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Knowledge, practice and professional identity: unthreading the challenges of contemporary police tutoring arrangements in England and Wales*

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ABSTRACT

Police tutoring, to date, has received little attention from researchers and what research currently exists points to a system that is largely failing. The current research was undertaken in response to a range of concerns including those relating to the impact on tutoring of a new underpinning educational framework (Policing Education Qualifications Framework) and a substantial increase in police recruitment (Police Uplift Programme). The research is unique in that it explores these challenges through the context of different delivery models. The data upon which this paper draws consists of survey data returned from each of the 43 Home Office funded forces in England and Wales, 22 semi-structured interviews and four focus groups. Descriptive and thematic analysis of this data allowed the authors to identify four inter-related themes which will be reported on in this paper – 'Different Models of Tutoring Delivery', 'Structure of Tutoring Arrangements', 'Status of Tutoring' and 'Classroom, Practice-based and Reflective Learning'. These point to the nuanced relationship between structural arrangements for tutoring delivery, the value which police organisations attribute to tutoring and the impact of these on the ways in which 'learning' is positioned within these arrangements. In doing so, this draws attention to the apparently intractable tension between 'legalistic' and 'autonomous' perspectives on policing (Fekjaer and Petersson [2020]. Producing legalists or Dirty Harrys? Police education and field training. *In:* T. Bjorgo and M.-L. Damen, eds. *The making of a police officer: comparative perspectives on police education and recruitment*. Abingdon: Routledge, 208). The paper concludes that police tutoring arrangements exist without a defined set of underlying pedagogic principles, are often primarily focused on enabling organisational capacity and conflate organisational socialisation with the translation of knowledge into practice.

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Introduction

The role of tutoring in the police learning and development agenda has received limited, concerted attention to date. Existing knowledge points to wide variations in infrastructure, resourcing and

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implementation. Furthermore, there exist embedded challenges in respect of articulating the purpose of tutoring given the difficulties of reconciling what Fekjaer and Petersson (2020, p. 208) view as 'legalistic' and 'autonomous' perspectives of policing.

Tutoring is an in-service training period, based on principles of work-based learning, that occurs after initial training and involves (usually) one on one training with a fully qualified post-probation officer (the tutor). The tutor assesses the new officer (the tutee) within practice to ensure that they are safe, their actions are legal and that they have reached a level of proficiency in their operational decision making. Once so assessed, new recruits are deemed to have achieved 'Independent Patrol Status' (IPS) and continue with their probationary period to 'Full Occupational Competence' (FOC). The absence of a substantive knowledge base around police tutoring poses substantial challenges for contemporary policing. The first relates to pressures caused by the introduction of the Police Education Qualification Framework (PEQF) in England and Wales. This development aspires to fully professionalise the police in England and Wales by identifying three distinct routes of entry into the profession, equating these with degree level academic achievement and ensuring greater consistency between forces in learning delivery (Hough and Stanko 2020). The second concerns the challenges posed by the Uplift programme, introduced in 2019, which attempted to increase the number of police officers in England and Wales by 20,000 – an increase of almost 20% (Stubbs 2023). Taken together, these two developments represent a considerable dilemma for existing tutoring arrangements because of the expansion of the curriculum that tutors support and the increase in tutee numbers passing through the system.

This paper reports on a piece of research that surveyed the tutoring practices of every police force in England and Wales (one response each from all 43 Home Office funded police forces) and contextualised this data through 22 interviews undertaken with tutors, assessors, strategic leads and inspectors (who had deployment responsibilities for tutees) and four focus groups with tutors and assessors. Interview and focus group respondents were drawn from five strategically identified police forces. The research questions were, (a) to understand the ways in which tutoring is structured and delivered in England and Wales, (b) to explore the experiences of those who have responsibility for delivering tutoring and (c) to identify the challenges which emerge from tutoring for the learning and development agenda in policing.

This paper will seek to undertake four main tasks. First, it will explore some of the complexities surrounding police education in respect of the tension between formal and informal modes of policing and the conditions needed to develop a functional police identity. Second, it will present findings that coalesce around four thematic areas – 'Different Models of Tutoring Delivery', 'Structure of Tutoring Arrangements', 'Status of Tutoring' and 'Classroom, Practice-based and Reflective Learning'. Third, it will seek to explore the ways in which the structure of tutoring arrangements impacts the form that learning takes during the period of tutorship. Fourth, it will present insights in respect of the tasks of learning the context and skills of policing and assessing competence within this occupational milieu. In doing so, this paper will highlight the inherent tension between pedagogy and organisational demand within a profession that needs to accommodate both formal and informal modes of practice.

This paper makes three significant contributions to knowledge in this area. First, the authors believe the underlying research to be the most thorough exploration of police tutoring undertaken, to date, in England and Wales, drawing on primary data from all 43 Home Office funded forces. Second, it is unique in the literature of this area as it highlights the impact of different tutoring delivery models and how these underscore tensions between meeting the capacity demands of an organisation and the development needs of its learners. Third, it explores the tension between formal and informal learning, the role of reflection and the related challenge of establishing what constitutes 'competence' in policing. In doing so, it seeks not only to highlight the challenges of supporting the learning of new police recruits more generally, but also to identify particular challenges around supporting the translation of knowledge into practice through tutoring processes.

Tutoring in policing

The College of Policing (2020) defines the characteristics of the tutor role as one of facilitating the translation of formal learning into an officer's professional practice. Tutoring promotes reflective learning and provides a space in which a student officer can critically develop an understanding of how theory relates to practice.

One of the key existing pieces of research to consider police tutoring was published in 2002 by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC 2002). This report drew stark attention to several challenges experienced by police forces. Many tutors were reported as being pressured into taking on tutoring roles and selection criteria and tutor training were inconsistently applied. For many new recruits, tutorship involved being deployed to response units with little scope for reflective interaction between tutor and tutee.

