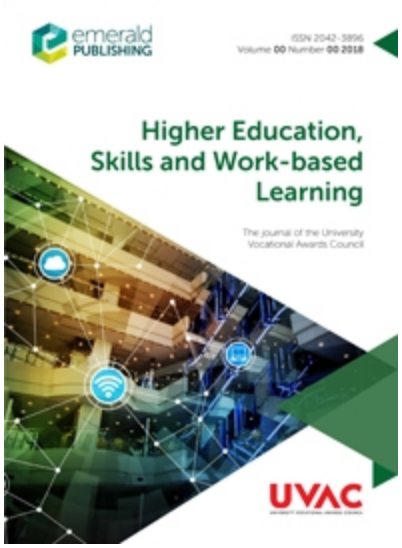

The first national subject benchmark statement for UK higher education in policing: the importance of effective partnership and collaboration

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Structured Abstract

Purpose

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education in the UK focuses on maintaining, enhancing and standardising the quality of higher education. Of significant impact are the development of subject benchmark statements (SBS) by the QAA, which describe the type and content of study along with the academic standards expected of graduates in specific disciplines. Prior to 2022, the QAA did not have a SBS to which higher education policing programmes could be directly aligned.

Design/methodology/approach

Over 12-months, a SBS advisory group with representatives from higher education across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, The College of Policing, QAA, Police Federation of England and Wales, and policing, worked in partnership to harness their collective professional experience and knowledge to create the first UK SBS for policing.
Post publication of the SBS, permission was sought and granted from both the College of Policing and QAA for members of the advisory group to reflect in an article on their experiences of collaborating and working in partnership to achieve the SBS.

Findings

There is great importance of creating a shared vision and mutual trust, developed through open facilitated discussions, with representatives championing their cause and developing a collaborative and partnership approach to completing the SBS.

Originality

The SBS for policing is the first across the UK. The authors experiences can be used to assist others in their developments of similar subject specific benchmarking or academic quality standards.

Practical implications

A collaborative and partnership approach is essential in developing and recognising the academic discipline of policing. This necessarily requires the joint development of initiatives, one of which is the coming together of higher education institutions, PSRBs and practitioner groups to collaborate and design QAA benchmark statements.

Social implications

The SBS advisory group has further driven forward the emergence of policing as a recognised academic discipline to benefit multiple stakeholders.

Introduction

Society expects the police service to keep communities safe by upholding the law fairly and firmly, preventing crime and antisocial behaviour, keeping the peace, protecting and reassuring communities, investigating crime and bringing offenders to justice (Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and National Police Chief's Council, 2015). It is therefore only right that police officers, staff and volunteers have the best equipment and technology to perform their roles, but also importantly the most up to date knowledge, understanding and skills available and required for contemporary policing. There is a national move to recognise the profession of policing, included within which is the way that new police officers are educated and trained for their role.

As a key component of the professionalisation drive for policing, the majority of police forces in the UK partner with higher education institutions to enable the professional development of police officers completing learning in their workplace alongside classroom-based study (Rogers and Frevel, 2018; Strudwick, 2021; Watkinson-Miley et al., 2022). Such work-based learning, taught through partnerships, are not traditional academic subjects yet provide opportunities for professional work-place development aligned to a higher education award and often meeting professional body requirements (Bravenboer and Workman, 2016). These academic and practitioner partnerships are prevalent in other areas of professionalised practice, such strong partnerships can enhance education, research, and practice in numerous fields, such as the health

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care or law professions. One of the benefits of work-based learning partnerships is helping to bridge the gaps in transferring theory to practice by integrating academic and practical experiences, as a result improving outcomes for all stakeholders (Halili et al., 2022). The Baroness Casey Review (2023) highlights the need to overcome similar gaps with learning and development in policing.

In the United Kingdom (UK), the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) works to benefit both students and higher education by, for example, providing a quality code which details expectations for standards and quality, and provides a definition of partnership working. Adding that if working in partnerships, experiences of learning should continue to be of high quality and expected standards (QAA, 2023a).

