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RESEARCHING POLICE PROFESSIONALISATION IN SCOTLAND, SWEDEN, AND FINLAND

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Introduction

This chapter reflects on the complex and contested topic of police professionalisation with an emphasis on theoretical and practical issues facing researchers. In recent years police professionalisation has re-emerged as a way to re-affirm legitimacy, public trust, and support (Holdaway, 2017). To establish in what ways the professionalisation of police services can achieve these aims, researchers have started to explore the different ways in which professionalisation manifests in policing, and the impact of this on police officers, the police organisation, public perception, and partnership working (Lumsden, 2017a; Tong, 2017; Tong and Hallenberg, 2018). One central aspect of this 'agenda' is the transformation of established learning pathways. This assumes that for an occupation to be defined as a profession, its practitioners are required to engage with the evidence-base, think critically and reflect, have a commitment to lifelong learning, and engage with higher education (Tong and Hallenberg, 2018). Therefore, much research on the professionalisation of police services has tended to focus on degree entry and the role of police-academic partnerships.

However, in line with reconfigured notions of profession, professionalism, and professionalisation (Noordegraaf, 2015, 2016), we argue that police research could be enhanced by developing a more situated and nuanced understanding of different kinds of learning and knowing in bridging the gap between theory and practice. Whilst our research sought to develop a better understanding of police learning and education, it also provided us with insights into contemporary challenges facing researchers in this context. Hence, this chapter presents ways in which future research can address these to support the development of relevant, rigorous, and meaningful research on, by, and with the police. This kind of research may transform current discussions and debates in this context away from a dichotomous and limiting view of the art, craft, *or* science of policing, to one which recognises the need for all three of these in the development of police forces as professional learning organisations (Hallenberg et al., 2016; Leek, 2020; S. Tong & Wood, 2011).

Within this chapter, we will draw on our relevant experience conducting research in this field as both inside/outsiders and outside/insiders (Brown, 1996). We argue that although there have been significant improvements in relation to the research on police professionalisation, there remain several challenges which future researchers may seek to address. Through the lenses of initial police learning, continuous professional development (CPD), and organisational learning, our work helped to uncover some of the deep-seated complexities emerging from the police professionalisation agenda. Focusing on both the wider narrative around police professionalisation and how to research it, we will utilise our experience of mixed-methods, qualitative, cross-national, and comparative research, in Scotland, Sweden and Finland, to illustrate how our understanding of police-academic partnerships and the professionalisation of police services may be advanced.

Contemporary Notions of Police Professionalisation

How professions should be defined, has "haunted studies of professions for a long time" (Brante, 2011, p. 4). Whilst it has been suggested in the sociology of professions, literature "from various theoretical vantage points, that debating the definition of profession is a sterile exercise...it is actually at the root of understanding what professions are about and how they operate" (Saks, 2012, p. 1). Hence, it is not surprising that there are competing definitions of what police professionalism means. In the 1950s and 1960s, the focus of analysis was on the "concept of profession as a particular kind of occupation or an institution with special characteristics" (Evetts, 2014, p. 31). Often referred to as the trait-based approach (Saks, 2012), these traits have formed the basis of a social contract in return for which the 'classic' professions, such as the medical and legal professions, have been granted status, power, financial rewards, and a high degree of autonomy and self-regulation.

Whilst there is a plethora of different traits suggested in the broader literature on professionalisation, there are some traits which are more frequently identified. Green and Gates' (2014) literature review identified seven 'characteristic clusters': (1) social movement, socialisation into the professions, 'exclusive' self-organising membership, registration, monopoly rights in respect of practicing the profession; (2) autonomy (particularly from political interference); (3) providing a useful service to the community; (4) self-regulation, code of ethics and accountability; (5) higher education; (6) a lifelong commitment to learning; (7) and a body of knowledge. It is this trait approach to defining profession which public service occupations such as nursing, social work and more recently paramedicine, and a growing number of police forces, appear to have drawn on when attempting to achieve the status of a profession. However, this proposed notion of profession has been criticised for its inability to address the "ambiguous occupational domains" which have led, in recent decades, to public services such as the police, being reconfigured and subjected to "hybrid notions of control" (Noordegraaf, 2007, p. 761). These are situated between professional trust and autonomy driven by individual professionals, and the organisational control of individual autonomy. Drawing on Noordegraaf's work, Martin (2021, p.2) argued that these normative frameworks fail to capture the realities of police work which are being reconfigured through a process of restructuring, re- stratification, and relocation, underplaying "the complexities and contested meaning of professionalism" within broader social, cultural, and political contexts. Therefore, she argued, in attempting to re-professionalise the police "there is a need to reconceptualise our understanding of professionalism to identify the range of [internal and external] factors influencing and reshaping professional identities" (Martin, 2021, p.1). This has implications for the way in which professionals are educated and developed (Noordegraaf, 2016, p. 802).