More recent academic research into this area highlights the mental and emotional labour employed in tutors 'thinking for two' (Tyler and McKenzie 2014) noting that the safety of tutees was a constant mental distraction. Work conducted by Bergman (2017) suggests that some tutors have little knowledge of their tutees' curriculum, while others suggest that tutors can devalue academy training and the formal initial police training curriculum, perceiving it as insufficiently focused on practical skills (Chan *et al*. 2003). Both of these pieces of research also highlight the challenges posed by the assessment requirements of tutoring. The final issue to identify here relates to a lack of pedagogy in respect of tutoring arrangements. Tyler and McKenzie's (2014) research, for example, identified a range of pedagogies or theories used by tutors that did not always correlate to the formal curriculum and Bergman (2017) suggests that more education on training pedagogies could enhance the competence of tutors.

A report, published by the Police Federation in August 2021, may shed light on how the tutor constable system is currently operating across England and Wales (Chandler 2021). This presented the findings of an online survey with a representative tutor constable or professional development lead from 28 police forces across England and Wales. The headline findings of this report suggest that 79% of respondents said there was no formal selection process for tutors; 64% said there was no formal selection criteria for tutor roles; and 14% stated that tutors received no training prior to taking on the role. Furthermore, variations existed in the length and format of tutor training between forces and differentiation in tutor-student ratios were widespread, with only ten forces identifying a 1:1 tutor/tutee ratio.

Theoretical framework

To facilitate our understanding, a theoretical framework drawn from the work of Fielding (1984) has been adopted. The work of Fielding (1984) is invaluable in respect of theorising the tutorship stage of a police recruit's developmental journey. His starting point is that formal police training does little to prepare police recruits for the occupational environment that they will work within. In particular, he highlights the need to differentiate between the occupation of policing and the police organisation. The former relates to a range of sanctioned and non-sanctioned practices and is influenced by a culture that is not primarily structured to meet the formal needs of the organisation. The latter refers, simply, to organisational structures directed to deliver state services around security and crime control. This disconnect between the formal organisation of state services and the operational reality of delivering services is evidenced by Fielding with the following example. He notes how less experienced officers often adopt an overly formal position when engaging with members of the public with the net result of effectively passing on their decision-making function to the courts. Experienced officers, however, come to learn that practice-based decision-making is positioned within the, 'dialectic between formal definitions of legitimate practice and informal work practices' (Fielding 1984, p. 583). As their understanding becomes more nuanced, new recruits use language to articulate working practices in ways that satisfy requirements of both the public and the police

organisation. Thus, Fielding (1984) illustrates how officers learn to navigate the dialectic between formal authorised practices and those which are informal and culturally driven. One example of this is when officers draw on formal narratives to justify potentially problematic informal practices. As a result, officers oscillate between the two positions as the demands of a situation dictate. Of interest here, as Fielding (1984) illustrates, is the fact that the *formal* knowledge of the police does not always equip officers for practicalities of their occupational role. To Fielding, the policing of domestic disputes represents one such skillset that cannot be learned in the classroom.

Similarly, Fielding (1984) stresses how officers view experiential learning as the primary mode of learning, not least as a means of instilling 'commonsense'. He suggests that, whilst commonsense has a variety of purposes, it ultimately provides a lens through which to make sense of the ambiguities presented by the limitations of formalised police knowledge. This takes on extra importance when one considers, as Fielding (1984) does, the importance of local variables – be they 'culture', 'knowledge' or 'physical ecology' (p. 575).

The inherent challenge of rationalising formal and informal police knowledge has led, notes Fielding (1984), a failure in defining what constitutes competence in police practice. In other words, police officers find it hard to identify the practice-based skills required for policing. Competence is not only linked to working practices and occupational socialisation (and localised variations of these) but to the context of the situation the officer is engaged with (Fielding 1984). To add a subsequent layer of complexity, Fielding (1984) suggests that police officers will tend not to have all the necessary qualities to deal competently with all potential situations and will display competence in some instances but not others. Judgements of competent practice become contingent, therefore, upon the, 'delicate and continual interplay of formal organizational mandate, occupational culture and situated experience' (Fielding 1984, p. 588) and these judgements will be influenced by further variables such as rank and role. It is often hard, he observed, to ascertain whether it is competence or luck that leads to acceptable outcomes in policing. The elusive qualities of competence, he concludes, provide one final benefit to officers, that of allowing them to more effectively avoid accusations of incompetence. As Fielding wryly notes, 'the emphasis on experience gives training the excuse to make only the law and the organizational rules explicit because the real character of policing is radically unteachable' (1984, p. 582).

Fielding's identification of a fundamental dialectic between epistemological positions is important. Furthermore, his extrapolation of this dialectic to the dilemmas associated with identifying competence provides a frame of reference for understanding how police knowledge relates to processes of formal professional education. It provides a platform from which to address the challenges of defining what constitutes core skills and knowledge, of understanding how best to communicate and nurture these attributes and, finally, of how best to evaluate whether an individual has achieved an acceptable level of practice. Obviously, these challenges have substantial relevance for how tutoring is structured and delivered in police organisations.

Whilst beyond the remit of this paper it is of value here to recognise that the dialectic referred to by Fielding parallels the Foucauldian identification of the relationship between power and knowledge (Foucault 1980) whereby power, in modernity, increasingly comes from the ability to train individuals to recreate particular 'expert' regimes of knowledge. Power, for Foucault, has become nested in various capillary networks of expert and technical knowledge that become internalised within individuals and institutions. Power, in this Foucauldian understanding, is less about overt oppression and threat, but rather is 'baked in' to the disciplines and institutions that seek to understand, know, inform, and reproduce society and culture. In essence, using this analytic lens, one can identify competing claims as to the nature of knowledge in policing as being a conflict over legitimate authority and where power should lie. On one side there is traditional and informal praxis-based knowledge and on the other theoretical and empirical knowledge. Tutoring draws on both these conceptions of knowledge and this explains some of the complexity of definition and delivery.

Becoming a police officer

In this section we will outline and discuss some of the key themes covered in the literature of police education, learning and socialisation. These include the challenge of rationalising theoretical and practical knowledge and the uneasy co-existence of formal and informal understandings of policing (or 'legalistic' and 'autonomous' perspectives on policing according to Fekjaer and Petersson 2020). The review will then touch upon police recruits and their perceptions of police work and how this shapes their understanding of what constitutes relevant learning as they develop their professional identity. Finally, this review will consider how these issues highlight difficulties in articulating and delivering effective tutoring.

