An Explanatory Study Reviewing the Implementation of Police Higher Education Within the Context of The Professionalisation Reform, And the Perceived Impact on Police Legitimacy

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Abstract

This is an explanatory study which draws on academic literature, policy reviews and strategic reports to provide a comprehensive understanding of the transition from a predominantly craft-based police training model to one grounded in academic rigor and professional standards. The historical evolution of police higher education in England and Wales from 1990 to 2025 is explored, drawing a comparative analysis to examine how political, cultural, institutional, and educational shifts have shaped the professional development of police officers through increasingly formal academic routes. Using a historical-analytical approach, this research identifies key milestones, policy initiatives and social reform which have prompted academic partnerships, and the subsequent impact on policing by consent and legitimacy. Critical discourse analysis is the primary method to interrogate the language of reform, focusing on how discourses of education are framed, operationalised, or weaponised within political and institutional contexts. The latest of the professionalisation reforms is the Police Education Qualification Framework, offering three degree entry routes for probationary officers. Preliminary findings suggest organisational structural barriers, a lack of diversity in recruitment and a junior workforce; signifying implications for legitimacy, sustainability and staff retention. The findings highlight the need for policy makers to reduce the stigma of academia in police culture, create genuine police-academic collaborations for long-lasting partnerships, and address probationary officer retention.

Keywords: Higher Education, Policing, Professionalisation, Reform