Our studies found that police officers in Scotland, Sweden and Finland generally drew on a notion of police professionalism which was influenced more by their occupational identities and work practices (Evetts, 2003). For example, we found, as others have done (Charman, 2017), that policing activity is increasingly becoming focused on protecting vulnerable groups, whilst 'crime fighting' or 'locking up the bad guys' have become smaller aspects of their perceived role. Therefore, police officers in our studies often foregrounded empathy, ethical decision making, and taking a course of action which was focused on doing the right thing in any given set of circumstances as desirable professional attributes and behaviours. This, we argue, has significant implications for both the type of person the police look to recruit, the type of knowledge they require, and how professionalism may be developed.

That said, the extent to which there was congruence between organisational and occupational notions of profession and professionalism, and therefore the type of knowledge required by police officers, were influenced by the social, cultural, and political contexts of each country. For example, in Scotland 'craft' knowledge developed through experiential learning was foregrounded over academic theoretical knowledge and organisational control was foregrounded over individual autonomy; in Sweden and Finland interweaving the 'art', 'craft' and 'science' of policing was generally perceived as being an important foundation through which to develop expertise, although experiential knowledge was still considered important; in Finland, individual professional autonomy was encouraged within a lean, distributed management and leadership notion of organisational professionalism. Our studies, therefore, empirically show that policing, as suggested by Noordegraff (2016) and Martin (2021), is not a 'pure' profession as defined by the trait- based approach, but is a 'hybrid' and reconfigured form of profession which is complex, situated, and constantly changing within different social, cultural, and political contexts. The way in which different forms of knowledge and learning are foregrounded within these hybrid forms of police professionalism tends to influence how research *on* and *with* the police is appreciated and utilised in practice and is, therefore, something researchers in this field should be aware of.

Researching Police Professionalisation – Where to Start

Debate within and outwith the literature on police professionalisation has been plentiful in recent years, but empirically based research, especially cross- national comparative research, is still in its infancy. Indeed, the first version of this book provides an interesting look at the developments within this context pre-2013 (Wood and Bryant, 2015). This chapter builds on Wood and Bryant's (2015, p.96) argument that "it is important that professional development within policing is informed by the benefits, as well as pitfalls, of all research methodologies [...] not simply what is in vogue at the time". Indeed, since the publication of the first version of this book, we have moved from evidence-based to evidence-informed

notions of practice, particularly in the UK (Fyfe and Wilson, 2012; Hunter, May and Hough, 2018; Aston, Murray and O'Neill, 2019). Evidence-informed practice suggests that, rather than having a hierarchy of knowledge and indeed research, "empirical evidence is better regarded as one component in the mutual and constantly changing journey of client and practitioner" (Nevo and Slonim-Nevo, 2011, p. 1178). Our studies reflected this interest in different forms of evidence and knowledge, by exploring police professionalisation and police learning from different vantage points and through a range of methodologies.

Engelmann's (2022) study of the role, value, and culture of police learning in Scotland utilised a mixed-methods approach to explore both initial and continuous learning from different stakeholder perspectives, such as police officers, allied professions, and university policing students in Scotland. Online surveys (n=381) and interviews with police officers (n=33), as well as interviews with allied professions (n=15), and focus groups with students on one of the only policing degrees available in Scotland at the time (n=3), enabled a detailed analysis and understanding of how learning within Police Scotland manifests, how this compares to allied professions and is experienced in shared learning environments, and how these viewpoints compare to that of students on a policing degree wanting to join Police Scotland in the future. In the same vein, Tatnell's PhD study (2022) of initial police learning in Scotland, Sweden, and Finland, comprised one-to-one interviews (n=49) and focus groups (n=6) with police officers, academics, educators, and trainers involved in police education, as well as representatives from police unions, and those (in Scotland) in oversight and governance roles. It explored how policy had been formulated and implemented in relation to initial police learning, perceptions of how the different approaches were perceived as helping professional development, and perceptions regarding higher education's role in the wider, on-going police professionalisation agenda.