This paper discusses partnership working to co-create a QAA and professional body subject benchmark statement (SBS) for policing. Such SBS describe the expectations of the discipline and are in place to assist providers developing comparable programmes of study and associated curricula, it is important to note that they are not however a regulated requirement for higher education providers in the UK.

Discussion

The context

Almost a century has passed since Volmer (1933) proposed an Associate Degree in the USA which reflected the requirements for policing at that time. It is less important that professionals learn specific facts, rather they learn more about transferrable techniques, methods and problem solving (Bitner, 1970). Whereas Sherman et al., (1978) adds that policing programmes in higher education should emphasise the importance, complexities and ethical dilemmas faced daily by those in policing. In the early 2000's vocationally focused Foundation Degrees in Policing were developed by partnerships between some police forces and higher education providers across England and Wales (Lee and Punch, 2004). These two-year degrees combined learning within

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the workplace with academic study, hoping to meet the needs of both employers and individuals (ibid.).

Neyroud (2011) reviewed training and education across England and Wales, recommending the establishment of a professional body for the police service. The College of Policing (The College), is the resultant professional body for the police across England and Wales, established in 2012 as an arm's length agency of the Home Office. The College has a range of complementary functions including establishing and maintaining the educational requirements for policing, ensuring quality and recognition of professional expertise.

The College is the driving force for the professionally focused policing education and training programmes taught through partnerships at undergraduate level by police forces and higher education providers. The Policing Education and Qualifications Framework (PEQF)[1], was introduced in 2016 by the College, aiming to standardise the approach to initial education and training for those either recruited as new police officers, or aspiring to be recruited, by the police service in England and Wales. Currently there are three graduate level initial entry routes into the police service for new police officers. These are:

- The Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship (PCDA)
- The Degree Holder Entry Programme (DHEP)
- The Professional Policing degree (PPD)

In March 2024, a non-graduate level programme first introduced in 2006, the Initial Police Learning and Development Programme (IPLDP), will cease as a route of entry. In late 2022 the Home Secretary announced the requirement for a non-accredited, in force delivered training programme for new recruits who did not want to study for a degree, the Police Constable Entry Programme (PCEP). This is to be available from April 2024 (College of Policing, 2023), with police forces able to use a blend of the initial education entry routes in order to meet their needs.

[1] November 2023, PEQF as a term is now generally being referred to as "Optimisation" and/or Police Constable Entry Routes (PCER).

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The PCDA, DHEP, IPLDP and the PCEP are all work-based learning (WBL) programmes. The PPD is taught solely within higher education for those learners aspiring to join policing, but does not include the practical experiences within the WBL programmes. All of these routes of learning are licensed, and to a greater or lesser extent quality assured, by the College of Policing, and follow a standardised National Policing curriculum (NPC). The knowledge, understanding and skills developed in the PCDA, DHEP and PPD programmes are studied at undergraduate level and lead to an award at level 6 aligned to the national Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). The FHEQ providing key reference points against which higher education providers can align the standard of their degrees. The current non-graduate IPLDP leads to a level 3 qualification mapped to the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF). Both the FHEQ and RQF are educational frameworks adopted across England and Wales which align to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The EQF being an aspect of recognising and creating a broader European wide skills agenda (European Commission, 2018).

Importantly, a higher education qualification in policing brings the opportunity for work-based learners to develop and evidence enhanced levels of structured intellectual attainment and problem-solving skills. Cedefop (2015) also report a range of advantages to the adoption of WBL programmes across various European nations, including the provision of an efficient and effective way of combining skills development with a broader understanding of the relevance and application to the workplace.

In order to assist the provision of consistency across higher education in the delivery of qualifications, subject benchmarks of 'expected' national standards have been developed to assist in shaping the curriculum. Education providers can utilise these as reference points to ensure the nature and characteristics of awards in particular subject areas such as Archaeology, Chemistry, Criminology and Economics (QAA, 2023b).