Professionalising learning: learning in the classroom versus learning 'in the field'

Education, occupational culture and organisational learning and socialisation are inextricably linked when applied to the ways in which new police recruits transition into police roles. Furthermore, different models of police education are intentionally drawn upon to shape police officers' values, attitudes and practices in particular ways. Within the context of police training in Europe, it is possible to identify a variety of approaches. Nordic countries, for example, have come to closely align and integrate their initial police training provision within a Higher Education model, a model that has been less widely used within other areas of Europe where vocational principles predominate (Bjorgo and Damen 2020).

Such scope for variability in respect of initial police learning is largely due to the different types of knowledge which are integral to the successful development of police officers. Indeed, police education has evolved to draw upon a range of craft, technical and professional knowledge (Hove and Valles 2020). Whilst this drawing upon of different types of knowledge may, hypothetically, provide a broad platform from which officers can go on to specialise or develop within their careers, it is perhaps inevitable that some forms of knowledge may appear more or less relevant to certain roles. For example, despite the symbolic importance of legal frameworks to policing, craft rules continue to pervade and inform everyday police practices. This is particularly true amongst lower ranking officers working in public-facing roles (Fekjaer and Petersson 2020), and this continues to disrupt the idea that there exists a single coherent narrative in police learning.

Winnaess *et al.* (2020) draw upon the work of Grimen (2008) that identifies the essentially different properties of professional and academic knowledge by suggesting that the former is a combination of both theory and practice. Professional competence, therefore, is distinct in that it draws on both to accomplish specific tasks and, as a result, professional education is based upon and implicitly advocates two quite different types of knowledge. Furthermore, these forms of knowledge, their purpose and compatibility, in the context of police education, have become the subject of substantial debate not least in relation to the relevance of, and therefore the need for, a theoretical component. Whilst the pertinence of this theoretical component is sometimes justified with reference to the increasing complexity of police roles (Hove and Valles 2020), there remains a need to understand the symmetry and consistency of these two forms of knowledge in relation to each other (Winnaess *et al.* 2020) to ensure that they are not, 'out of step' (p. 114). One of the drivers of discussion in this area is that initial police education, note Hoel and Dillern (2022), promotes an 'instrumental' (p. 185) approach to learning that both inhibits effective workplace development and restricts the development of more effective ways of 'doing' policing.

Legalistic versus autonomous perspectives on policing

This tension between academic and professional police knowledge finds itself mirrored in the relationship between what Fekjaer and Petersson (2020) refer to as 'legalistic' and 'autonomous' perspectives in police work. This is a well-documented area in relation to police research, particularly in

the area of police occupational culture (see, for example, Skolnick's [1994, p. 71] distinction between 'delegated' and 'unauthorized' discretion). To Fekjaer *et al*. (2014) police education is predicated upon equipping recruits with a legalistic perspective which necessarily downplays the need for discretionary police practices. In doing so, it promotes 'soft skills' such as reflection as a means to achieve a reduction in non-legalistic practices (Hove and Valles 2020, Hoel and Dillern 2022). Reflective practice has come to be viewed as an integral element of police practice by many commentators (Wood 2020, Staller and Koerner 2023). In particular, it is viewed as a significant driver of increased professional competence by encouraging practitioners to challenge not only their own practice but that of their colleagues. It is therefore suggested by some that reflective practice drives cultural change (Hegarty *et al*. 2011) and that it is a fundamental element of professionalisation due to its promotion of more autonomous professional practice (O'Malley *et al*. 2021).

Through promoting such practices the legalistic position therefore places itself at odds with the autonomous perspective (Fekjaer and Petersson 2020) which allows cultural knowledge to influence police decision-making and practices. That said, Fekjaer and Petersson (2020) go on to suggest that the real purpose of the legalistic perspective may be as an 'ideological facade' (p. 208) to obscure the complexities of everyday police work in the light of cultural and organisational pressures.

Whilst the legalistic perspective might promote the view that process is central to policing, according to Fekjaer *et al*. (2014), the reality is that policing is largely driven by outcomes. During the tutoring phase, note Hoel and Dillern (2022), new recruits begin to reduce adherence to the legalistic perspective, when exposed to the reality of police practice, and become more autonomous in their working style (Fekjaer *et al*. 2014, Fekjaer and Petersson 2020). Furthermore, the integration of higher education into police education frameworks and infrastructure has done little to reverse this process, according to Hove and Valles (2020).

The competing legalistic and autonomous perspectives are, as Fekjaer and Petersson (2020) suggest, a continuum rather than a dichotomy – a helpful distinction that allows us to understand the challenges of reconciling process and practice. Furthermore, other variables may influence officer outlook and behaviour. One such variable has been identified as national contexts (Damen and Bjorgo 2020) with, in the Northern European context, Danish officers more likely to exhibit autonomous practices and Swedish officers more likely to be legalistic in perspective (Fekjaer and Petersson 2020). Furthermore, and of importance to this paper, Fekjaer *et al*. (2014) identify a skewing of the legalistic-autonomous continuum along the lines of role. That is, officers in different roles will be more likely to find themselves more or less likely to gravitate to one side of the spectrum. For example, Fekjaer *et al*. (2014) refer to officers in leadership roles as being more likely to associate with the legalistic perspective and street cops with the autonomous (see Fekjaer and Petersson 2020). It is straightforward to see how street police officers' and police leaders' views diverge in this way. However, this distinction becomes more nuanced when applied to the role that is pivotal in integrating professional and craft knowledge amongst new recruits – that of the police tutor. Whilst the division between street and management police officers is relatively clear cut, the tutor simultaneously works in both the legalistic space (through the formality of their learning and development role) and the autonomous space (through the practice-based element of their work).

Just as tutors have to move between these opposing perspectives, the distinction is also reflected in the expectations of the recruits and in the lack of symmetry between the curriculum and practice-based skills. Regardless of national differences in relation to the legalistic-autonomous continuum, research by Damen and Bjorgo (2020) suggests that all recruits tend to be essentially action-oriented and the shift from legalistic training to the context of professional practice becomes one of moving from passivity to autonomy.

