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**Abstract:** In an effort to help professionalise and modernise police organisations in an ever changing and complex society, it is becoming increasingly common for police to obtain university qualifications. Initially, the push towards university education for police was met with opposition and some hostility from serving police. However, over the past twenty years university education has been undertaken by police working across all organisational ranks and jurisdictions within Australia. Police organisations now actively collaborate with universities in the development and delivery of policing courses and often have articulation agreements in place with universities. This paper explores the perceptions of key informants or 'experts' in police education. Forty in depth interviews were carried out with police managers working in education and training and university academics in policing and criminology from across Australia. Themes in police education were explored including expectations and relevance of university education for police managers and the notion of police professionalism. Overall, both police and academics had very favourable views towards university education and working together in the delivery of policing courses. In contrast to previous research into police education. the perceived outcomes of university education were seen to be largely positive. However, perspectives about the specific role of university education in professionalising police organisations differed along with views about the necessity of requiring police managers to have formal university qualifications.

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# **University Education and the Police:**

# **Perspectives of Australian Police Managers and Academics**

### Abstract

In an effort to help professionalise and modernise police organisations in an ever changing and complex society, it is becoming increasingly common for police to obtain university qualifications. Initially, the push towards university education for police was met with opposition and some hostility from serving police. However, over the past twenty years university education has been undertaken by police working across all organisational ranks and jurisdictions within Australia. Police organisations now actively collaborate with universities in the development and delivery of policing courses and often have articulation agreements in place with universities. This paper explores the perceptions of key informants or "experts" in police education. Forty in depth interviews were carried out with police managers working in education and training and university academics in policing and criminology from across Australia. Themes in police education were explored including expectations and relevance of university education for police managers and the notion of police professionalism. Overall, both police and academics had very favourable views towards university education and working together in the delivery of policing courses. In contrast to previous research into police education, the perceived outcomes of university education were seen to be largely positive. However, perspectives about the specific role of university education in professionalising police organisations differed along with views about the necessity of requiring police managers to have formal university qualifications.

#### Introduction

The objective of this paper is to highlight the complexity of the relationship between Australian police organisations and university education. For over 20 years leaders in policing, including police ministers and commissioners, have discussed and debated the need to professionalise police through university education. The debate remains ongoing to this day and various steps have been taken by Australian police organisations to reach the goal of police professionalism. Within Australia there is a dearth of research in this area and the perceptions of current key stakeholders in the area remain unclear. This paper begins by providing a brief overview of the impact of university education on police. It then moves on to discuss the perceptions of key stakeholders working in the field. The findings on perceptions of key stakeholders have been consolidated as major themes, including the notion of "experts' in police education, university education overall and police

professionalism and conclusion. The findings from the interviews with key stakeholders are discussed in terms of the key literature in the field.

## The Impact of University Education on Police

The suggestion that police should obtain university qualifications is not a new one. August Vollmer, the police chief in Berkley, California initially encouraged police to undertake formal university education at the beginning of the twentieth century (Carte, 1973). However, it was not until the late 1960s that significant numbers of police leaders and administrators in the United States began to debate the benefits of university education for police and the role of university education in police professionalism started to become accepted (Roberg and Bonn, 2004). Since this time, there have been a number of reviews carried out mainly in the United States on the impact of university education on police attitudes and performance. The large body of literature suggests that university education has both positive and negative impacts upon police, although the majority of reviews found more positive impacts of university education.

Key researchers in the area have found the *positive impacts* of university education to include lower cynicism for senior officers (Niederhoffer, 1967), less authoritarian behaviour (Smith, Locke, and Fenster,1979 and Dalley, 1975), fewer citizen complaints (Cohen and Chaiken, 1972 and Lersch and Kunzman, 2001), lower dogmatism and higher self esteem (Guller, 1972), fewer incidents of arrest in discretionary situations (Finkenauer, 1975), more open mindedness (Parker, 1976), higher performance ratings (Cascio, 1977 and Roberg, 1978), higher administrative abilities (Wycoff and Susmilch, 1979), higher performance in police academy training (Lester, 1983), better informed practice and use of critical thinking in carrying out duties (Carter, Sapp & Stevens, 1989) better decision making and flexibility in problem solving (Carter and Sapp, 1990), higher value for ethical conduct (Shernock, 1992) increased initiative and taking on of leadership roles (Kakan, 1998), decreased levels of use of force (Terrill and Mastrofski, 2002). The research into the impact of university education focuses more on police attitudes as individual performance is often difficult to measure (Reiner in Brodeur, 1998). Also, police organisations are diverse and change over time and may have contested goals so performance measures are not absolute and may vary between organisations (Reiner, 1998; Roberg and Bonn, 2004).