Cedefop (2015) recommend the importance of professional bodies influencing policy to adopt WBL at a national level. The QAA have successfully led recent partnerships to develop SBS with professional bodies including those for paramedics, architects and engineers. In order to supplement the QAA suite of SBS and assist in ensuring the consistency of learning delivered

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across institutions with large number of learners studying the discipline of policing (as an example, in 2021/2022 the PCDA had over 4,200 new starters (Office for Students, 2023)), the QAA worked with the College to develop and publish the first national benchmark statement for policing. Thus aligning the recognition of policing with other professionally aligned academic disciplines.

A subject benchmarking advisory group was formed by the QAA to co-create the SBS. The group worked at pace over 12 months to achieve this important step towards the recognition of policing as a profession. As Neyroud (2011) describes, aligning the profession of policing to that of other professionals such as the clergy, lawyers and teachers, with real professionalism for policing being intrinsically aligned to the expected standards of higher education (Hoover, 1975).

Policing, higher education and professional status

Historically, policing has been viewed as a lower-class occupation (Reiner, 1978; Lee and Punch, 2004), with early attempts to professionalise the police service meeting both political and cultural resistance. Green and Gates (2014), discuss how agendas for professionalising policing come and go depending on external factors ranging from the political climate and changes in senior leadership to public opinion.

Debate has also continued throughout the years as to whether policing is a craft or a profession (Lee and Punch, 2004; Neyroud, 2011; Fleming & Rhodes, 2018) and whether police officers engaging in higher education will ever help the service achieve professional status, often restricted by the prevailing police culture (Fleming & Rhodes, 2018). Bitner (1970) argues that if policing is to move from a craft to profession there is the need for the development of policing scholarship and co-ordination of education and training curricula.

Hoover (1975) discusses a consensus that in order to enhance US law enforcement, the quality of police officers must be upgraded, with the most effective means to achieve this being to fully embrace the expected standards of higher education, a debate which continues in the USA

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(Cordner et al., 2022). Brown (1974) adds how higher education is instrumental in instigating cultural change within the police service.

The police service across England and Wales could benefit from increased professionalism empowered by a move from training towards education (Flanagan, 2008), with learning and development seen as a vital tool in developing the professionalism of officers (Baroness Casey Review, 2023). Police officers who have experienced US college education accept change more readily, they have better knowledge of the law and enhanced problem-solving ability (Krimmel, 1996). Such college educated officers are also more aware of broader social problems (Weiner, 1976; Heath, 2011) and are reported as being less likely to use force when making an arrest in minority communities (Chapman, 2012). One of the key pillars to evolving recognition of the profession of policing across England and Wales are the links created between policing, higher education and training.

Pepper and McGrath (2015) discuss the teaching of the College licensed Certificate in Knowledge of Policing (CKP) as a foray into a pre-employment course for those aspiring to join the police service. An approach Flanaghan (2008) highlighted as worthy of exploration, similar to ways in which those hoping to work within education or social care develop themselves for employment in their professions. Brown (2020) conducted a review of research on the impact of higher education on police effectiveness. Whilst the review clearly showed many positive gains from such graduate studies, the evidence base is limited (ibid.).

Neyroud (2011) advocates embedding partnerships between the police service and education, yet numerous attempts to enhance initial police training and education have struggled to overcome the tensions between the two major partners, policing and education, both attempting to work together, yet key barriers persist (Watkinson-Miley et al., 2022). Franklin (2009) examines the values underpinning good partnerships, identifying the requirements for a blend of mutual respect and reciprocity, with partnerships evolving synergies that enhance results better than isolated initiatives. This is underpinned by Reed et al. (2014) who emphasise the importance of mutual understanding, engagement and collaboration in order to achieve meaningful outcomes. Franklin (2009) continues to argue that, if properly managed, partnerships can lead to high

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professional standards and operational efficiency, but before joining a partnership, each organisation needs to take a leap of faith, trusting that its participation will add value.

