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Incorporating Higher Education into Initial Police Training: An International Comparison of Practices and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The need for well-trained and educated police officers is key to the delivery of effective and professional policing services. How "well trained and educated" is defined and accomplished is regularly debated and varies. There are long standing visions of effectively linking training and education for police recruits, but these have yet to be completely achieved. This paper describes the training and education of police recruits in four locations worldwide (California, USA, England and Wales, UK, Ontario, Canada, and Tasmania, Australia), providing an instructive overview of how practical training and higher education are combined and formally recognized. However delivered, there seems to be a consensus on the need for a relatively standardized learning curriculum for recruits. Approaches are tempered with political intervention, available funding, recruitment, retention, and realities of requiring recruits to quickly become operationally competent policing resources.

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Introduction and context

The need for a professional police service consisting of well-trained and educated police officers, staff, and volunteers is key to the delivery of effective policing. In the early years of policing, there was little training and development of new officers. For example, when the Metropolitan Police Service was formed in 1829, officers recruited were expected to be intelligent, literate, able to spell, and of good character (Heather, 2011), being issued with Sir Robert Peel's nine Principles of Policing to guide their duties (Home Office, 2012). Whereas in contemporary society, the selection process to recruit those to serve in policing can be extensive, with the training and professional development being both intense and increasingly demanding.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, debates continued in many nations focusing on the benefits of enhancing the educational levels of new police officers to improve police performance (Punch, 2007). The debates continue with the President's Task Force (2015) in the USA highlighting the importance of embedding high quality and effective training and education as one of the pillars of twenty-first century policing. Across England and Wales, the Strategic Policing Partnership Board (2023) presents a policing vision for 2030, describing one of their pillars being the importance of developing a learning culture within policing and working with academia to develop the knowledge base. Public Safety Canada (2013) suggests moving forward Canadian police training could benefit from engaging with academia and look toward the possibilities of academic accreditation. Whilst in Australia there has been a drive to enhance police professionalism through police training and education since a recommendation by the National Police Professionalism Implementation Advisory Committee in 1990 (Trofymowych, 2007).

Almost a century earlier Vollmer (1933) discussed the evolving needs of those delivering policing services and the resultant requirement to professionalize early twentieth century policing, continuing to suggest the benefits to the service and society of formally linking police training and professional development with college and university education, blending practical training requirements with academic study. Bitner (1970) highlights the importance of professional education for those in policing, enabling officers to understand the reasons for the workplace application of their technical training, with Punch (2007) continuing to argue that one of the benefits to policing of recruiting those who have completed university qualifications is increased professionalism.

In addition to the belief that college-educated police officers provide an enhanced, comprehensive and thoughtful service, it was thought that in the longer term, the service would evolve as college-educated officers become policing leaders who, open to change, are more creative in their approaches and better planners (Carter & Sapp, 1989). The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the UK College of Policing argues that formal qualifications are vital tools for recognizing the extensive training, professional development and experience police officers achieve (Police Federation, 2024a), yet all CEOs within forces (such as Sheriffs in the USA, Chief Officers in England and Wales) also need to fully understand and value the benefits of college level education to their workforce.

Exposing officers to such education is expected to make them better problem solvers and decision makers in the short-term as well as moving policing, as a profession, to new heights and levels of innovation in the longer-term. Fast-forward several decades and one-third of current police officers and most police leaders in the United States have at least a bachelor's degree and many have advanced degrees (Gardiner, 2017). But does this make them better decision makers or police officers?

Bitner (1970) highlights how it is important for police officers to learn transferrable techniques and problem-solving skills rather than facts and figures, and Sherman and The National Advisory Commission on Higher Education for Police Officers (1978) add that higher education policing programs should emphasize methods for dealing with the complexities of everyday policing. The evidence-base highlighting the value of a

bachelor's degree for police officers is however mixed, with some studies reporting positive benefits and other studies finding little correlation. Yet, on balance, research indicates that college education develops individuals' critical and flexible thinking skills, creativity, and other tangible transferable skills which are important in everyday policing practice (Paterson, 2011). Cordner (2019) is convinced that the foundations of an evidence-base exist which supports policing professionalism, accountability, and legitimacy benefiting from blending police training with higher education.

College-educated officers take fewer sick days, have fewer injuries and accidents whilst on duty, and have fewer individual liability cases filed against them (Carter & Sapp, 1989; Cohen & Chaiken, 1972). They also are perceived to be better report-writers, technology users, and problem solvers, more innovative and open to new approaches to policing, and less resistant to organizational change (Carlan & Lewis, 2009; Cohen & Chaiken, 1972; Gardiner, 2017; Roberg & Bonn, 2004).

It also has been found that officers with higher levels of education place a greater value on ethical conduct and are less supportive of abuse of authority (Paoline et al., 2015; Rosenfeld et al., 2020). They also have fewer citizen complaints, fewer disciplinary actions taken against them, use force less often and use less force than officers without a college degree (Chapman, 2012; Cohen & Chaiken, 1972; Lersch & Kunzman, 2001; Roberg & Bonn, 2004; Rydberg & Terrill, 2010). Such benefits may be of value within community policing, particularly where trust in the police by some communities is low.