Not all research findings into the impact of university education on police have been positive. A smaller number of *negative impacts* of university education have also been found, including higher cynicism scores for junior officer (Niederhoffer, 1967 and Regoli, 1976), higher attrition rates for police with higher degrees (Trojanowicz and Nicholson, 1976 and Weirman, 1978) and less respect for citizens (Shernock, 1992). So, while the majority of findings about the impact of university education are favourable there do remain some negative findings from key researchers.

The first national level research pertaining to university education for police began in Australia in 1986 when a formal review into police education for upper level police managers was conducted at the request of the Australian Police Ministers Council (APMC) (Rohl & Barnsley, 1995). The review "Characteristics and Educational Needs of Upper-Level Managers in the Australian Police Forces" surveyed 529 police managers from across Australia. The most significant finding of the review revealed that 86% of respondents were in favour of police oriented university courses for senior police. However, the respondents also expressed some scepticism towards university education and felt that university education would not necessarily help police managers perform better with a key view being illustrated by the following statement, "You can make an academic out of a policeman, but you cannot make a policeman out of an academic" (Rawson, 1986:140). The review recommended that police managers undertake university education and that a national police education course be implemented.

Subsequent to the review, the Australian Police Ministers' Council agreed to establish the National Police Professionalism Implementation Advisory Committee (NPPIAC) in 1990 (Rohl and Barnsley, 1995). In formulating the national statement of strategic direction for the police to achieve professional status the NPPIAC sought advice from Australian police jurisdictions, universities, and police unions. All police jurisdictions, through their commissioners, agreed on the national strategy of professionalisation of the occupation of policing which stated that there should be:

- 1. Establishment of agreed core standards for recruits entering community based policing.
- 2. Development of a national common core component for community based police recruit training and education purposes, supplemented according to jurisdictional needs.
- 3. Review and enhancement, followed by publication and promotion, of the Australian National Police Code of Ethics.
- 4. Appropriate police training courses having national (rather than jurisdictional) relevance and significance to the profession to be monitored and accredited.
- 5. Tertiary and other courses undertaken by police as part of their ongoing professional development to be endorsed and accredited where appropriate

- 6. Development of a national rating system for educational activities undertaken by police as part of their ongoing professional development, to enhance objective comparison of courses, qualifications and standards achieved.
- 7. Conduct of a national needs and demand analysis of requirements for police tertiary education requirements, recognizing the various and changing positions in and between jurisdictions, for the purpose of providing governments and tertiary institutions with the possible indications of the police profession's future higher education needs.
- 8. Development of nationally accredited in service courses to meet the needs of jurisdictions and for specific professional development of members of the profession.
- 9. The Education Advisory Board to the Australian Police Staff college, in its capacity as a national police education standards council, to monitor, accredit as necessary and endorse courses and to work closely with providers of tertiary education to maximize the credits towards general tertiary qualifications gained by those successfully completing national police professional development courses.
- 10. The Australian Police Staff College will pursue recognition and status as a tertiary institution, with formal postgraduate courses for its executive development programs. (NPPIAC, 1990)

Seventeen years later the aims of the national strategy have yet to be realised, although some steps towards it have been taken. After the strategy was introduced the National Police Education Standard Council now called the Australasian Police Professional Standard Council (APPSC), was established and is responsible for advancing police professionalisation. In addition, in 2000, a number of operationally based and task focussed competency standards were developed for police (Public Safety Industry Training Advisory Body, 2000). These competencies had taken nearly 10 years to complete and were more vocationally focussed, highlighting the emergency service functions of police work rather than the overall role of police. The Australian Police Ministers' Council is still very committed to university education for police. In its Directions in Australasian Policing 2005 -2008 it stated that it has an "Ongoing commitment to educational and career development framework for the continuing development of police employees" (Australian Police Ministers' Council, 2005).