Belur et al., (2020) clarify the next development in police education across England and Wales should enhance collaboration between forces and higher education institutions, developing conceptual and cultural attitudes towards education and training. Rogers and Gravelle (2020), reviewed experiences in South Wales which provide an excellent description of the arguments about cost and control, making a strong case for change and supporting the need for a formal benchmark statement. Specifically they describe the policing requirement as the need to educate student officers so they can deal with the complexities and demands placed upon policing. Evidence exploring the challenges and benefits of the new approaches to initial education and training across England and Wales continue to emerge (Watkinson-Miley et al., 2022; Rogers et al., 2022).

Although evidence of impact is far from clear, it makes sense to enhance the knowledge, understanding and skills of officers to be critical thinkers and reflective practitioners, enabling them to react to the fast-changing policing context, develop evidence-based practice and engage with education throughout their careers.

Establishing the subject benchmark for policing advisory group

Essential to the development of a subject benchmark statement (SBS) is the establishment of an effective advisory group with broad representation of views, from across multiple stakeholders in the sector.

For the policing SBS, the panel had a broad remit and as required by the QAA, needed to include representatives from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Members were required from both higher education and professional practice. In addition, it was important to consider the inclusion of other interested parties such as the professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB), staff associations and employer groups.

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A chair of the advisory group was sought, agreed and jointly appointed by the two partners who would be responsible for publishing the SBS, the QAA and College. Then members of the group were called for through the higher education forum (HE forum) for policing. The HE Forum was established in 2008 to provide broad academic perspectives on police education and training (Home Affairs Committee, 2013). The forum called for expressions of interest from its membership, who represent over 100 educational institutions who offer policing programmes. Potential group members were asked to commit to a minimum of 12 months ongoing structured work, which had to be completed between monthly online meetings. There would be no financial reward, any time allocation to be locally negotiated with individual employers. Although names of contributors would be published in the final statement, those participating needed to commit to work in partnership to create a statement aimed at further standardising the educational delivery of academic policing programmes and furthering recognition of the profession. Partnerships can lead to high professional standards, but in order to engage effectively organisations need to take a 'leap of faith' in the potential for mutual benefits (Franklin, 2009).

This broad approach led to the timely recruitment of an advisory group with 14 members representing eight higher education providers from across all four nations, the College of Policing, the Police Federation of England and Wales, the Trailblazer Group (which developed the Apprenticeship Standards for policing), and the QAA. Each representative having equal status within the group, an important aspect to ensure all views were valued. Such a representative cross-section of group members being a critical success factor for successful partnerships (Wildridge et al., 2004).

The development of the subject benchmark statement for policing

Working in partnership to co-create the SBS for policing, further advances the case for knowledge creation that is application-oriented, trans-disciplinary and subject to multiple accountabilities, such as those of the College, the QAA and higher education institutions. Wildridge et al., (2004) discuss several components for successful partnerships including the

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need for shared vison and willingness to share knowledge engendering mutual trust. Morrissey et al., (2023) adding the benefits of working in partnerships include the sharing of ideas and experiences. For such partnerships to successfully evolve, communication needs to be clear, open, and consistent, there is a requirement for the collective responsibility identifying the way forward, with joint ownership of decisions and accountability for those decisions Wildridge et al., (2004).

Harrison et al. (2012) identify the high impact of a chair's approach to leadership on a board despite the fact they are unlikely to have authority. In the pursuit of genuine co-production of the SBS, the problematic issues of differing professional interests were never ignored. Indeed, what took priority was the need of the chair to manage these in ways that led to open communication and understanding of differential expectations, limitations, and responsibilities, as well as safeguards to academic integrity and requirements of the police service.