Access Negotiations

Negotiating access for these two studies has involved a complex process of building up layered permissions through both pre-existing relationships of trust, and through negotiating and creating confidence within new relationships. These were crucial in successfully navigating power relations within and between the various organisations (Robinson-Pant and Singal, 2013, p. 419) and across geographical and cultural boundaries (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 406). For example, after several months of unsuccessfully attempting to negotiate access utilising formal access procedures through the appointed Single Point of Contact (SPOC) within Police Scotland, we eventually drew on personal established contacts within police services to secure the requisite gatekeeper approvals.

Institutions such as the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR), which act as knowledge brokers and boundary workers (Crawford and L'Hoiry, 2017) through their established relationships with police organisations locally and internationally, are central to the success of research activity in this field. However, whilst these established relationships were immensely helpful, it should also be recognised that these official access routes into the often insular and 'closed off' organisation of the police (Cockcroft, 2012), might result in academics only gaining access to and hearing from policing practitioners who are more open to and sympathetic towards academia's perspective or who wish to promulgate approved organisational messaging. Similarly, researchers need to be alert to the access barriers which can arise with regards politically 'hot' research topics. Hence, future research would benefit from utilising a range of different recruitment methods and 'ways into' the organisation to ensure that a breadth of viewpoints can be gathered, recognising the heterogenous nature of police organisations. In some cases, a shifting of narrative was felt to be important to secure access. For example, in Engelmann's PhD study (2022), it was important to change the focus from police education, which is often conflated with higher education and professionalisation, to police learning in Scotland.

Hence, pre-existing, trusting personal and professional relationships were pivotal to successful completion of data gathering for our studies. This was in addition to the need for an awareness of how academic research on professionalisation might be perceived and accepted by police services and how that may impact police service responses. Indeed, both of our studies found that there were stark differences between police forces, countries, and cultures around police professionalisation and how this impacted on access, fieldwork, and how our findings are currently being utilised within these organisations.

The Professionalisation Agenda and the Police Learning Environment

As mentioned above, one focus of the professionalisation agenda is the closer alignment of police learning with higher education, including degree entry only. It is argued that "the level of officer education can be instrumental in ensuring openness to new ideas", supporting the EBP [Evidence Based Policing] agenda (Kalyal, 2019, p. 615), which is considered a central aspect of professional practice. However, despite significant changes to police learning environments across the world to further professionalise the Police, "we know virtually nothing about the short- or long-term effects associated with police training of any type" (Skogan et al*.,* 2015, p.320). Therefore, expanding impactful and meaningful research on police officer and police organisational learning is central to better understand police-academic partnerships and police's commitment to professional practice which is informed and transformed by the best available evidence and knowledge.

Initial Police Learning

There is a prevailing view amongst policing scholars that the traditional 'craft' approach to police learning is no longer suitable to meet the rapidly changing and increasingly complex operating environments of the twenty-first century (Hallenberg & Cockcroft, 2017). These new operating environments, it is argued, require police officers to not only rely on the 'craft' of policing but also the 'art' and 'science' of policing (Furuhagen, 2015). However, the resulting trend towards the academisation of initial police learning has been, and continues to be, the subject of much debate amongst academics and practitioners alike. Some scholars have argued that "there are real potential benefits to be grasped by requiring a degree at the point of entry" (Hough and Stanko, 2019, p. 6). Others have suggested that the effectiveness of higher education as part of wider on-going police professionalisation agendas "remains ambivalent" and the evidence these changes are based on is neither consistent nor compelling (Wimshurst and Ransley, 2007; Paterson, 2011; Brown, 2020).

The academisation of initial police learning then appears to be "something of an article of faith" (Brown, 2020, p. 18), with the benefits of police professionalisation through higher education being largely at "an external or symbolic level, rather than the 'up-skilling' of individual officers" (Hallenberg & Cockcroft, 2017, p. 276). Indeed, Tatnell argues that a one size fits all approach is not desirable and degree entry is not always the answer when it comes to the professionalisation of police services. His PhD thesis highlights a need for more research to provide contextualised understandings as to which types and approaches to learning are foregrounded as sources of cultural capital within different social, cultural, and political contexts in order to develop a professional police force, be that degree-entry only or otherwise.