Australian research into police education has been located within the discussions and research into police professionalisation. Most research to date, has focussed on entry level police and the notion

of promoting the professional status of police through the completion of university education as an entry requirement (Lewis, 1992; Chan, 1997; Rushbrook et al 2001). As with the key American research, there is far less Australian research pertaining to university education for police managers. The attitudes of university educators in police studies have, however, been researched and were found to be in agreement about the provision of university education for police but also revealed a dichotomy between attitudes towards university education and police academy training (Mahony and Prenzler, 1996). It was thought this may be the case due to the early stage of police undertaking university education. While the notion of police undertaking university education is no longer new, there are still many uncertainties with respect to police education and professionalism facing Australian police jurisdictions. The current study addresses gaps in the existing Australian literature by exploring key stakeholders' perceptions about police university education and professionalism.

## Sample

Forty participants from across Australia were interviewed for this research. All of the participants were working or had recently worked in the area of police education. Of the 40 participants, a total of 24 police managers from the eight Australian police jurisdictions and 16 academics from both police organisations and universities were interviewed. Participants were approached directly by the researcher and all but one potential research participant agreed to take part in the research. In 8 interviews, additional names of potential research participants holding pivotal positions in police education and identified as experts in police education, were recommended by interviewees when they were interviewed. These recommended individuals were also approached by the researcher and all consented to take part in the research and be interviewed. The sample size was determined when representatives from each Australian police organisation had been interviewed and when saturation was reached and no new information was reported by participants (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

To meet the objectives of this research and determine the current views about police education and professionalism in Australia, research participants were deliberately recruited, and included both senior police managers and academics with experience in police education. This allowed the researcher to select participants who were particularly knowledgeable about and informed in the field of police education (Neuman, 2003). Work history details that were provided by participants during the interview process revealed they held senior positions and were typically very experienced in working in this area. The ranks of police managers ranged from inspector to deputy commissioner and academics were typically at or above the level of associate professor or director.

## **Procedure**

The in-depth interviews were all conducted by the researcher herself and ranged from 40 minutes to 2 hours and 20 minutes in length. Prior to the interviews taking place, the research objectives were discussed with the participants and each participant was invited to take part. All of the interviews were conducted at a location that was chosen by the participant to facilitate them feeling at ease. Typically, interviews were conducted at the participants' workplace or the researcher's workplace and in a few cases interviews took place over the phone. Unstructured, in-depth interviews were conducted in order to generate a variety of current and emerging themes about police education and professionalism (Moser and Kalton, 1992). With the exception of introductory comments and background questions about participants' work history and experience in police education, no interview schedule was used. The interviews were fluid in nature and took on the format of everyday conversations (Minichiell, 2005). However, the interviews were guided by the researcher and were in fact recursive (Minichielli, 2005) as participants were encouraged to talk broadly about police education to ensure their perceptions and relevant organisational experiences in police education were revealed. Open ended questions were asked and as the interviews progressed a number of dominant themes began to emerge.

# **Data Management and Analysis**

From the initiation of the data collection through to the completion of the research, data analysis was a continuous and ongoing process. The goal of the in-depth interviews was to identify current themes in the area of police education. This was achieved by thematic analysis utilising a process of identifying, coding and categorizing patterns within the data (Boyatzis, 1998). All interviews were audio taped and immediately following each interview the researcher's initial views about the key ideas raised in the interview were recorded in a reflective journal. This allowed comprehension of the data to begin immediately. As data was analysed, similar patterns or themes soon began to emerge from both the audio taped interviews and the reflective journal.

## Results

All participants in the research appeared to speak freely and openly about their perceptions of university education for police. Further, many interviews ran significantly longer than anticipated. This may have been because of the conversational nature of the interviews and the ease with which interviews tended to progress. Many of the participants also knew the researcher professionally or

were aware of her work. Although a range of issues pertaining to police education were discussed, a number of key themes emerged early during the interview process. The first was that many key stakeholders that were interviewed did not consider themselves to be experts in police education although they held pivotal positions in the management and research of this area. All participants believed in principle that university education was beneficial for police officers across all organisational ranks. There were different perspectives about the professional status of police and if, in fact, police could ever be considered true professionals. The role of university education in police organisations was also viewed from a variety of perspectives in the areas of police culture, competencies, and promotions. Finally, there were different views on how police education and professionalism would be manifest in the future.