Balanced against these benefits are research findings that suggest that front-line officers who are college-educated may be more achievement-oriented, less service-oriented, have less satisfaction with their role, and are less favorable of their management than their non-college educated peers (Paoline et al., 2015; Rosenfeld et al., 2020). Furthermore, college-educated officers are more likely to see police work as a job rather than a vocation, unlike their non-college-educated colleagues (Carlan & Lewis, 2009). Whether, or how, this impacts their service delivery is unknown.

Interestingly, Gardiner (2017) reports from research in the USA how forces led by highly educated CEOs employ more college educated officers and are more likely to support educational development policies, such as tuition reimbursement, education pay incentives, and/or flexible work schedules to support college attendance. However, there is no requirement for Chief Officers in England and Wales to hold an educational qualification for appointment (College of Policing, 2024), and it is not clear how many Chief Officers have advanced degrees or how their views, and force policies, toward education and training may differ from non-degree holding Chief Officers. In Canada, little is known about the educational backgrounds of police leaders and there are no standard required educational qualifications for their appointment.

Green and Gates (2014) discuss how the recognition of policing as a profession continues to gain pace, however, despite what appear to be obvious benefits, attempts to completely integrate training for policing with higher education are yet to be achieved (Cordner, 2019).

The United Nations (UN) sustainability goals extol the virtues of lifelong learning, which can easily be translated to the initial and ongoing professional development of new police officer recruits. To explore how far contemporary policing organizations

have moved toward Vollmer's (1933) concept of blending police training with higher education for police recruits who are required to work within the complexities of twenty-first century policing, this paper investigates the current education and training routes to entry as police officer recruits in four nations. With approaches to education and training compared between California, USA, England and Wales, UK, Ontario, Canada, and Tasmania, Australia, discussing the balance of education and training across a range of jurisdictions with differing numbers of police forces, officer numbers, and populations policed, to share what we can learn from each other.

California, USA

Policing and law enforcement in the USA is fragmented, decentralized, and primarily local. Unlike other systems throughout the world, there is no unified system of law enforcement. There are 94 federal law enforcement agencies which primarily investigate federal crimes or crimes within federal agencies (they do not patrol local communities and most individuals never/rarely have contact with federal agents). Most of these agencies require agents to have a bachelor's degree. There are also about 2,000 state and special jurisdiction policing and law enforcement agencies. In total employing in the region of 1,214,000 sworn officers and civilian staff (Gardner & Scott, 2022), plus a significant number of reserves and volunteers.

Each state (except Hawaii) has at least one state agency that patrols highways and conducts specific criminal investigations, some have dozens. In general, patrol officer positions in state and special jurisdiction agencies require a high school diploma (or its equivalent) while investigative positions require a bachelor's degree or higher. In addition, there are about 15,000 local agencies (3,051 county sheriff's departments and 11,824 municipal police departments). Each of these departments establish their own hiring standards, in accordance with state policy. Most departments (78–89%) require a high school diploma (Gardiner & Hickman, 2024; United States Department of Justice, 2023). Despite this, approximately one-half of sworn U.S. law enforcement officers working in local jurisdictions have an associate degree or higher, 30% have a bachelor's degree or higher and 5% have a graduate degree (Gardiner, 2021). These percentages vary greatly by region and agency characteristics. There are no national standards for law enforcement hiring, training, certification, or pay. Each state sets its own hiring standards and training requirements and certifies peace officers. Most states set the minimum age between 19 and 21 years old and require recruits to have a high school diploma.

Currently, only three states require college study before working as a police officer—Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin (Gardiner, 2021). Soon, California will join this select grouping. All states require recruits to attend a basic law enforcement academy of ~833 hours (20 weeks) to learn the requisite skills and knowledge. Many states also require a field training component, which averages 500 hours, to allow officers to practice and apply their learned skills under supervision. Officer pay is generally set by individual agencies, in accordance with state and federal law, and reflects regional factors and agency standards (agencies that value higher education or special skills normally pay more). Individual agencies may require more than state standards, but not less.

Gardiner (2021) describes how state standards generally dictate minimum education standards, with only 12% of U.S. agencies requiring more education than their state requirements. Agencies that require more education than their state are generally headed by a college-educated CEO (Police Chief or Sheriff) and allow collective bargaining (unions).

While a college degree is generally not required to become a police officer in the USA, it is usually important for promotion, especially to the rank of lieutenant. For example, 56% of California agencies expect a bachelor's degree to become lieutenant in comparison to 12% nationally (Gardiner, 2021). Moreover, agencies headed by CEOs with a master's degree or higher have the most stringent education requirements for entry and promotion.

California is the most populous state in the USA with 38 million inhabitants. It is also the second-most racially diverse state and is home to the most law enforcement personnel in the nation with slightly over 79,000 sworn officers and over 40,000 police staff working for 609 law enforcement agencies, of which 395 are police and sheriff's departments (POST, 2023) (Table 1). For these reasons and because it is a trendsetter, it is an important case study for international comparison purposes.

In California, hiring, training, and certification are overseen by California Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST). There are about 40 basic academies, all of which teach the same mandated curriculum, divided into 42 learning domains, over

Table 1. Comparison of approaches to police officer initial learning.