Such a nuanced, situated approach helps to understand why Scottish policing has retained its craft-based notion of professionalism and a more traditional approach to initial police learning. Unlike other north-western European countries, including Norway, Sweden, and Finland, where initial learning is generally longer, and more academically focused (Bjorgo and Damen, 2020), Scotland remains focused on 'on-the-job' 'craft' learning and acculturation in to a disciplined, hierarchical culture which requires compliance with managerial control, and which has little interaction with academic knowledge (Engelmann, 2021; Tatnell, 2022). These findings show that entrenched cultural and historical understandings of what policing is and should be continues to be a challenge for researchers and policy makers looking at the ongoing professionalisation of policing. Furthermore, the contentious notion of initial police learning in its different forms and manifestations illustrates the need to explore the use and appreciation of learning throughout a police officer's career and how such learning is shared across the organisation to develop a professional learning organisation and lifelong learners (Martin et al., 2019; CIPD, 2020).

Lifelong Learning and CPD

A significant gap in the current research literature on police professionalisation is the lack of focus on CPD and lifelong learning. This is despite the fact that these activities are central elements of the professionalisation agenda and present several benefits to police, the public, and community cohesion (Green and Gates, 2014; Leek, 2020). One reason for the dearth of research in this area may be the lack of clarity of what CPD, or indeed lifelong learning, might entail. Taking the College of Policing's definition of CPD, whilst it is "a range of learning activities through which you can maintain or enhance your capacity

to practice legally, safely, ethically and effectively", they also state that "CPD comes in many different guises [...] and most people's learning is informal and takes place outside of the classroom structure" (College of Policing, 2020, 2022). Hence, the focus within many police organisations, beyond mandatory safety training and online legislative updates, is on informal learning structures, the engagement with which, as Engelmann (2022) has highlighted in Scotland, is often dependent on rank, role, and cultural capital within the organisation.

At a time where police forces have to increasingly work in collaboration with other services (see van Dijk & Crofts, 2016), there is an interest within the police learning and CPD literature to develop collaborative leadership models (Docherty and Russell, 2022). The well-established notion that public services, in particular the police, cannot respond to current social ills by themselves, expands the notion of professionalisation to one that needs to consider the shared working and learning environments of public services. Whilst there is recognition of this shift, research exploring how different professions, at different points on their professionalisation 'journey', with different learning environments, work effectively together, is scarce. Indeed, Engelmann's PhD thesis (2022) identified that there are still significant gaps in our understanding of how different professions can develop shared and better aligned learning environments to address contemporary problems with holistic response mechanisms.

The ambiguous nature of CPD and lifelong learning within and between workplaces requires more research. Indeed, without a focus on how initial learning is continued throughout a police officers' career and embedded within the organisation, it is unclear how changes to initial police learning by itself lead to the professionalisation of policing. Therefore, further research in this area is necessary to explore the different forms of professional learning within policing, the lived experiences of lifelong learning as a police officer in a multi-agency environment, and how this relates to the organisation as a profession. Exploring this topic against the current backdrop of ongoing and significant changes within the police education landscape in the name of professionalisation posed particular research opportunities and challenges, which will be explored next.

Breaking Down the Barriers

In many ways, there remains, what Bradley and Nixon (2009) called, a 'dialogue of the deaf' (Bradley and Nixon, 2009) between the 'two worlds' (Hallenberg, 2012) of policing and academia, despite the establishment of police universities in countries such as Finland, and the introduction of degree entry in England and Wales. This can limit police organisations' capability to fully commit to newly established notions of professionalisation (Martin, 2021), which foreground extensive engagement with the evidence-base and academic learning beyond that which is traditionally provided by police organisations. One central shift that is needed, which is increasingly recognised in the literature on this topic, is the understanding that simply providing academic education to police officers will not automatically change the organisations' perception of research and evidence-informed practice (Martin et al*.,* 2019).

Indeed, some scholars have argued that there is a perceived dichotomy between formal, theoretical, classroom-based learning and informal, on- the-job learning of craft knowledge, which further intensifies feelings of distrust and irrelevance for either in the respective organisations (i.e., Higher Education Institutions and Police) (Wathne, 2011; Fleming and Rhodes, 2018). As suggested by Healey & Healey (2020) and Lancaster (2021), it is the combination of theoretical academic, experiential informal learning and reflection on and in action (Schoen, 1984), in the context of practice, that leads to transformative learning experiences. This is important to avoid the largely symbolic ongoing professionalisation of police services. Developing learning environments which combine the art, craft, and science of policing (Wood et al*.*, 2018) will be quintessential in ensuring that the traditional cultural notions of policing, which still hold value in contemporary society, are appreciated and utilised to add to, rather than distract, from the evidence- base of professional policing practice. A professionalisation agenda which ignores these complexities and applies a trait-based approach to police professionalisation, may fail to reform or indeed meaningfully professionalise policing (Martin, 2021).