Competently, the chair was instrumental in facilitating the process of knowledge production. Wildridge et al., (2004) highlights the importance of skilled and effective leadership, with Harrison et al. (2012) adding how effective chairs possess a range of traits including high commitment to the board, trustworthiness, the ability to empower others, good communication skills and the ability to reach common ground. During early discussions different co-producing tasks were discussed openly developing a shared vision and then allocated amongst the members of the Advisory Group, who worked either individually or in pairs, to complete the tasks in set tight timeframes. For the whole group, it was unproblematic to appreciate the multiplicity of the components affecting the co-production and co-creation processes because the line of communication amongst different stakeholders were always well-defined and transparent, with guidelines for collaboration being flexible, limited, and realistic (Franklin, 2009). What further eased the co-production process was the fact that group members professional expertise was acknowledged by each other, trust being implicit. There is a good deal of evidence (Macvean and Cox, 2012; Goode and Lumsden, 2016) of the cultural differences between academics and practitioners in police work and how distrust arises in large part from the legacy of research on the police (Bacon, Shapland et al. 2021). For the SBS advisory group, professional trust was the key ingredient to successful partnership working and co-creation.

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Effective communications

Consistent effective communications were fundamental to harnessing the collective experience and knowledge of the advisory group, particularly in a way that achieved some of the complex aims of the SBS.

Worthy of note is that the SBS was required to account for both the current need and expectations of policing education, but also to be anticipatory of developments in policing in the coming decade to ensure its continued relevance as a subject benchmark. While QAA benchmarks are not formally adopted in Scotland and Northern Ireland, a key goal was to ensure its applicability to all UK university and policing jurisdictions.

The composition of the advisory group, in its reflection of these diverse policing and higher education contexts, meant that a profusion of perspectives came together. Aligning to the critical success factors identified by Wildridge et al. (2004), open and frequent (monthly) online discussions took place, with informal meetings as required. For these to be productive and synergetic, the advisory group needed to engage in candid debate about the nature, practice, and epistemological foundations of professional policing, and how to reconcile sometimes competing or conflicting visions.

From an early stage, chaired group meetings served as a negotiatory space in which a range of foundational early questions were considered, such as 'What does an aspiring police officer need to know?' and 'What is the proximity of criminology and criminal justice to education in policing?' along with what the role of the SBS is in articulating this distinction. Such specifically work-focused areas of study were not viewed as opposition to more traditional subject disciplines, instead very relevant to its study (Bravenboer and Workman, 2016). The members extensive collective experience spanned academia, PSRBs and professional policing practice, which provided ripe grounds for discussion and debate, the chair keeping discussions on track. The professional and jurisdictional contexts produced a range of ideas about the disciplinary contours of policing in its traditional sense and to what extent criminology might feature as a

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requirement of professional policing graduates, eventually leading to consensus. Effective communication and open discussion were the foundation of finding shared resolutions.

Amending professional allegiances, academics must be willing to bring specialist expertise together, working in teams to address approaches and projects (Goode and Lumsden, 2016). Underpinned by the mutual trust of its members, chaired advisory group meetings became sites of discursive reconciliation where theoretical and practical knowledge was critically debated with reference to its value to practice, but also to the future direction of policing in the UK more generally. A central achievement of the advisory group was creating a space in which these complex and historically charged debates about 'legitimate' knowledge, evidence-based policing and 'standardised learning' could play out. It was important throughout that the statement needed to be inclusive of such a multiplicity of perspective.

A complication of co-creating the SBS was the pursuit of a statement that was inclusive of the range of approaches to policing education across the four nations of the UK, including the professional policing degrees in practice (PCDA and DHEP) licensed in England and Wales to police forces and their educational partners. Such practice-based learning is strengthened by the sharing of resources and expertise across partners (Morrissey et al., 2023). Access to workplace practice allowing student officers to develop the practical and professional knowledge and skills related to field experience.