The professional identity

Bjorgo and Damen (2020, p. 14) note that police recruits have a 'dualistic perception' where the academic elements of police training are less valued than the operational practice elements and,

according to Winnaess *et al.* (2020), this is a common feature throughout police services of the Western world. To Winnaess (2017, cited in Winnaess *et al.* 2020, p. 111) this can be partly explained by the concept of 'elective affinity' which is a metaphorical distinction through which to understand the reciprocal attraction between belief systems and the orientations and requirements of those groups and individuals who invest in them (Jost 2021). Part of this phenomenon may be explained, suggest Winnaess *et al.* (2020), by the tendency for recruits to view as irrelevant those subject areas taught by civilians and where there is a perceived disconnect between the subject area and the knowledge requirements of professional practice.

Another element at play here is the way in which foundational and theoretical learning is not an end destination itself but part of the sequential journey through which individuals arrive at their 'professional identity' (Winnaess *et al.* 2020, p. 114). The shift to practice-based learning, after the controlled environment of a formal learning setting, causes insecurity (according to Fekjaer *et al.* 2014) which is resolved or mitigated through exposure to cultural norms. Furthermore, they go on to draw on the work of Van Maanen (1973) to show how the socialisation process that new recruits go through is composed of four stages spanning pre-entry, formal education, initial work-based learning and a final stage where the contradictions between the second and third stages are assimilated. It is clear to see that the stage at which tutoring takes place (stage three) is integral not just in assisting recruits in applying knowledge to practice but also as a means of supporting the recruit as they navigate the contradictory elements of the police role to develop a coherent and authentic professional identity.

Similarly, the action-orientation noted above can be further strengthened through tutoring, according to Hoel and Dillern (2022), who noted that some tutors were patronising in their references to 'soft skills' (such as reflective practice). At the same time, they suggested that autonomy was encouraged by tutors who believed that there was no single way to correctly practice policing. This reluctance to articulate the hallmarks of competent police practice was paralleled by police tutors failing to adhere to a particular consistent pedagogy in their interaction with tutees (Hoel and Dillern 2022).

Furthermore, this tendency to action-orientation is not to be viewed as a form of superficiality or failing on the part of a recruit (or a tutor) but is fundamentally related to issues of professional identity (Fekjaer and Petersson 2020). Moreover, as Hoel and Dillern (2022) note, some practical policing skills simply cannot be effectively learned in the classroom (for example, Fielding [1984, p. 573] identifies the policing of 'domestic disputes' as one such skill).

Navigating the tension between classroom and craft learning

Pragmatism, suggest Fekjaer *et al.* (2014), is central to, and underpins, officers' learning in a culture that is predominantly outcome focused. This resonates with Fielding's suggestion that officers of all ranks view experiential learning as the primary means by which they develop the 'commonsense' required to be an effective officer. Furthermore, he shows how commonsense becomes one means through which officers learn to navigate not just the ambiguities of the police role but also the contextual inconsistencies that define police practice in different environments.

The issues and concepts outlined above draw us, inevitably, to a dilemma when attempting to balance, integrate or formalise legalistic and autonomous elements of police knowledge. There exists a fundamental tension between what Eraut (2000) termed 'codified' and 'personalised' knowledge (and its relevance to 'legalistic' and 'autonomous' distinctions) and how it maps to the role of the police tutor as a facilitator between knowledge and practice. This suggests an inherent difficulty in conceptualising, let alone defining, 'competence' in policing.

This leaves us in the position of not being fully able to understand the relationship between formal learning and work-based learning, nor of the extent to which tutoring can efficiently reconcile these tensions. Finally, the situationally contingent nature of 'success' makes it difficult to direct tutees as to what competent policing is. Obviously, these challenges have substantial implications for how tutoring is undertaken in police organisations.

Methodology

This project was structured into two phases. In 2021 an initial overview or 'mapping' of tutoring across all 43 UK Home Office forces was conducted and followed by a series of qualitative case studies to elicit a deeper understanding of tutoring practices and experiences.

Phase One incorporated a survey comprising 51 questions covering the following thematic areas: the tutor role, tutoring delivery models, recruitment, assessment, training, support, retention, diversity, and quality of tutoring experiences. These questions were compiled on the basis of existing research and grey literature in this subject area, as well as the knowledge requirements of the funders. All 43 Home Office forces in England and Wales submitted returns for this exercise, with data returns being provided by learning and development leads within the forces. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with three strategically placed representatives from the College of Policing, the Police Federation and a police force which had recently changed their tutoring delivery model to sense check emerging findings. These provided subjective perceptions to contextualise the descriptive data generated through the survey. We used simple descriptive statistics, including percentages and means, to present the data and to develop an overview of tutoring practices in England and Wales. As we are aware that tutoring practice is subject to frequent change, we asked questions such as 'Do you intend to change your tutoring model within the next two years?' and 'Have you changed your tutoring model within the last two years?' to give a sense of the fluidity of tutoring practices. However, we are aware that we produced a snapshot of tutoring in England and Wales at the time of a rapid increase in new officers caused by Uplift. The results of Phase One were provided as a report (Cockcroft *et al.* 2022).

Phase Two of the Tutor Constables work stream was conducted by the same academic team and was funded by a collection of police forces who were in a strategic relationship with the higher education institution through which the research was conducted. It constituted a deepening of the research, from an overview where practicing was mapped across all forces, to case studies of five forces that focused upon experiences of tutoring systems and practices. For Phase Two of the project, 22 semi-structured ethnographic interviews were undertaken with strategic leads, tutors, assessors and inspectors who had deployment responsibilities for tutees, with the aim of gaining a deeper qualitative understanding of tutoring processes and the effects that they produce. The ethnographic interviews were based on a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 1990) and explored experiences and perceptions of professional practice in institutions (Hockey and Forsey 2012, Skinner 2012). Four focus groups were also undertaken with combinations of tutors and assessors. Respondents were drawn from five forces and forces were chosen on the basis of their responses to the Phase One survey. A combination of forces was selected to ensure that a range of forces were engaged with and which represented, (a) a variety of delivery models, with 'on shift', 'hybrid', and 'PDU' forces represented, (b) a range of forces in metropolitan and rural areas, (c) forces at different stages of adoption of the PEQF, (d) forces with different approaches to recruiting and incentivising tutors, and (e) forces with different reported levels of tutor satisfaction. The research team identified the intersecting features of forces based on these criteria, with six forces selected and agreeing to be part of the Phase Two research. Five forces ultimately were able to facilitate contact with interview participants and one force withdrew due to time and operational constraints late in the research planning process.