In a similar vein, policy formulation based largely on professional judgement and political ideology rather than research, tends to apply a dichotomous view of what a profession and professionalism are and how professionalisation might be achieved. Indeed, whilst Harding et al. (2019) suggest that there may be a destination to reach, where learning is aligned with certain standards which can be achieved, our

research would suggest that it might be the processes that are important here. The processes that lead to decisions being made, the processes involved in implementing these decisions, and importantly those involved in realising intended policy outcomes, particularly winning the hearts and minds of police officers, staff, allied professions, publics, and governments. To ensure that we address the 'dialogue of the deaf', we need to take people with us when we are thinking about conducting research on and with the police. As Lumsden (2017b) highlighted, as researchers we do not want to become 'servants of power' or commit to a dominant script which might give us a blinkered view of what professionalisation within policing entails. We should endeavour to create research projects that listen to the voices of those who have a stake in the topic when designing our research projects, to ensure that any impact it might have, is going to be relevant and appreciated by those it is supposed to help. Similarly, to Martin et al*.'s* (2019) project, we should seek to deploy collaborative and co-produced research designs, including action research, collaborative workshops, and networking events, which support existing work and organisational structures, rather than conducting research from the outside in.

Tatnell's PhD thesis (2022) included an exploration of policy formulation. In doing so, he highlighted the interplay between the 'three- worlds' thinking of politics, academia, and policing, arguing for the need to ensure that policy formulation is heterogenous, and to ensure that inter- relational power does not result in the foregrounding of political ideology or academic assessment criteria over the vocational needs of policing. Indeed, our experiences conducting research not only as academics but also as a retired police officer (Tatnell) and Special Constable[1] (Engelmann) have highlighted that within the context of police professionalisation, a better understanding of the needs and experiences of police officers and the Police, rather than what the literature suggests they should do, is required. This would reflect the complex and unique role the Police have in society and the powers they possess. At the same time, it is important to maximise the benefits to be derived from a closer association with local and national Governments as well as academia to work towards innovation and evidence-based practice.

Reflections From the Frontline

An important aspect when researching police professionalisation is researcher positionality, which can influence and shape access to the 'field', the interaction with participants, and the interpretation and presentation of the data (Berger, 2015). It is described as the researcher's position in relation to their personal characteristics, "such as gender, race, affiliation, age, sexual orientation, beliefs, biases, preferences, theoretical, political and ideological stances" (Berger, 2015, p.220). Whilst academic research aims to be critical and unbiased, it has been acknowledged that one's own belief systems, values, and personal characteristics cannot be completely separated from the research (Olukotun et al., 2021). Through our experiences, as both insiders and outsiders, as early career academics and police officers, we have been able to take a closer look at the 'dialogue of the deaf' and gain a better understanding of its impact on contemporary policing research on the professionalisation of police services.

The concept of insiders and outsiders was explored by Brown's (1996) typology of police researchers identifying the different ways in which researcher positionality might manifest. She describes four types of policing researchers, *outsider outsiders* (an external researcher with no affiliation to the police), *insider insiders* (a current police officer conducting research on the police), *insider outsiders* (a civilian researcher doing consultancy work with the police), *outsider insiders* (retired police officers with deep-seated relations to the police) (Brown, 1996). Nevertheless, it is important to state here that the realities of categorising police researchers in this way is not always as simple. Indeed, researchers may shift in and out, and between these roles depending on who they engage with, why, and their personal circumstances. For example, Engelmann started her research project as an *outsider outsider,* became an *insider outsider* during the data collection period by joining the Special Constabulary in Scotland, and now continues to move between the two roles. There were times when she was still being considered an *outsider outsider,* or an *insider insider,* or *outsider insider*, depending on who she engaged with and if she shared her personal affiliations. This is important because it shapes how participants react to you and your research, and how you interpret and present your data.

An *outsider outsider* perspective can often persist because many officers might be suspicious of a researcher who was or is currently affiliated with the police in a different capacity. The paradoxes introduced through this *insider outsider/outsider insider* status have been described by Van Maanen (1978, p.346), suggesting that the researcher becomes "part spy, part voyeur, part fan and part member".

Depending on the situation and context one might be more prominent than the other. Therefore, it is critically important to navigate the *insider* and *outsider* world, and what lies in-between, effectively, introducing clear boundaries where necessary, while identifying where the overlap between these two worlds may advance academic work. Indeed, there were occasions when revealing alliances with the police helped. For example, whilst permission to interview a group of officers who had recently completed their initial learning programme at a Swedish University was initially refused, upon being informed that Tatnell was also a recently retired senior police officer, access was immediately granted. This highlights the strong hold of camaraderie and aspects of traditional police culture (Cockcroft, 2017), which for those who have or had a foot in both worlds (academia and policing) can significantly enable research.