This is as opposed to the PPD, still licensed by the College of Policing to universities, but has no formal requirement for professional practice. In Northern Ireland, a university collaborates with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to offer a graduate-level award which builds upon a new police officer's initial programme (Police Service of Northern Ireland, 2021). In contrast, there is no higher education route in to Policing in Scotland, and little evidence suggests an appetite for change at present (Martin and Wooff, 2019). The challenge of including these varied arrangements can be seen in the published SBS (QAA, 2022) in the wording of requirements and demonstrated learning outcomes. These also inevitably reflect the contested and political nature of making ontological and epistemological claims about professional policing knowledge.

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The impact of champions

Identifying and involving those with the right personalities and willingness to adapt to assist in shaping partnerships and influencing change is so important (Marks et al, 2010). 'Champions' or educators and practitioners with experience of the roles in question are crucial to developing curricula that reflect the realities of real-life environments where learning will eventually be employed. The ability to apply higher educational learning to the workplace is an imperative (Green and Gates, 2014; Rogers et al., 2022). Champions are catalysts for change, where their experience and reputation can serve to 'lead by example' and foster change. Such functions and strong beliefs in the value of innovation are evident for the role of champions in organisational change (Tankebe, 2014; Varano et al., 2019).

The advisory group for the SBS reflected a cross-section of representatives to act as champions, working in partnership to lead the creation of the SBS. The SBS taking the shape of the advisory group's collective vision that had been carved out in debate and discussions, a consolidation of the intersections of academia and professional policing practice. The inclusion of some concepts within the SBS where easily agreed across the group, such as the need to embed diversity, equality and inclusion throughout, whereas others, such as what constituted the interdisciplinary nature of policing, took much longer to debate across the group and reach a shared agreement.

This groups configuration enabled them to consider how theoretical knowledge requirements might be situated in the context of practical policing 'craft' through collective knowledge and experience. This perspective is crucial to the statement's legitimacy given growing controversy regarding policing education and training, higher education requirements and professional recognition. An important basis for having a range of champions in any equivalent group is to ensure that both theory and praxis are represented effectively to produce a SBS that recognises learning outcomes achieved via multiple modalities and reflects embedded practices as well as emerging needs.

In addition, across the public, private and voluntary sector policymaking, there is an increase in the use of 'champions' as drivers of innovation and development. In a similar way Tankebe

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(2014), identifies how champions are essential to developing a statement that drives change and innovation forward internally through its vision of learning outcomes that learners are required to achieve. This in turn becomes a catalyst for the evolution of the educational programmes, the learners from which can go on to drive organisational reform.

Partnership and collaboration

The ultimate challenge of developing the SBS is finding effective ways of working that allows for the sharing and debating of ideas from a range of contributors. To facilitate this, several collaborative working practices were implemented throughout the development of the SBS. As Morrissey et al., (2023) identify, successful partnerships require clear communication, mutual trust with agreed outcomes which are beneficial to all involved. With Franklin (2009) adding that such mutual respect and shared benefits enhance results across partnerships.

There were several audiences that had to be actively engaged in the process of creating the SBS, where policy, concepts and practice intersect. Core to all conversations were the four nations of the UK, where three different approaches to policing education, oversight, and professional standards in place. One challenge was the position of the PEQF within England and Wales, a framework that is not in place in Northern Ireland or Scotland.

Insert Figure 1: Stakeholder Context for the QAA Benchmark Standards in Policing

The Working Group brought together representatives from all stakeholder sets outlined in Figure 1, some stakeholders taking two or more interests within a complex policing context. For example, those working in HE in England and Wales had a sharp focus on the PEQF and were also speaking for those particular nations of the UK.

Importantly, from the outset there was a focus on developing policing standards at degree level (FHEQ level 6) that were practice informed, and the process was designed to ensure this was at the core of the agreed SBS. In order to bring all advisory group members together so that everyone had a voice and ensure that all stakeholders felt engaged in the process, a model was

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adapted and employed that replicated elements of Kotter's (2012) model for accelerated change to avail of big opportunities, creating an eight-staged approach through consecutive steps to overcome challenges between interest groups.