Following transcription of the interviews and focus groups, a thematic analysis (Braun and Clark 2006) was undertaken using NVIVO 12 to tag and code interview and focus group responses. An iterative process was undertaken to ensure that codes and sub-codes clearly aligned with the range of data and consideration was given to the frequency that codes and sub-codes arose within the data. The analytic approach was constructivist and the researchers were very aware of the challenges of, as highlighted by Guba and Lincoln (1994), identifying the transferability of the findings generated under such conceptual frameworks. At all times, every effort has been made to ensure that the reporting of the research accurately represents the material which it presents

(see Malterud 2001, for a further discussion of this point). Phase Two of the Tutor Constables work stream resulted in a written report, made publicly available, and designed to highlight challenges facing police tutoring in England and Wales and to suggest principles to guide effective tutoring practice (Cockcroft *et al*. 2023).

The study is, strictly speaking, of a mixed methods design in that an amount of quantitative factual data on the process of tutoring was collected in Phase One. This was combined with the qualitative data produced by free text responses in the survey, interviews and focus groups in Phase One and Two for the preparation of reports and other outputs. The research team very much drew on Leiber and Weisner's (2010) guidance about the need for practical approaches to using mixed methods in research. The authors therefore utilised a pragmatic integration of qualitative and quantitative methods driven by the need to both understand organisational arrangements for delivering tutoring and the subjective impact of these upon human participants.

Ethics and positionality

Ethical approval for the piece of research upon which this paper is based was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at the higher education institution through which the research was conducted. The approval number is HREC/4174/Williams. All research subjects gave informed consent to participate having, beforehand, been provided with a project information document outlining details of the research. Information on the project was provided through a participant information form and was also verbally delivered prior to the interviews. Individual's identities were anonymised prior to data interpretation and analysis. The identities of the participating forces and rank/role title of participants, where they could be identified, have also been anonymised in all reports and publications. No ethical challenges were encountered during the research and this was probably due to the relatively non-sensitive nature of the subject matter being investigated. The research team also planned elements of the data collection, such as focus groups, in ways to reduce the possibility of unhelpful power dynamics (Smithson 2000).

The authors have no conflict of interests with respect to the research. All authors are academics employed as researchers and are not police practitioners and none have firsthand experience of being tutored or acting as tutors in policing contexts. The research was motivated by the authors' desire to improve the evidence base around what makes for effective tutoring, particularly in the context of rapid increases in police recruitment under the Uplift programme and in respect of the changes to police education caused by the PEQF. The funders of the research shared these objectives as they are focused upon the practical questions of how best to aid new police recruits with their early-stage professional socialisation and skill development.

Findings

The analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data, against the context of the divergent models of tutorship delivery, allowed for the identification for four inter-related themes. These provided insights into how tutorship is perceived and practiced, but also into tutoring's relationship with organisational structures, restraints and norms.

Theme 1 – different models of tutor delivery

The College of Policing (2020) identifies three different delivery models for tutoring which exist upon a continuum between Professional Development Unit (PDU) (where new recruits are attached to a specific unit dedicated to learning and development) to being tutored on active policing teams (usually undertaking a response function). The latter is usually referred to as an 'on response' or 'on shift' tutoring model. Between these sit hybrid arrangements which combine elements of both. This broad distinction between dedicated tutoring units and less formalised arrangements

within response teams led us to explore the advantages and disadvantages associated with both. The PDU-driven approach, according to College of Policing (2020), allows learning and development-related expertise to be readily available, for tutors to select jobs on the basis of their ability to meet the learning needs of the tutee and can provide a controlled introduction to professional life. However, tutors stationed in PDUs may lack up-to-date occupational experience and this may disadvantage them in terms of the occupational socialisation of new recruits. The tutor and student on shift model, as stated by College of Policing (2020), allows for tutors to simultaneously be deployed as operational staff, and ensures current competency in an operational setting. Disadvantages of this approach include individual capacity and wellbeing issues, the inability to choose jobs on the basis of tutees' learning needs and the potential for tutees to feel that they are being immersed in operational policing with insufficient training.

The most commonly adopted model for tutoring delivery in the 43 Home Office funded forces in England and Wales was the on-shift model (47%, $n = 20$). The second most popular model was the hybrid model (30%, $n = 13$) and, finally, the PDU model which was used in 23% ($n = 10$) of forces. The hybrid model, however, covers a number of variations in delivery. The most popular variation of this model is where assessors are based in a separate unit to tutors. Furthermore, some forces operate different models to accommodate differential demand for tutoring. One force, for example, moves tutees from a PDU to a 'resilience tutor' on a response team if they are deemed to have progressed sufficiently. Of interest here is that almost a half of forces (47%, $n = 20$) reported having changed their model over the previous two-year period.

Theme 2 – structure of tutoring arrangements

The second theme identified by the data was that of the structure of tutoring. The challenge posed by external pressures is a substantial influence on the structure of tutoring arrangements. For example, HMIC (2002) stated that, since 1984, the period of tutorship was set at 10 weeks and, for many forces, this remains the norm. However, tutoring continues to be squeezed into a quite limited period of time to ensure that officer recruits 'progress' as quickly as possible. Whilst some forces authorise extensions to this period, under certain conditions which fall short of the need to invoke Regulation 13 terminations to employment, the time period seems limited given the considerable expansion of the educational framework for initial police learning over the last 40 years. According to one respondent, three recruits per cohort on average are held back and these interruptions place further pressure upon tutors.

The research also identified particularly challenging areas of development, such as case file-building, which could place substantial further demands on tutors and tutees alike. For example, respondents noted that case files for complex cases were extremely time-consuming and that for those tutors and tutees whose periods of tutorship involved several such cases, the work arising from these could be unmanageable. Just as HMIC (2002) noted the prevalence of 'burn out' (p. 82) amongst tutors, the current research found that 60% ($n = 26$) of forces experienced difficulties in retaining tutors, most notably in forces delivering through an on shift model. The reasons given were a mixture of individual (e.g. burnout), organisational (e.g. lack of organisational support) and external factors (e.g. the increased complexity of the tutor role).