Location	Police forces	Police officers 2022/2023	Police officer initial learning programmes	Duration	Accredited with educational award	Standardized mandated curriculum	Work-based learning
California, USA	609	79,038	Basic Academy Certificate	16 weeks	None	Yes	Additional weeks
Ontario, Canada	53	26,215	Basic Constable Training	13 weeks	None	Yes	Additional weeks
England and Wales	43	147,430	Police Constable Entry Programme	Two years	None	Yes	Training and work-based
			Degree Holder Entry Programme	Two years	Graduate Diploma	Yes	Integrated
			Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship	Three years	Honours Degree	Yes	Integrated
			Professional Policing Degree (See Note 1)	Three years	Honours Degree	Yes	No
			Note 1: the Professional Policing Degree is for university study by students who aspire to join policing but have not yet been recruited.				
Tasmania, Australia	1	1,395	Recruit Training Course: stage 1: (Academy Phase)	28 weeks	Higher Education Diploma	Yes	No
			Recruit Training Course: stage 2 (probation phase)	One year	Associate Degree	Yes	Integrated

at least 664 hours (16 weeks). More than half of these academies are associated with a community college (2-year general education, associate degree, and vocational certificate granting college). The others are run by individual agencies (e.g. Los Angeles Police Department, Sacramento Police Department, etc.).

Courses are taught by certified instructors and recruits must demonstrate competency in each learning domain as well as a variety of mandated skills. After successfully completing a basic academy, recruits begin a minimum 10–15-week field training program in their agency taught by certified field training officers. A new officer is awarded their basic certificate after successfully completing the basic academy, the field training program, and their agency's probationary period (generally one-year). Once an officer has their basic certificate, they are eligible to work for any law enforcement agency in the state. As officers advance to supervisory positions or specialty assignments (such as detectives), they are often required by POST to attend additional training to prepare them for their new responsibilities. While there is quite a bit of variability in salaries between suburban/urban and rural agencies, most officers in California are very well compensated, have better benefits than all other public employees and salaries are equal to and higher than college professors (this is a testament to their bargaining power).

Despite record-high retirements and resignations in the post-Covid/George-Floyd years and severe recruitment gaps even before then (PERF, 2023), the California legislature passed the Peace Officers Education and Age Conditions for Employment (PEACE) Act (2021), California AB 89, to reduce use-of-force incidents based on scientific research showing that human brains are not fully developed until the mid-20s. This police reform bill raised the minimum age to become a police officer in California from 18 to 21 years and established a committee to develop a modern policing degree program with the intent to raise the minimum education requirement from a high school diploma.

This concept of a future modern policing degree is to include courses in psychology, communications, history, ethnic studies, law, and critical thinking with the goal that each graduate will be a "well-rounded," "culturally competent and equity-minded," "resilient," "critical thinker," and "communicator" (California Community Colleges AB 89 Committee, 2023). The steering committee, which was composed of law enforcement officials, educators, and administrators, recommended that students also receive instruction in social justice, the history of policing, sociology or social psychology, racial and cultural diversity, interpersonal communications, transformational policing, ethics, logic, emotional intelligence, and mental health and wellness. This degree will be offered at all 23 community colleges which offer the basic academy, as well as several other colleges (probably starting 2025–2026 academic year). Students should be able to complete their modern policing degree in conjunction with academy in two years or complete their modern policing degree then transfer to a university to earn their bachelor's degree and return to complete their basic academy training in four years. It is likely that some California Community Colleges (CCCs) may start offering a bachelor's degree in modern policing as part of their new vocational bachelor's degrees.

While some recruits will stop their education after earning their associate degree (in modern policing), it is anticipated that many future recruits will earn their

bachelor's degree because they may be too young to be hired as a police officer (must be 21), and future promotions will require at least a bachelor's degree. There are already mechanisms in place to make transferring from a CCC to a California State University (CSU) or University of California (UC) campus easy for students. This is likely to lead to more partnerships between CSU and UC campuses offering criminal justice degrees and CCCs offering police training academies. It is expected that police recruits in California will need to have a college degree (associate degree in modern policing or a bachelor's degree in any subject) by 2029.

England and Wales, UK

Over 247,000 police officers, staff, and volunteers across 43 territorially based Home Office police forces covering England and Wales (Home Office, 2023a) (Table 1), provide policing to a population of around 60 million. There are also several thousand police officers, staff, and volunteers providing specialist policing and law enforcement activities in other non-Home Office police forces and agencies, such as the British Transport Police and National Crime Agency (Home Office, 2023b).

Over the last few years policing across England and Wales has received a financial boost of £3.6 billion GBP[1] ($4.6 billion USD, $6 billion CAD, $6.9 billion AUS) of Government funding to recruit, train and equip an additional 20,000 new police officers (National Audit Office, 2022). With pre-requisites for recruitment including being at least 18 years of age and holding a level 3 qualification, such as "A" levels in England and Wales (similar to Advanced Placement (AP) courses in the USA), this target for recruitment was met in April 2023 with 20,900 new officers having been hired (Gilder et al., 2023). This boost to officer numbers equates to a full-time equivalent total of just over 147,000 regular police officers now serving across both nations.