The role of current, volunteer, and retired police officers conducting research on police professionalisation may be considered one way in which to break down the 'dialogue of the deaf' (Bradley and Nixon, 2009), where such researchers could be considered boundary workers or knowledge brokers (Crawford and L'Hoiry, 2017; Syria, 2019). Researchers who are current officers engaging with academic research, also called *pracademics*, it has been argued, are invaluable due to their access to both worlds of policing and academia (Huey and Mitchell, 2016). Nevertheless, Willis (2016) highlighted that pracademics might not be able to single-handedly transform police learning culture and/or practice, since organisational (budgetary and administrative) as well as cultural (the hierarchical nature and inherent distrust of academia) limitations can act as barriers to fulfil the knowledge broker role.

Indeed, based on our experiences so far, we would argue that there is still a significant amount of separation and siloed thinking within the three worlds of academia, policing, and politics. When working within academia, if *insider* or *outsider*, it is clear that a certain narrative of policing emerges, often highly critical of police culture, police use of force, learning on-the-job, and police leadership. Whilst the relationship between police and academia has not always been static or dichotomous (Wood et al., 2018), we have started to see that these narratives can at times be counterproductive when interpreting data or indeed when deciding on the direction of a research project. As researchers who have experienced, to varying degrees, the realities of policing, police culture, and the police organisation, the nuances and pull and push factors influencing police decision making are extensive, complex, and interwoven with public support/perceptions, police trust and legitimacy, police powers, and legislative direction (Harding et al., 2019). It is important for researchers to avoid reducing these tensions to certain traditional notions of police culture or a lack of legitimacy, but instead try to explore the controversies and complexities of policing within the broader system. Much of the police professionalisation research continues to largely present an academic and distanced view of drivers and experiences of professionalisation. We suggest that there is a need for more diverse, contextualised, and nuanced viewpoints and understandings of this topic which should be developed through co- produced research based on the lived experiences of officers and police staff at all levels. This is not to say that critical distance is not important to avoid the use of research to deliver "'quick wins' or use[sic] [it] for more perverse reasons, such as justifying a course of action that has been already decided upon" (Honey, 2014, p. 137). Empirically based, critically distanced evaluations, which also reflect the realities of policing and being policed, can support innovative reform and avoid the reproduction of established ways of thinking and doing.

Concluding Remarks

Whether we produce legalists or Dirty Harrys as future police officers are clearly determined by more factors than the design and content of police education.

(Fekjær & Petersson, 2019, p. 948)

As illustrated throughout this chapter, whilst research on police professionalisation is burgeoning, this is often, not always (Martin et al*.,* 2019), biased towards initial police learning and degree entry, possibly simplifying the process and journey of professionalisation by focusing on one particular aspect over others. Our research has highlighted that not only the culture(s) and values within police forces, but also the external socio-political environment, play a significant role in how and why police services are professionalised and how this manifests in practice and over time. Researchers therefore must recognise the complex environment that they are entering when conducting policing research, particularly in relation to professionalisation and the contentious nature of this topic within some policing

environments. Indeed, there is a need for academics to be more aware of their outsider status and consider ways in which to engage in boundary crossing through more collaborative and co-produced pieces of research (Crawford and L'Hoiry, 2017).

If, as Harding et al. (2019) argued, evidence-based theory should be integrated into the professional police learning and development endeavours as active and iterative rather than passive processes to future proof police organisations, the expansion of co-produced research is needed. In particular, there is a need for academics to recognise the limits of their objective and critical viewpoints of police professionalisation, where understanding and recognising the complexity of the lived experience of being a police officer, both within the organisation and within society, becomes paramount in developing research and research findings which will have any tangible impact. This stands in addition to recognising the role of police staff in police professionalisation discussions, which has yet to be considered extensively in research. Hence, current researchers and those considering research on police professionalisation in the future, should recognise the continued cultural, structural, and political barriers they may face when exploring this topic, and consider ways in which to actively integrate police officers (particularly frontline police officers) into their research design phase and engage in long- term and comprehensive studies which recognise that learning does not stop after the initial learning period.

Note

1 The Special Constable programme is a part-time voluntary policing programme. Special Constables have the same powers as full-time police officers and are part of the Special Constabulary of Scotland.

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