## The Notion of "Experts" in Police Education

Consistent with past research into the continuously evolving and changing nature of policing (Kelling and Moore, 1988) and the political influence exerted upon police organisations (Reiner, 2000), many police managers in this study perceived they were not experts or always aware of what was happening with respect to police education. The two main reasons for this were, firstly, they felt the relative importance of police education in their organisations was constantly changing and in some cases that there was a lack of organisational continuity in the area of police education. Perhaps the most telling quote came from an Inspector who stated, "There is a very short memory when it comes to police education. We are constantly reinventing the wheel and today we are much less committed to formal university education for our members then we were only a few years ago." However, this varied between police jurisdictions with certain jurisdictions having much more emphasis and importance placed upon university education. In several instances police managers working in police academies and liaising with universities indicated they worked in the academy due to serendipity and that their work at the academy was not planned but rather it just happened. One Superintendent stated, "I came the academy as a promotion and had very little knowledge about police education and training. Today I am responsible for overseeing a number of courses at the academy and often liaise with universities about credit arrangements and the like." In addition, police managers indicated that they sometimes ended up working in education because they themselves held university qualifications but did not possess qualifications in education.

Secondly, police managers felt there was pressure from outside political sources forcing the hand of police education. In the current context resources in some police organisations are often being taken out of education and responsibilities are being devolved onto the field with the effect being to overload education officers and senior constables in the field. Whether this is philosophically driven or resource driven remains unclear. Surprisingly, academics in police education also tended to feel they were not experts in the area as they sometimes worked across a number of research areas

(such as criminology, law and emergency management) or in some instances had not published recently in the area of police education.

## **University Education Overall**

Without exception, all participants agreed in principle that university education is good for police. However, it was revealed that Australian police organisations do not share a national perspective or view regarding the most appropriate design, curriculum and delivery of education courses for police. Due to the varying requirements of each Australian police organisation, there are differences between the organisations in their approach to curriculum development and the delivery of education courses for managers. Both police managers and academics indicated that there is active collaboration between their police organisations and universities and numerous articulation arrangements are now in place. Police organisations each have different articulation agreements in place and collaborate with universities to varying degrees. Although in 1990 the NPPIAC illustrated there was some consensus among police commissioners pertaining to police education there are now many differences between Australian police jurisdictions. While all police managers indicated their organisations encourage their members to undertake both internal education courses and university courses which are relevant to their need, each police jurisdiction goes about this in a unique manner and places a different level of importance on it.

Clearly, educational requirements for police are varied and often specialised as police undertake many more roles and specialised functions than previously. Most Australian police organisations do not necessarily require a university degree for police seeking promotion, although the completion of university is still voluntary, it is viewed favourably. In some jurisdictions it is only the new recruits who are required to undertake various education and training courses when they join the police. This is perhaps counter intuitive as when police become more senior and move into management positions, they require a number of essential skills including planning, organising, leading, controlling, communicating, decision making budgeting and labour relations skills (Wilson & McLaren, 1972) that are enhanced through the completion of university. University education encourages reflective practitioner attributes that become more relevant to the job functions of police managers as they are no longer performing strictly operational duties and are required to be more strategic in their thinking (Roberg, Crank, & Kuykendall, 2000).

While academics were very clear in distinguishing education and training some police managers used the terms interchangeably. In this research *police education* referred to formal study which takes place at an accredited university or institution and *police training* was viewed as the operationally focussed techniques that were taught in police academies and required by police in order to carry out their duties. According to Massey (1993) it is police education that is significant as it promotes

autonomy and deliberate judgement, unlike police training which encourages police to conform to prevailing cultures. Where police are encouraged to undertake further study key stakeholders indicated a number of courses were appropriate to study, including law, management, communications and criminology. While it is acknowledged that both education and training are beneficial when working in changing environments and as a means to promote change (Rusaw, 2000), it is university education that is necessary if police are to be considered professionals with the ability to reflect upon and evaluated their actions.