The rapid recruitment of 20,900 new officers is not without challenges. The resultant frontline is inexperienced (HMICFRS, 2024; National Audit Office, 2022), with over a third of officers having <5 years' service (National Audit Office, 2022). HMICFRS (2023) report how 71% of voluntary resignations of police officers were those with <5 years of service. Both new recruits and experienced officers are reported leaving due to low annual salaries (Essex Police, 2023). Low morale is reported across the service (Police Federation, 2022), with the Police Federation (2024b) raising ongoing concerns about officer wellbeing. In total slightly over 9,000 police officers left the service in the year ending in March 2023 (Police Federation, 2024b), an increase on the previous year. With each leaver not only impacting on the delivery of policing but also having a financial impact on the organization of an estimated £83,000 GBP[2] ($106,240 USD, $140,270 CAD, $160,190 AUS) per officer leaving during their first year of service (HMICFRS, 2023).

Once hired, there are several options for police forces to adopt for the training and/or education of their new officers, with Chief Officers being able to opt to use

[1] £1.00 GBP = $1.28 US, $1.69 CAD, $1.93 AUS—as of August 2023.
[2] Ibid.

a blend of the available initial entry routes to meet their force needs. HMICFRS (2024) points out that these initial training and education routes go a long way toward developing the knowledge and skills required by new officers, they are also more rigorous and longer than previous programs, they are a worthy investment, but the increased curricula requirements add to the financial burden placed on forces.

The current initial entry routes for police officer recruits in England and Wales were first introduced in 2018 and by 2024 have replaced the now phased out two-year work-based learning (WBL) Initial Police Learning and Development Program (IPLDP), which had been introduced in 2006. Set in policing regulations, the current programs build on a policing vision which intends to improve the capability of the service and recognize learning and development through academic accreditation (Association of Police and Crime Commissioners/National Police Chiefs' Council, 2015). This has been enhanced as a vision for the service to embrace a learning culture which is evidence informed and ensures a workforce which is talented, agile, and innovative (Strategic Policing Partnership Board, 2023).

The entry routes were designed, and are now regularly updated, in consultation with the police service, coordinated and licensed by policing's national professional body, the College of Policing. The work-focused programs are the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship (PCDA) and Degree Holder Entry Program (DHEP), with a third degree level route of study for those aspiring, but not yet hired, as police officers which focuses on knowledge and understanding development only, the Professional Policing Degree (PPD). In November 2022, the then Home Secretary directed the College of Policing to design, develop, and quality assure an additional, non-degree unaccredited entry route for new police officer recruits, whether they hold a degree or not, to be taught at level 5 "in-house" by police force trainers. All four recruit programs are hosted and maintained together by the College of Policing under the umbrella of the all-encompassing Police Constable Entry Routes (PCER).

The work-focused degree level programs are studied by new police officer recruits in formal contracted partnerships between a police force and higher education provider/s. The co-created content of these programs must be mapped to the College of Policing's National Policing Curriculum (NPC), which consists of learning and content underpinning the PCER, some content of the NPC is also used for other work-focused programs of study. The NPC provides the standardization of curricula across police education and training.

The new initial entry programs are quality assured by the College of Policing before initial delivery and then "light touch" quality assured following the annual updated NPC content for mapping to the program. The programs and employer partnerships must also meet the requirements of external higher education quality assurance inspections. There is also a national Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education subject benchmark statement for policing to which partnerships may reference their programs, the statement describes the nature of study and academic standards expected of policing graduates (QAA, 2022).

The PCDA is a three-year, fee free for the learner, initial entry program designed for those new police officers who do not already hold a degree. During this work-based program new officers are employed and salaried whilst studying specific subject knowledge, developing an understanding and applying in the workplace a range of

policing disciplines and skills, such as the roles and responsibilities of those deployed in police response, communities or the roads, the application of criminal law, use of information and intelligence, how to conduct investigations, multi-agency working and as a key theme the adoption of an evidence-informed approach and the application of their learning to professional practice. In addition, officers need to successfully complete role specific requirements, such as first aid, public and personal safety training. Supported throughout by police trainers, academics, and work-based tutors, successful study by the recruits leads to assessment of competency for independent patrol status (IPS) by the end of their first year and full occupational competence (FOC) by the end of their third year. Throughout their study, new officers spend a minimum of 20% of their time "off the job" learning, often in a university. Successful completion of all work-based and academic assessments leads to confirmation as a police officer and the award from the higher education provider of a level 6 Framework for Higher Education (FHEQ) degree in professional policing practice. The levels of learning reflect the progressive levels of difficulty, with the FHEQ focusing on higher education and ranging from level 4 (certificate of higher education) to level 8 (doctorate). The FHEQ being established by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) against which educational providers may set and assess academic standards with comparable qualifications and awards (QAA, 2014, 2024).

For newly hired and salaried recruits who have already successfully completed degree level learning in any subject before joining, the DHEP is studied in the workplace for two years at no financial cost to the learner. The intensive program covers much of the content of the PCDA including both IPS and FOC, with those successfully completing all work-based and academic assessments being confirmed in post as police officers and achieving an FHEQ level 6 graduate diploma in professional policing practice. Placing officers on an equal footing in two years to those who have completed the three-year PCDA.

