new pathways.

In the current climate of police professionalisation and new recruits who are entering the force as undergraduate degree holders, there is a potential pool of serving officers who may wish to pursue an undergraduate and/or post graduate education and who would qualify for the APEL route. The Policing Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF) (College of Policing, 2019) in England and Wales, clearly sets out future expectations of educational achievement through the ranks, with PCSO (Police Community Support Officer) to level 4 (the first undergraduate level), Police Constable and Sergeant's to level 6 (undergraduate degree) and higher ranking officers to Chief Constable to level 7 (post-graduate), thus for an officer to progress, an undergraduate degree is now a minimum requirement.

Although, both England and Wales and Canada have, it seems, taken a decision to promote professionalisation of their police services through the provision of studies, how this has manifested is remarkably disparate. The recognition of prior experiential and academic learning for current serving officers is applied quite differently, not only in regard to how it can be used towards academic achievement but also in the way it is valued by the governing body.

CONCLUSION

Policing in the 21st century is far more complex than in previous generations and therefore the knowledge skills and behaviours required to work effectively are changing to reflect this. Expectations placed upon officers requires a shift from the traditional vocational level of training, to include post-secondary/higher education that can support the officer's in the development of critical thinking, analytical reasoning and the sociological skill sets that are required to be just such an effective police officer.

The pathway to professionalisation and to creating the necessary cultural change that addresses issues such as systemic racism, increased use of technology and globalization of crime, and increasing social unrest includes an academic qualification to the same standard as other professions alongside the occupational competences required to enact the law equitably and in an informed manner.

Governments, police organizations and academic institutions working collaboratively to provide pathways for police officers is a key factor in creating sustainable change that is clearly evident in England and Wales, however not so evident in Canada. Whilst there is an underlying movement towards undergraduate qualifications as desirable, Canada, unlike England and Wales, has not yet put in place any strategic governance that places a mandatory requirement for all officers to be trained in the same way the College of Policing has. Indeed, the literature suggests that Canadian police officers remain, by and large, recruited in the traditional way that defies the professionalisation ethos.

Collaboration between policing organizations, academic institutions, and professional bodies that coordinate and integrate pathways for police officers to complete post-secondary/higher education is considered by those in central positions of policing research and rhetoric, such as Sherman (1998) and Ramshaw and Soppit (2018) as critical to the continued success of the police our progressively sophisticated society. The College of Policing oversight of all forces within England and Wales offers an overarching curriculum, structure, and accredited route for police forces nationally to work with and alongside to provide the behaviours, skills and knowledge required for 21st century policing. In Canada, although somewhat behind England and Wales in the creation of a similar College of Policing, societal demands have identified the need for police officers to possess post-secondary education. Formalized partnerships between academic institutions and police services are rare, but the need for academic institutions to develop pathways for officers to complete higher level education is a positive step forward in the process. At this time, Canada has not yet reached the same level of maturity as England and Wales relative to identifying a nexus between academia and practice.

At time of concluding this piece, the Covid-19 pandemic is sweeping the globe raising more and more issues for the police as legislation is swiftly passed to provide them with the powers to enforce the strict regulations of “lockdown”. Without understanding the position of public fear, frustration, anger and resistance, without realising the socio-economic impact on families and the anxiety of those children caught up in the balancing act of educational achievement in compulsory schooling and Covid-19 security, officers may struggle to respond effectively.

The improved education of police officers will support them in this understanding, empowering them to interact and problem-solve in an informed manner to this and any future challenges, national or global. This study has identified there is a nexus between post-secondary education and police professionalisation. The integration of the PLAR/APEL process, creates pathways for new and current officers to engage in the expansion of knowledge, skills and competencies and the model implemented by the College of Policing showcases a structured and politically driven process that can successfully bridge academia and practice.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Anne Eason was previously a Senior Probation Officer, who has areas of operational expertise are in multi-agency working, public protection and the assessment of risk and dangerousness. She has managed sexual offenders, domestic violence perpetrators and Lifers in the process of desistance and rehabilitation. She is currently the Associate Head of Department for Policing, overseeing the University of the West of England provision for the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship and Degree Holder programs. Her research interests focus on police decision-making particularly around risk and domestic and/or sexual violence and working with victims but also about the way in which work-based learning contributes to students' skills and knowledge development. She is also a Trustee of AnamCara.

Dr. Scott Blandford is a retired (30 yr.) police officer who has operational and administrative positions, including emergency response, criminal investigation, training, human resources, and research & planning. He developed a competency-based performance management, career development, and promotional system for his organization. In addition, he has been an instructor and administrator for several college and university programs focused on policing & public safety for over 25 years. He is currently the coordinator of all undergraduate and graduate policing/public safety program for Wilfrid Laurier University. The Bachelor of Arts – Policing is a program specifically designed for serving police officers and utilizes a PLAR process to award credit transfer for officer's work and life experiences. His research focus is on organizational development in public safety organizations, and competency-based recruiting and development of police officers.