The main stages employed to create the SBS were:

Building and maintaining coalition across cultures and UK nations

Lester and Kickul (2001) underscore that positivity and trust when working in partnership with organisations is imperative to nourish the level of outputs and quality of work. The advisory group were driven by an ethos of openness and transparency throughout the process, being supportive not dictatorial, encouraging progress and building trust across the whole team. This provided the platform for the team to work closely together and for all to feel totally included in the process.

The implementation of such working collaborations amongst the advisory group was commenced with pairing members from different professional backgrounds. Each pair worked on and developed ideas on an identified theme or section of the documentation outside of the routine scheduled group meetings, with the aim of feeding back and informing discussions amongst advisory group members. This proved an effective way of developing more focused and in-depth discussion amongst group members, often requiring negotiation and compromise on what to feed back to the membership, given the often-different backgrounds and associated priorities within the pairings. An example of this included the negotiation of academic standards and discipline boundaries amongst the higher education practitioners with the operational and practice-based priorities of police practitioner members. Over the course of 12 months, members experienced working with several different colleagues on different themes related to the development of the SBS.

Strategic change vision to enhance policing education

At the core of the working group were scheduled monthly meetings. Here the process of developing the SBS was project managed. Importantly, meetings provided a safe space for discussion amongst working group members, with each meeting commonly focusing on a

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specific theme of discussion set by the chair. These meetings were held online due to the impact of Covid-19 but provided an effective mechanism for members to prioritise points for discussion and to debate and challenge issues. For example, the common theme was the challenge of designing SBS that have currency across all four nations of the UK.

After some early meetings involving significant debate around concepts versus practice within each nation, each member was clear as to the purpose of the SBS and their role in delivering them.

Communicating the vision to a 'volunteer army' with stakeholders

As the process of writing the SBS documentation evolved, advisory group members began reviewing and commenting on drafts outside of scheduled monthly meetings, with studious version control being overseen by the chair. This was important, to ensure that everyone within the working group felt ownership of what was being produced. Kotter (2012) argues that large-scale change can only occur when massive numbers of people rally around a common opportunity. The advisory group was a small team but had access to a ‘volunteer army’ of policing networks, higher education staff and students which proved essential in testing out aspects of the SBS standards. This approach was invaluable to delivering a quality and respected product that was reflective of practice across the UK.

It must be acknowledged that the diverse membership of the working group proved technologically challenging, having to find ways of collaborating on draft documents across institutions. The security requirements and firewalls of policing organisations in this regard proved particularly challenging to overcome, requiring specifically agreed police access to sites and documents.

Removing barriers to change within Policing and HE networks

Kotter (2012) maintains that there are cultural issues which effect hierarchical organisations where the default position is to stick to what you are comfortable with. Policing and HE have long standing cultures of practice, but the advisory group worked to build and maintain rapport,

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sought, and valued the work of those involved in contributing to the design and planning of the SBS. This openness worked to break down barriers inside the advisory group and build trust.

Celebrating change milestones

At all stages successes were clearly communicated both electronically and in the advisory group meetings, where such success were also celebrated to sustain energy and commitment.

Partnerships learn from each other, and keep on learning

All members of the group were asked to partner with other members on the design and delivery of specific sections of the SBS, such as learning and assessment. This allowed for the development of a SBS that spoke for the whole of the UK, and truly reflected HE and policing practice in all four nations.

Institutionalising strategic changes across policing cultures

The SBS will, in time, become embedded in all policing degrees across the UK through agreed HE and PSRB review and evaluation processes. Advisory group members were encouraged to share the final Statement with peers and networks, alongside a formal launch of the Statement in March 2022.