A large-scale evaluation of the PCDA and DHEP by the College of Policing (2022) found that respondents studying these initial entry routes were better prepared for their role and valued the education and training they received. With PCDA students noting how the program improved their knowledge of subjects, such as digital policing and community policing, whilst also developing their skills of problem solving and critical thinking (College of Policing. 2022). Although, the College of Policing (2022) acknowledges areas for improvement including a greater connection between academic studies and the workplace enabling the transfer of learning, with Watkinson-Miley et al. (2022) also reporting how achieving a degree through the PCDA was seen as a perk not an attraction for many new police recruits.

The level 6 knowledge and understanding based PPD is taught solely by higher education providers to students aspiring to join the policing but having not yet been recruited. The learner pays traditional university fees directly to their chosen higher education provider. The content of the program must still be mapped to the College of Policing NPC by the educational provider, the program also being licensed, and quality assured by the College of Policing before initial delivery and then quality assured annually. The program still covers knowledge and understanding content similar to the PCDA but uses a more traditional model of university semester-based

learning for students. However, it is important to note that the practical components are not taught to students as they have yet to be recruited by a police force. Such practical learning and assessment taking place through IPS and FOC if students are later hired as a police officer, with the intention of enabling the development of a deployable officer much quicker as they have the knowledge and understanding, but not the skills.

The FHEQ is utilized by educational providers across England and Wales and align to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), designed to create a broader, transferrable, and transparent skills framework of qualifications across Europe (European Commission, 2018). In general terms a level 6 bachelor's degree in the UK is considered comparable to the same award in Australia, Canada, and the USA.

The so called "fourth entry route" for new police officer recruits is the PCEP. The intention for which is that it would not be formally recognized with an educational qualification, and new officers would achieve operational competence by the end of year two. The PCEP was developed and its content mapped against the first two years of the PCDA. The PCEP is of no cost to the learner and can be far more force focused, but as opposed to the other initial entry routes, has additional direct and indirect costs for the forces delivering this in-house program, such as the need for additional police trainers, use of training facilities and/or additional resources. As directed by the then Home Secretary, the PCEP was designed to have no external educational accreditation or scrutiny, this is at a time when the police are attempting to rebuild the trust and confidence of the public. The PCEP was launched in 2024 and is available for new officer recruits. Interestingly, some police forces are already seeking opportunities for alignment of their PCEP with external educational accreditation. The introduction of the PCEP has been welcomed by some, highlighting that officers do not need degrees, instead spending more time on the frontline rather than in the classroom (Lincolnshire Police and Crime Commissioner, 2022) and strongly opposed by others suggesting this will be a lower standard of training resulting in an unfair two-tier policing system (Police Federation, 2023).

The College of Policing (2023) has also attempted to standardize approaches to leadership across policing in England and Wales by introducing five stages of leadership. These stages provide routes for vertical progression for officers, staff, and volunteers, beyond their initial learning. However, these are yet to be educationally accredited. As highlighted by HMICFRS (2024), it seems clear that there is a need for strong leadership within policing at all levels ensuring the whole workforce has the knowledge and skills to work both efficiently and effectively to meet current and future challenges.

Ontario, Canada

In 2022 there were slightly over 70,500 police officers in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2023). In the province of Ontario, over 15 million inhabitants are policed by the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP), 43 municipal police services, and nine Indigenous police services (Government of Ontario, 2023) (Table 1). The OPP is the second largest police force in Canada and consists of ~5,800 uniformed police officers, an additional 600 auxiliary officers, and 2,600 civilian members. They provide policing services to

the entire province of Ontario, which includes 323 municipalities (excluding those locations that have their own police service). This requires the OPP to police ~1 million square kilometers of waterways, land, and roads in the province (OPP, 2023a, 2023b). The remaining police services vary in size and operate in rural, suburban, and urban locales or a mix of the three (OACP, 2020a). For example, the Toronto Police Service's ~7,600 police personnel (civilian and uniformed) serve close to three million residents in one of the most diverse cities in the world (City of Toronto, 2023; TPS, 2023). Whereas the Cobourg Police Service's ~100 police personnel serve a population in the region of 20,000 people (Cobourg Police Service, 2023). In 2022, there were a total of 26,215 police officers in the province of Ontario (Statistics Canada, 2023). However, police forces are finding it challenging to attract new officers, with some offering financial incentives for signing up and investing in better resources (National Police Federation, 2022).

Regardless of the police service in question, the majority of police officers in the province of Ontario must attend ~13 weeks of Basic Constable Training (BCT) at the Ontario Police College (OPC). Police officers must first be hired by a police service to receive the training (Casey & Jones, 2023; OPC, 2023). The BCT provides the fundamental skills necessary to succeed as a police officer including training in the use of force, enforcing laws, preventing crimes, assisting victims, maintaining public order, responding to emergencies, and more recently defusing situations where people are experiencing a mental health crisis (Butler, 2023; Government of Ontario, 2023). In total, OPC trains over 8,000 police personnel each year (OPC, 2023). In addition to this training, each police service in Ontario tends to offer its own work-based training as a supplement to the OPC training. For example, the Peel Regional Police requires recruits to complete three weeks of training at their Training Bureau before attending OPC and an additional eight weeks of training upon their completion of OPC training (Peel Regional Police, 2018). Although varying in length and training content, other police services in Ontario often offer similar pre- and post-OPC training. However, the standard probation period for all new officers is one year (Government of Ontario, 2024).