The data here demonstrates that the structure of tutoring arrangements continue to be defined by their fragility, lacking definition, direction and resourcing. To date there appears little in the way of firm strategic direction regarding what tutoring should involve, how it supports learning and what, ultimately, it should achieve. Despite the acknowledgement of the importance of reflective practice (College of Policing 2020), over three-quarters of forces (Cockcroft *et al*. 2022) reported using on shift or hybrid tutoring arrangements that rely upon shift placements with limited specialised learning support. These placements, defined by prolonged immersion in an on shift environment, suggest that exposure to police work leads to an appropriate transfer of skills and knowledge. At the same time, the on shift system conflates the development needs of the learner

with the resource requirements of the organisation. Rarely did this approach support recruits in synthesising formal knowledge with practice-based knowledge as there was a general failure to provide adequate space for reflection.

Theme 3 – status of tutoring

The status of tutoring, and that of police officers who take on tutor roles, remains largely unarticulated and prone to ambiguity. Over a quarter ($n = 11$) of all the forces surveyed saw tutoring as a core capability of any officer who had reached the status of Full Occupational Competence, rather than as requiring a more specialised skillset. This finding was of note given the existence of a specific professional profile for the tutor role (College of Policing 2020). This tendency, amongst a substantial minority of forces, to present the work of tutors as a generic skill may largely be driven by what HMIC (2002) noted as the 'fragility' (p. 17) of the tutor constable system. Notable here, for example, are supply and demand issues caused by the joint pressures of the PEQF and the Police Uplift Programme. The data very much supported this narrative of tutoring being determined, not by considerations of pedagogy or individual development needs, but by organisational resourcing challenges. One example of this is the fact that 47% ($n = 20$) of forces chose an on shift delivery model and 30% ($n = 13$) a hybrid delivery model. This suggests that over three-quarters of forces in England and Wales were able to overcome the issue of abstraction by adopting models that involve utilising learners as operationally deployable resources. In this way, adoption of an on shift model removed restrictions to using new recruits as a deployable resource and diminished their 'learner' status. Furthermore, Phase One of the research found 47% ($n = 20$) of forces reported having changed model during the previous two-year period with the majority citing resource issues as a motivating factor in such decisions. This, inevitably, leads to a tendency to downgrade both the status, and perceived value, of tutoring (as we have seen above) as the personal development needs of the learner become blurred with the organisational needs of the police service.

One of the strategic leads interviewed for the project recalled a conversation with a tutor who wanted to step down from their tutoring responsibilities. When he was asked why, the tutor stated:

> … because we're not valued. Nobody listens to us. If we're saying this student is not good enough, we're told by our supervisors, don't care, sign him off. Just get him done. (Strategic Lead)

Whilst police competence *per se*, as Fielding (1984) reminds us, is a challenging concept to articulate, tutor assessments of a tutees' ability to practice in a safe and legal manner is relatively more straightforward. However, such assessments of suitability are liable to be ignored as tutees, on occasion, may be 'doomed to succeed' due to resourcing issues.

Police research has consistently identified a culturally embedded expectation that the most important element of police learning and development is experiential rather than evidential. In other words, *real* learning occurs through *doing* the job rather than *being taught* about it (Harris 1978, Bittner 1983). This downgrading of formalised learning, even in respect of initial police learning and development, appears to have gained traction at more formal levels with the concept of 'abstraction' whereby, according to Wood (2020), officers who are engaged with learning or development are viewed as being operationally absent. The Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales (Police Foundation 2022) drew further attention to this dichotomy between development and deployment when it identified that the quality of police officer development would be substantially enhanced by focusing more on the professional development needs of officers and less on police forces' operational needs. As the situation currently stands, tutoring occupies a nebulous space where its status is fully dependent on the ebb and flow of external pressures, rather than on any assessment of its real value to the organisation.

Theme 4 – classroom, practice-based and reflective learning

The fourth theme identified the issue of learning and how it is both positioned, and understood, within tutoring arrangements and broader contexts of policework (for example, cultural knowledge, local knowledge and communities of practice).

Initial police learning draws on both formal and practice-based learning with reflective practice, on paper at least, acting as the means by which the two are assimilated by learners. Current tutor practices in England and Wales, however, do not appear informed by a pedagogic strategy that directs how these elements should work together and what they should achieve. As highlighted above, the basic tutoring delivery models, in many cases, remain surprisingly unchanged despite substantial developments in policing and the knowledge base which underpins it. In many regards, the reality of tutoring arrangements falls short of the guidance provided by the College of Policing (2020) and there appears to be a constant drift towards learning the practice of policing through, quite simply, being deployed to a response unit.

There are some advantages to this approach. As detailed above, tutoring is an area where a strategic approach to delivery model choice can be made to free up capacity by blurring the distinction between learner and practitioner. The data also identified an opinion (although not a particularly widely held one) that this approach allowed for recruits to be effectively socialised into the organisation. This would appear to support Fielding's (1984) views regarding the importance of becoming acquainted with local police knowledge and practices during the period of initial learning. This logically leads to a consideration of the role played by communities of practice in organisational socialisation. The ongoing primacy of the on shift model of tutoring identified in this research appears to be consistent with the notion that policing has a particularly strong community of practice (Bjorgo and Damen 2020) where personal experience is prioritised over formal knowledge through the 'social dimension of learning' (Hoel and Dillern 2022, p. 174).

The predominant focus of tutoring as a means of organisational socialisation did however lead to challenges of both identifying the spaces where reflection could be practiced and the role it played in the wider process of initial police learning. This research found that whilst tutors viewed reflective learning as crucial for tutee development, particular when facilitated through one-to-one discussions, forces struggled to provide dedicated learning time to facilitate reflective practices. This was especially the case in respect of tutoring in on shift and hybrid models and was summed up by one tutor who stated:

> … on response I just feel like I'm run ragged, just pulled left, right, and centre and I'm just dragging this poor fellow along with me' [Tutor]

The compromised ability of tutors to support tutees in reflective practice, due to a lack of space and time, was a constant theme in the research and was viewed as impacting professional development (see Clouder 2000, for similar findings in allied health professions). The lack of consideration for how to integrate reflective practice into the period of tutorship was, the data suggests, undermining the opportunities presented by the PEQF for professionalisation. The repeated drift to learning through observation resonated strongly with the work of Hoel and Dillern (2022) which suggested that police training invariably defaulted to those methods that had been found to work in the past, regardless of current needs.