The defined body of knowledge which is part of a profession is still being developed in policing. In order that they meet the goals of policing both in technical terms and ethical ones police managers have been called upon to be fully reflective and reflexive (Massey, 1993; Bradley & Ciocciarielli, 1994). The notion of the reflective practitioner (Schon, 1983) highlights the idea of situational understanding of actions, thoughts and assumptions within professional practice as situations happen or after they have taken place. Research has found that a reflective approach is not easily achieved by police managers (Adlam, 1999). However, the Australian Graduate School of Police Management, Graduate Student survey (2001) into the perspectives of police managers who have successfully completed university courses revealed that police managers perceived that their ability to reflect upon and solve problems and make decisions had improved after the completion of a university course.

# **Police Professionalism**

While the changing police environment has been superimposed with calls for police to professionalise there is still no clear definition of police professionalism among key stakeholder in the field. Respondents had numerous interpretations and definitions of police professionalism and what it entails. More surprisingly some police managers, but not academics actually wondered if in fact police should be considered professional. For example, "Do police really need university degrees to lock up crooks on the street?" was asked and another participant stated, "If police were going to achieve professional status it should have happened by now. We have been talking about this for years and nothing has happened." The view of some police managers was that if police were in fact professionals they should have already been accorded professional status in Australia after so many years of debate.

Respondents' varied views about police professionalism were surprising given the considerable research into police professionalisation and the past support of the professional status of police from police leaders both within Australia and overseas (Skolnick, 1966; Price, 1977; Carter & Sapp, 1989; Weinberger, 1991; Rohl & Barnsley, 1995; Police Commissioners' Conference & Australasian Police Ministers' Council, 2005). According to Klockars,

If police are to get to be true professionals – that is, professionals in more than name only – our society allows one and only one path to that status. It must begin with a long period of education in an accredited, academic professional school at the college or postgraduate level, include or continue through a period of supervised internship, and conclude with the granting of a license without which one cannot practice that profession. No true profession – neither medicine nor law, engineering, accounting, teaching, social work, nursing or clinical psychology – has ever achieved genuine professional status in any other way. (Klockars, 1985:114)

Although university education is not the only component required for police to obtain professional status, it is an essential part of the professionalisation process without which police will never obtain professional status. The discussions pertaining to police professionalisation and the application of professional status to police remain ongoing in Australia (Police Commissioners' Conference & Australasian Police Ministers' Council, 2005) and this was very much reflected in the participants' views in this study.

Notwithstanding the Australian debates pertaining to police professionalisation, in 1985 the case of Davis v. Dallas, a court of appeals concluded that police officers hold "professional type" positions rather than skilled occupations. According to the pervasive view of the court in this case, the professional standing of police was based on a number of factors: 1) officers must be able to diagnose problems in confusing and variable situations; 2) based on their diagnosis, officers must make timely discretionary decisions; 3) their responsibilities and authority are broad and performed under minimal direct supervision; 4) officers must be highly adaptable to handle heated emotions and interpersonal sensitivity in close proximity; 5) they must be able to make critical decisions in circumstances of great stress; and 6) they must be able to apply the law fairly and equitably, as do other criminal justice professionals. The "professional type" positions held by police largely focus on police problem solving and decision making. Carter and Sapp (1989: 157) go on to describe professional police as those with the ability "to diagnose problems in confusing and variable situations, using their own diagnosis to make timely discretionary decisions in circumstances of great stress." While Australian debates concerning police professionalisation remain ongoing, at the very least police can be seen to hold "professional type" positions which require skills in problem solving and decision making.

## Conclusion

While the idea of university education for police and police professionalism was first proposed by August Vollmer over 100 years ago there is still no consensus about what police professionalism actually means. While the idea of university education for police is supported by both police managers and academics in principle, the body of knowledge in policing is still being developed. Not all key stakeholders working in police education accept that police can obtain full professional status and some think that trying to obtain professional status for police is doomed to failure. Whether police will ever attain full professional status and whether this is desirable remains unclear. This study found research participants working in pivotal positions in police education were not in agreement on a number of issues. If police are to ever attain professional status in Australia there needs to be a common vision and implementation plan which originates from the top of each organisation and is then championed and embraced by those working in key management and education roles. There is still a long way to go.

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