In comparison to other nations (e.g. England and Wales) that often have close ties between police training and higher education, Ontario is sorely lacking and moving in the opposite direction. For example, in April 2023, the Ontario government announced the elimination of the requirement for new police officers to have a college diploma or university degree. This was done to encourage the recruitment of new officers, which has been increasingly difficult. However, no parallel announcement was made to ensure these recruits would receive the benefits of a diploma or degree once they were hired. Instead, the Solicitor General commented on the importance of life experience when attending police College rather than the benefits of holding a degree (Casey & Jones, 2023). Thus, the new minimum educational requirement for becoming a police officer in Ontario is a high school education. To further enhance police officer recruitment, the Ontario government also scrapped the ~$15,000 CAD[3]

[3]$1.00 CAD = $0.735 US, $1.15 AUS, £0.578 GBP—as of August 2023.

($11,025 USD, $17,250 AUS, £8,670 GBP) tuition fees that new officers had to pay to attend OPC (Casey & Jones, 2023).

Although publicly available information and research are sparse, the ongoing education and training of hired police officers in Ontario also have much less connection to higher education than in other locales. OPC offers additional specialist courses, as does the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP) and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (2014). As an example, OACP offers a Professional Standards Investigator as well as a Media Relations Officers course (OACP, 2020b). Whereas higher education institutions offer courses to hired police officers at a cost, there are few formal partnerships with police services for recruit training.

Police leadership programs are the one area where there appears to be some connection between higher education and police services. Examples include Ontario Tech University, which offers a Police Leadership Graduate Diploma allowing the transfer of credit toward a Master's degree (Ontario Tech University, 2023), or the OACP which partners with the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management to offer a Police Leadership Program (University of Toronto, 2023). Overall though, obtaining higher education accreditation (and recognition of credits) for training courses completed by police officers in Ontario is rare (Deckha, 2020), as are formal partnerships between higher education institutions and policing services. Without a College of Policing to oversee professionalization, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has stepped in to encourage more links between higher education and policing, but this has not been fully realized in comparison to other locales (Montgomery, 2021).

Therefore, given the almost non-existent relationship between higher education and police services in terms of education and training, there are many opportunities to be achieved if better connections could be formed. Some have even recently called for a Canadian College of Policing to help ensure basic standards of education and training are met across Canada (Sundberg et al., 2021; White, 2023). Indeed, the complexity of modern policing and public skepticism about recent police actions demands more effort be made going forward to ensure police officers are receiving the best and right education and training.

Tasmania, Australia

With exception of the nationwide federal police force, policing across Australia is generally state and territory based with a total of slightly under 80,000 police officers (Australian Government, 2023). Many state police organizations across Australia are deemed under strength according to their own workforce documentation and trying a range of strategies to attract new recruits (ABC, 2023). In contrast to the much larger populations in California, England and Wales, and Ontario, the island state of Tasmania has a population of just under 560,000 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021) and is policed by 1,395 officers of the Tasmania Police (Police Association of Tasmania, 2023) (Table 1).

In contrast to the multiple entry models seen in many other nations, there is only one entry pathway for new police recruits in Tasmania, with an abridged accelerated

version for police officers from other jurisdictions or past Tasmania Police officers re-entering Tasmania Police.

The approach to initial recruit education and training in Tasmania is one of success for the partnership created between higher education and police training, and the subsequent professionalization this entails. While higher education in Australian policing is not unique to Tasmania, the majority of services administer and deliver the diplomas (Australian Qualifications Framework level 5 qualifications) either by themselves (Australian Capital Territory, Northern Territory, South Australia, Victoria and Queensland), or with some input from Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and university (in Western Australia this is in conjunction with Edith Cowan University and North Metropolitan TAFE) (Rogers & Wintle 2021). Only New South Wales Police includes an associate degree taught in partnership with Charles Sturt University (Rogers & Wintle 2021). The embedded and integrated nature of higher education at the degree level within police training is still a rarity in Australia, as seen in the case of Tasmania.

The involvement of the University of Tasmania (UTAS) in the delivery of police training started modestly in 1995, with academics in the discipline of Philosophy involved in delivering ethics classes jointly with senior police officers at the Police Academy. The partnership between the University of Tasmania and Tasmania Police was formalized with a Memorandum of Understanding in 2010 and has been characterized by the deeply embedded nature of higher education within recruit and promotional education and training (Tasmania Police, 2010). This articulation contrasts with a model where they would be running alongside one another, with the Tasmania Police training modules unitized and accredited by the UTAS. Until recently this model remained largely unchanged, with recruits undertaking a program of 32 weeks of academy-based training and education, which includes many practical skills-based modules, such as firearms training, unarmed tactics, driver training, and other operational skills, delivered by police instructors. Modules that include theoretical and contextual components, such as legislation, integrity and governance, community policing, vulnerable communities and people, etc., involve lectures and sessions with UTAS academics as well as police instructors, in a blended model that students view positively (O'Shea & Bartkowiak-Théron, 2019). Upon successful completion of the Tasmania Police Recruit Training course, and successful completion of 12 months' probation, students are awarded an Associate Degree of Arts (Policing Practices) (Riley, Curtis & Julian, 2017).