The research found that these challenges surrounding the provision of authentic and meaningful reflective practice became even more problematic in the face of the operational tension between what Eraut (2000) termed 'codified' and 'personalised' knowledge, the latter referring to, quite simply, 'the way we do things around here' (Deal and Kennedy 1983, p. 60). In other words, the tension between formal and practice-based learning parallels the division between the formal evidence base of policing and how this is mediated through localised knowledge, culture and communities of practice into actual police practice.

One area of occupational skills and knowledge which was undermined by such a differential, in the current research, was that of case file-building (identified under Theme 2). Here, very different

standards and procedures were often advocated in training phases compared to those actually undertaken on shift. One tutor referred to case file building as a 'massive minefield' and that the training that new officers received is, 'awful' and 'terrible'. Conversely, a strategic lead for a force's tutoring arrangements noted that forces were becoming concerned at the poor quality of case files being submitted by officers who were on their period of tutorship. This highlights the obvious impacts and inefficiencies of differential expectations, divergences in practice and potential weaknesses in training provision. It is also worth noting the impact of these on those undergoing tutorship in a context that is both time-constrained and lacking in space for personal professional reflection. The first consideration here is that our data shows, in some cases, that tutees do not have the required space and time to learn how to complete key tasks to a satisfactory standard. One assessor, for example, highlighted the time pressures that occurred within the limited period of tutorship. They noted that there is sometimes a temptation for the assessor to complete the assignment on the tutee's behalf or to tell them what to write, rather than to allow them the space to develop their own response. This example was also reinforced by data from one of the focus groups.

This undermines the requirement for learning to be an active process and exposes the disadvantages of using a work-based learning programme in a context devoid of 'space' to reflect. This appears to contrast with the College of Policing's position of actively promoting reflective practice within tutoring, which it articulated by suggesting that tutorship provides:

> an environment in which the individual has the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills acquired; with time to understand how and why learning is being applied through self-reflection; and provide the support to discuss and reflect on their experience. (2020, p. 7)

Furthermore, the College of Policing's position can be considered an extension of the position taken by HMIC (2002) that initial training, 'must accommodate the opportunity for individuals to explore their own attitudes and behaviour' (HMIC 2002, p. 45).

In reality, our data shows that this does not routinely happen (nor does it appear to be considered in the context of on shift models) and some of the broader implications of this apparent marginalisation of reflective practice will be explored within the Discussion section. However, it should be noted at this point, as Bond and Wilson (2000) suggest, that work-based learning relies on more than, simply, the application of procedures, skills and theories to practice. In doing so, they show that whilst such an approach might enhance cognitive understanding of a profession in a wider sense, they fail to address, 'the complexity and uncertainty that surrounds contemporary practice' (p. 135). Furthermore, the work of Schön (2016) suggests ways in which reflective practice can help officers in negotiating circumstances, such as the case file building issue highlighted above, which his work would categorise as 'troublesome "divergent" situations of practice' (p. 63). In particular, reflection-in-action allows the practitioner to both successfully navigate, and resolve, the tensions between 'codified' and 'personalised' knowledge (Eraut 2000) which often characterise resistance to new ways of thinking about or 'doing' policing.

Discussion

The various components of the above themes provide insights into the structure of tutoring arrangements in the police, the status accorded to them and the often uncomfortable combination of classroom, practice-based and reflective learning which tutors are tasked with drawing together in a meaningful sense.

The findings of this piece of research largely reinforce the findings of existing literature on police tutoring. Existing research into tutoring has correctly identified the importance of supportive work environments, the need for time and space to enable reflective practice, and the need for the process to positively support the translation of knowledge/theory into practice. This piece of research is the first to build upon such work to consider the ways in which these elements are intricately dependent

upon the models by which tutoring is delivered. Research distinguishes between work-based learning that is developmental and that which is instrumental, and Lester and Costley (2010) note that the former occurs when work-based learning is connected to, 'a personally-valued purpose and engaged with critically and reflectively' (p. 563). A consistent finding of this research is that much tutoring practice, particularly that delivered through on shift models, is likely to be instrumental given the absence of the structural conditions required to promote purpose, criticality and reflection. In reality, on shift delivery of tutoring may largely perpetuate the prioritisation of organisational needs over those of the learner, reinforcing the view, articulated within the Strategic Review of Policing, that learning and development is too often perceived as, 'inconvenient abstraction' (Police Foundation 2022, p. 110).

When trying to unpick the relationships that draw these various components together, the authors are drawn, initially, towards structural determinants of tutoring arrangements and processes. In a sophisticated analysis of the role of the tutor constable and its relationship to police socialisation and competence, Nigel Fielding (1984) argues strongly for the need to recognise the influence of both process and structure on new officers as they become socialised and trained as police officers. That is, prescriptive and formal descriptors of occupational competence need to be understood within the, 'normative standards, tasks and practices' (1984, p. 572) which direct the ways in which police officers act when at work. This distinction though is the result of negotiation, with procedures and guidance being mitigated in a variety of ways (for example, by concessions of discretionary leeway). Fielding's work is important here in that it allows us to understand the very real challenges in resolving the messy relationship between formal knowledge and 'acceptable' real-world practice – and its consequences for effective conceptualisation of learning and development in policing. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of reflective practice as a tool by which to negotiate this tension.

Structure also impacts, however, in respect of the different models by which tutoring is currently delivered and which lay on a continuum between PDU-driven and on shift systems. This differentiation is important as it partially juxtaposes the distinction made above by Fielding. In doing so, it allows us to identify one set of delivery architecture that articulates learning within a more formal context and one that does so within a context where formally prescribed guidance is culturally mediated into acceptable occupational practice. Whilst this variation in delivery is, in itself, of interest, it is important to direct attention to the motives which underscore the existence of these models, and to understand those factors which influence police forces to choose a particular model of delivery. Importantly, at no point of the research, and regardless of the tutoring model chosen by a force, did we encounter evidence to suggest that delivery arrangements were informed by pedagogic considerations rather than by short-term practical and organisational requirements. Furthermore, a significant proportion of forces had recently changed their delivery model for reasons of capacity (e.g. so that they might evidence greater numbers of operationally active police officers). This suggests that police organisations conceptualise learners' development needs as being met by exposing them to operational practice-based knowledge. The result of this is to undermine the status of both theoretical and reflexive knowledge. Not only does this convey a strong message about what kind of knowledge is considered most important, but does so at the expense of those knowledge forms closely associated with professionalisation.