Achieving the published Subject Benchmark Statement

The editing of the final SBS manuscript was completed against tight timescales to meet the publishing deadline of launching at the same time as other QAA subject statements. The on-going and then final editing required the application of a systematic process of proofreading to ensure accuracy, adherence to the prescribed QAA style and logical flow of the document, both the QAA and Chair of the advisory group coordinated and shared the process.

Hendrix (2013) suggests a process for the editing of technical legal documents which can be structured in four stages of reviewing to ensure factual accuracy, organisation of the writing to meet the required layout, aligning style and readability by reworking sentences and paragraphs, then finally checking for grammatical and typographical errors. Following a similar approach, at the outset, the chair adhered to a template provided by the QAA to assist in structuring the

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statement, which as a result, made the required layout relatively straightforward. The factual accuracy of each section was checked and edited in collaboration with each author to ensure that a local focus was reworked into a national view. The most challenging aspect was the varied writing styles that took the most time to rework to ensure readability and flow.

The importance of a second editor cannot be overlooked (Hendrix, 2013), and the expertise of the QAA in the editing process, especially in the terms of ensuring the resolution of grammatical and typographical errors, adherence to style and accuracy of content was essential. This editorial process then led to the final proofs produced by the QAA to review before publication.

The work of the advisory group has resulted in real gains for the recognition of policing within higher education in the UK. It is a strong demonstration of the power of partnerships where everyone in the highly motivated advisory group had equal standing. Feedback on the SBS from members of the 'volunteer army' is that the published statement is well understood and positively reflects the intersection of policy, concepts and practice within HE.

There are important differences in how policing education has been established in different countries (Terpstra and Schaap, 2021). However, the successful experience of creating a subject benchmark advisory group across the four nations of the UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) can be reproduced by effective partnerships and collaboration which encourage stakeholders to share inputs and stay consistent in communicating. The collaborative partnership process to achieve an agreed SBS shows that the adopted model can be applied in other jurisdictions.

Conclusion

The development of a national SBS for policing which applies to UK Higher Education is a natural and impactive step in the formulation of a professionally recognised police service. With the experiences described within this paper being useful for the development of future academic benchmark statements.

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The process of creating the SBS involved both partnership and collaboration from a diverse range of representatives from different professional settings across the four home nations of the UK. Group members had to meet regularly in effectively chaired task driven meetings, share a vision, communicate effectively in safe spaces, trust each other, research and write as team members, and champion their discipline in open discussion, which on occasions led to intense debates. The constraints on available time to both meet and complete the SBS within 12-months was challenging, especially as group members still had to complete their usual workplace commitments.

Future policing will benefit from officers who think critically, make evidence-informed decisions, operate ethically and be open to new ideas and innovate as they deal with unexpected and wide-ranging events. Future research would be beneficial to explore the impact of the SBS on the development of new programmes and through reflection the need for future revisions.

The creation of the SBS brought together a range of stakeholders in the process of policing education. This blend of the academic and practitioner perspective working in partnership is important in order for the SBS to reflect the evolving nature of policing generally whilst providing a realistic benchmark, 'fit for purpose' higher educational programmes, which meet the standards expected of 21st century policing.

Recommendations for future national and international academic benchmarking advisory groups

Developing and delivering an SBS involves constructing a vision of the discipline. Acknowledging the importance of effective chairing, meeting structures, administration and ensuring group members have time allocated by their respective employers to attend meetings and complete tasks, all participants must be motivated, champion their discipline with the ability to call upon relevant knowledge and/or experience of academic and professional practice. They must also be open to alternate concepts and ideas.

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Group members must make evidenced and debated decisions about inclusion and exclusion, with individuals undertaking the process being aware they are engaged in both epistemological and policy decision-making. Advisory group members must engage in the process inclusively, adopting and adapting ideas and a working model as a representative group of scholars and practitioners, whilst also as an advisory group which has mutual trust and relationships to communicate effectively, engage openly, collaboratively and in partnership.

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Figure 1: Stakeholder Context for the QAA Benchmark Statement in Policing (figure by authors, 2023)

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