Somewhat uniquely, the UTAS engagement does not end at this point. Several additional modules are integrated into the three steps of the police promotion process for frontline supervisors, sergeants, and inspectors' courses. This can lead to graduation with the Bachelor of Social Sciences (Policing Practice) (University of Tasmania, 2024).

In 2023, Tasmania Police started to face a recruitment bottleneck, while at the same time seeing an increase in officer resignations due to upcoming retirements, those seeking higher pay and better work conditions elsewhere, and concerns over officer wellbeing (ABC, 2023). At the same time, Tasmania Police aimed to increase officer numbers to achieve 1479 numbers of officers by 2026 (Police Association of Tasmania, 2023). In the same year, Tasmania Police saw some significant changes at

the Chief Officer level, with the appointment of the forces first female Police Commissioner (Carter, 2022). One of the most significant changes that stemmed from this new leadership was a comprehensive shift in police recruit training. While a single-entry model remains (with an additional accelerated training pathway for experienced police officers or former members of a police service), recruits were enrolled into an intensive program of ~18 weeks at the academy, in an intensive training model predominantly focused on operational skills (Tasmania Police, 2023). Recruits were then sworn in as Special Constables and completed the remainder of their training "in the field" learning in the workplace under the guidance and supervision of dedicated training mentors over a period of ~10 weeks.

Given the longstanding nature of the relationship between UTAS and Tasmania Police, as well as the tight integration inherent with the unitization of recruit training to the professional development of officers, there was a need to rapidly pivot the UTAS component of the recruit training program to meet Tasmania Police's needs and to service a shorter academy component in the recruit training program. To do this, the existing associate degree was split into two. Every UTAS module was evaluated and prioritized, with content that was deemed necessary for recruits to study (family violence, working with vulnerable people, integrity and governance for example) separated out into a Diploma of Arts (Policing Practice) (University of Tasmania, 2023a), to provide an accelerated qualification and training model that prepares recruits for their in-field training and work as Special Constables. The exercise partially aimed to more closely align with the minimum training qualifications of other jurisdictions mentioned earlier, while keeping the associate degree level qualification for those who successfully pass their probation.

Devolving training responsibility out to individual officers or stations risked a loss of standardization that is integral to a centralized academy model. Individual idiosyncrasies or differences in approaches between different regions could also impact the quality of individual training, in that some trainees may receive high quality, thorough training, while others may well see gaps in what is delivered to them (Korach, 2015). In an attempt to address this possible supervision discrepancy, concurrent with the new model of recruit training, was the development and deployment of a formalized mentor training course. The mentor course took the form of refresher training on key areas of frontline policing, including operational skills, family and domestic violence, wellbeing, trauma-informed policing (which was about to be introduced to recruits as part of a review of recruit training and evidence coming from overseas) and road/traffic policing. The intention was to deliver a standardized model of key components recruits would be completing during the in-field component of their training, to reduce the potential lack of standardization in delivery discussed earlier.

The diploma model streamlined the university modules incorporated into the recruit course, allowing a faster delivery so that recruits could enter the workplace as police resources sooner, a key benefit to Tasmania Police given the pressures on staffing frontline positions (Ellis, 2023). However, students completed the remaining associate degree modules during their probation period, graduating with the associate degree in the same overall timeframe as the original model outlined earlier in this section (University of Tasmania, 2023b).

While the intention of this model was to accelerate police training and education, the administration of the diploma model was eventually considered cumbersome by both Tasmania Police and UTAS. It was considered difficult to both keep track of student progress once they were on probation and difficult to both gauge and manage student engagement. Further, while the intention was to provide relief to a strained frontline by quickly increasing the number of operational officers, the burden on mentors was significant, nullifying much of the intended benefit. However, many of the operational benefits (shorter academy training phase and longer periods spent training in the field) were deemed advantageous from a recruit training perspective.

In 2024, after careful consideration from the two partners, the training model reverted to an associate degree model. The return to the initial model allowed both UTAS and Tasmania Police to reduce the administrative burden while keeping the aspects that worked well (predominantly streamlined delivery of modules, and an adjusted period for recruits both in the academy and in the field). The swearing in of recruits as Special Constables was also ended, instead they enter the field as Trainee Constables with greater supervision and fewer policing powers (as per the "old" previous structure). At the same time this reversal occurred, a 2023 external review of the Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies (TILES) recommended the consolidation of both teaching and research under the auspices of the Institute (as opposed to keeping the research institute separate), therefore strengthening the nexus of evidence-based teaching within the core business of the team.

Ultimately, the trial of the diploma and implementation of the many benefits (while addressing the issues found in the trial) demonstrates the closely intertwined and responsive nature of the relationship between Tasmania Police and UTAS in recruit training. Over several months in 2024, both organizations had to design, implement, evaluate, and then adjust their delivery of training, ensuring throughout that both organizations were in sync, collaborated, and had mutual understanding.

A considerable amount of this work would not be feasible without the deeply embedded nature of the educational arrangements between Tasmania Police and the University of Tasmania, and the trust that exists between partners to transparently discuss issues and opportunities as they emerge. This recent consolidation offered new opportunities to develop new short stackable courses in various areas of specialization, particularly in Intelligence and Trauma-Informed Policing and First response (Bartkowiak-Théron & Atkinson, 2024).