A further contribution of Fielding (1984) is the way he uses police tutoring as a means in which to frame the contrast between officers' elaborate observational and interpretive skills with a reluctance to explicitly articulate the criteria for 'competence'. For all the sophisticated ways in which officers deftly apply the 'working personality' (Skolnick 1994) to a variety of work-based contexts, there is, according to Fielding, a lack of evidence to suggest that officers feel able to articulate the hallmarks of 'competent practice' (1984, p. 582). He goes on to suggest that other occupations, such as social work, are far more effective in accommodating reflections on competency within the occupational culture. In policing, he notes, 'direct experience' (1984, p. 574), rather than explicit experiential guidance, drives learning. This is because of the challenge inherent in understanding clearly how to 'do' policing well.

Within the present research, some tutors did feel able, and sometimes compelled, to make judgments of competence in relation to new police officers (indeed, it is integral to the role). However, the pressure that some tutors felt to sign off recruits who they had judged as not reaching the threshold of competence once again draws us back to the tension between organisational capacity and the needs of learners. Laws of supply and demand dictate that a heightened need for officers will lower quality standards and, in practice, lead to the recruitment of some officers who do not objectively meet minimum standards of competence. In an occupation that routinely employs standards of occupational competence, it may be considered novel that objective judgements of competence by those trained to do so may be overturned or ignored on the grounds of organisational capacity. Such occurrences undermine both the notion of police professionalisation and the practice of tutors whilst reinforcing the perception that it is better to have an officer on the streets who lacks competence rather than no officer at all.

This, of course, raises questions about the purpose of tutorship, certainly in respect of its use as a means of assuring competence. Furthermore, as we have already highlighted, differing conceptions and standards of competence exist in respect of key skills/tasks (for example, case file building) at the 'codified' and 'personalised' levels and this could, for some, lend weight to Fielding's thought-provoking assertion that policing is, 'radically unteachable' (1984, p. 582).

Work-based learning, of which tutorship is a fundamental element, implies the inclusion of a substantial element of reflective practice (O'Malley *et al*. 2021) and this is true in the occupational context of policing (Wood 2020, Staller and Koerner 2023). To Fielding (1984), the focus of experienced officers on the importance of 'direct experience' allowed a reading of policing which ignored the importance of reflective practice. He went on to note that the challenge is not just to get new recruits to think reflectively about their work, but to get experienced officers to think 'reflexively of their own practice' (p. 584). To officers in our research, the experience provided by response work could be very valuable, although they generally regretted the lack of opportunity for reflective practice to be undertaken. Policing may, at one level of interpretation, be therefore 'unteachable', but that is not to assert that policing is 'unlearnable'. It does, however, prompt closer scrutiny of the challenges of determining how to make evaluations of competence so as to avoid accusations that policing is also 'un-assessable'. A robust tutoring system, underpinned by reflective practice, we believe, remains a crucial, yet over-looked element in initial police development if we are to successfully support the transfer of knowledge into practice.

Conclusion

Recent decades have witnessed calls to more effectively bridge the gap between police knowledge and practice (HMIC 2002, Police Foundation 2022) with both tutoring (HMIC 2002) and reflective practice (College of Policing 2020) being seen as integral to this process.

What has become apparent, over the last two decades, is that tutoring has come to present an apparently intractable challenge for policing in England and Wales. Like other 'new' professions within the public sector, policing finds itself tasked with instilling in new occupational members a combination of formal knowledge and an understanding of how that knowledge relates to the effective undertaking of their duties whilst, simultaneously, socialising them into the occupational role.

The current research builds on this knowledge by seeking to understand how these challenges can be understood more effectively by identifying the ways in which this element of police learning and development has become caught in a number of cross-winds. First, the apparent position that tutoring exists as an accepted element of initial police learning and development but is not meaningfully or universally supported by organisational structures or, indeed, an underlying set of principles. It exists by virtue of its presence rather than what it achieves. Second, that whilst the bridging of knowledge into practice is strategically viewed as a positive aspiration, further questions remain unanswered. For example, the tension between 'codified' and 'personalised' knowledge

suggests that the yardstick of 'competence' in policing is a moving target directed by organisational requirement rather than observable behaviour. Third, the prevalence of on shift approaches, which appear to neglect the provision of space for reflection within tutoring, suggests that current arrangements may effectively be conflating the requirement for occupational socialisation with that of supporting the bridging of knowledge into practice. The contemporary positioning of tutoring within the police appears to be informed by two reinforcing positions – that the process should impact as minimally as possible on organisational capacity and that tutoring (as a form of work-based learning) will promote critical and reflective-practice regardless of the ways in which purpose, criticality and reflection are integrated within it. This research suggests that such a position reinforces a passive, and more instrumental, form of police learning that does little to dispel Fielding's (1984) pronouncement on the (im)possibility of directly teaching skills to police officers. However, crucially, the current system also fails in that it neglects to address, fundamentally, the ways in which officers may best come to learn the complex craft of policing.

This paper has sought to cast light upon the challenges for police learning and development as understood through a lens that prioritises the role played by tutoring. Furthermore, it has acknowledged the epistemological tension between competing knowledge claims in policing and the impact on tutoring. As a result, it has the sought to address, and extend, national and international commentary about the challenge of authentically addressing 'legalistic' and 'autonomous' perspectives of policing and their relation to each other. It has also allowed us to engage with the challenges of operationally sustaining tutoring in a way that aligns with the expectations of professional learning, not least in respect of reflective practice. Finally, it has provided some insight into the role played by police structural and cultural factors in inhibiting the professionalisation of policework through their ability interrupt the integration of appropriate learning practices.

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