Discussion and conclusion

The continuing debates with regards to the integration of police training and higher education is set against a backdrop of the realities of policing in the twenty-first century which includes limited finances, political dimensions, the attraction of being a police officer, officer recruitment, and ongoing retention. As some policing professionals, politicians, and others have begun to recognize the benefits of linking higher educational study to the service, policing as a profession has simultaneously found itself suffering personnel shortages with many experienced officers leaving the service prematurely and limited numbers wanting to join.

The government in England and Wales has invested significantly in recruiting new officers but is struggling to recruit staff for specialist policing roles, possibly due to the inability to match pay and conditions in the private sector (HMICFRS, 2024). Investment in recruiting new officers has also been the case in some Canadian forces, and although across agencies in the USA, recruitment is increasing, they seem unable to hire new officers to keep pace with those who are resigning or retiring (PERF, 2023). This situation is not unique, as across England and Wales the highest number of officers ever recorded in one year have resigned (Police Federation, 2024b), generally policing across Australia is also struggling to recruit new officers, with only Tasmania not now seeing a shortage (ABC, 2023).

Each country, region, or state has had to respond to this new reality and make decisions about the best fit when balancing recruitment approaches, education, and training. There certainly appears as if those organizations which engage with higher education take longer to completely qualify their new officers, although reflecting on the ideas of Punch (2007), through the different learning process and experiences the types of officers developed are different.

Some agencies seem to have responded to the need to recruit officers by formally reducing minimum educational requirements for entry-level positions, while others have temporarily issued waivers or financial incentives to attract otherwise qualified candidates, and still others have held tight to minimum educational standards and widened their marketing efforts to attract qualified candidates.

The education and training level required by new officers varies across, and within, the nations discussed. Generally, there appears to be an intrinsic value placed on experiences of higher education for new officers, especially if the service is intending to move toward recognition as a profession, but this is somewhat tempered with the realities of requiring those new recruits to become operationally competent deployable policing resources in shorter timescales. There does however seem to be a general consensus on the need for a relatively standardized curriculum, the challenge of course is who has oversight, quality assures, and standardizes.

California has multiple approaches to the training and education of new police officer recruits, with standardization achieved through all recruits completing the basic policing certificate. This is however training, yet a light can be seen to assist in standardizing the approach through the possible adoption of higher education, supplemented with the basic policing certificate providing the technical skills for the workplace.

Across England and Wales, political interventions have further complicated the standardized routes established by the College of Policing as available for entry level learning. It is difficult for Chief Officers and their teams to make the best evidence-based decisions as to which entry route (or routes) to adopt, and for applicants and new recruits to understand the difference each route of entry may make to their ability to be police officers and future careers. The standardization across all routes comes from their alignment with the NPC. It is also difficult to judge how an educationally unaccredited entry route for new recruits can be taught in-house within a force at an equivalent educational level. This PCEP route of entry should not just provide the opportunity for recruits to swiftly meet the lowest

common learning denominator enabling them to go out "doing the job," rather than stretching and achieving their learning and development potential. The Police Federation (2023) argues that learning standards for new officers should be driven up to meet the constantly evolving demands placed upon policing.

This is not to suggest police force training teams and work-based tutors are not good at what they do, quite the opposite they are very skilled, but many have not been provided the opportunity to develop their own understanding of level 5 learning or are unable to work in partnership with higher (or further) education to deliver such level 5 context. This needs to be addressed within England and Wales at pace and perhaps broadened to include similar developments in other nations.

Police training in Ontario is focused on new recruits completing the Basic Constable Training at OPC with additional local practice courses. There seems to be a very limited desire to move toward higher education nationally to complement learning. Progress in policing will be difficult to make if police services and higher education continue to work in silos.

Across Australia attempts to standardize recruit training and education have become diluted over time. However, there are some exceptions, such as police education and training in Tasmania, where a single police force has aligned to a single university provider, which although was required to respond swiftly to changes in senior leadership decisions, the continued alignment of police training and education appears to be paying dividends for recruitment, standardization and achievement of awards for new recruit officers up to associate degree level. Of course, this may well be swayed by the much smaller numbers of officers recruited and such local levels of success could be transposed to individual partnerships in other jurisdictions.

However, much can be said for having a single, standardized, and understandable approach to police recruit education and training, at the very least on a national basis, in order to ensure a consistency of standards of service. Such approaches to learning require both champions at the most senior levels of policing leadership and evidence which demonstrates the value of this to the profession of policing. Increasing the number of police officers with post-compulsory educational experiences and qualifications must have a positive influence on organizational change and culture (Punch, 2007), and eventually, those who have studied such standardized blended education and training routes will achieve senior leadership positions exercising their influence. Perhaps offering educationally accredited learning for those in leadership positions may expedite such changes. This requires much further exploration and ongoing evaluation.

Through interpreting the Peelian principals, the power of the police comes from the consent of the public, which follows the public's approval and respect of the actions and behaviors of those in policing (Home Office, 2012). Embracing the UN ethos of engaging recruits in lifelong learning, may move the service further toward realizing Vollmer's (1933) and Bitner's (1970) longstanding ideals of enhancing the profession of policing by effectively linking together training, education, and workplace application, as we are not completely there yet.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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