

# The value and role of learning for police officers and the police organisation in Scotland.

## Preliminary Findings

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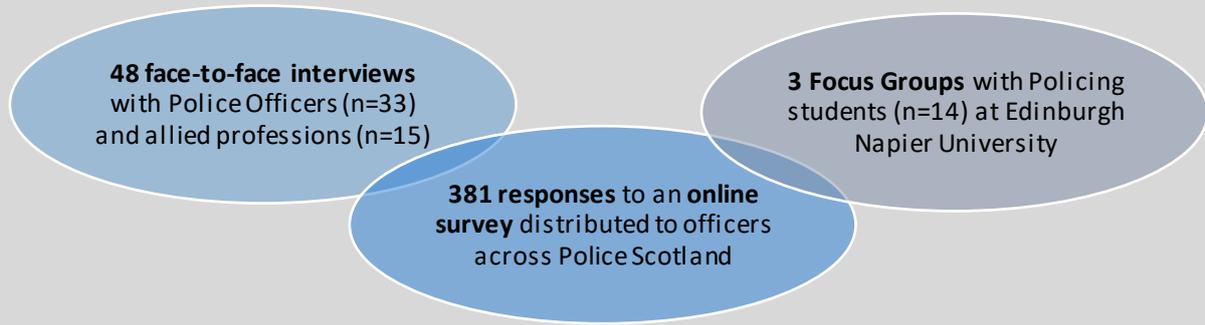


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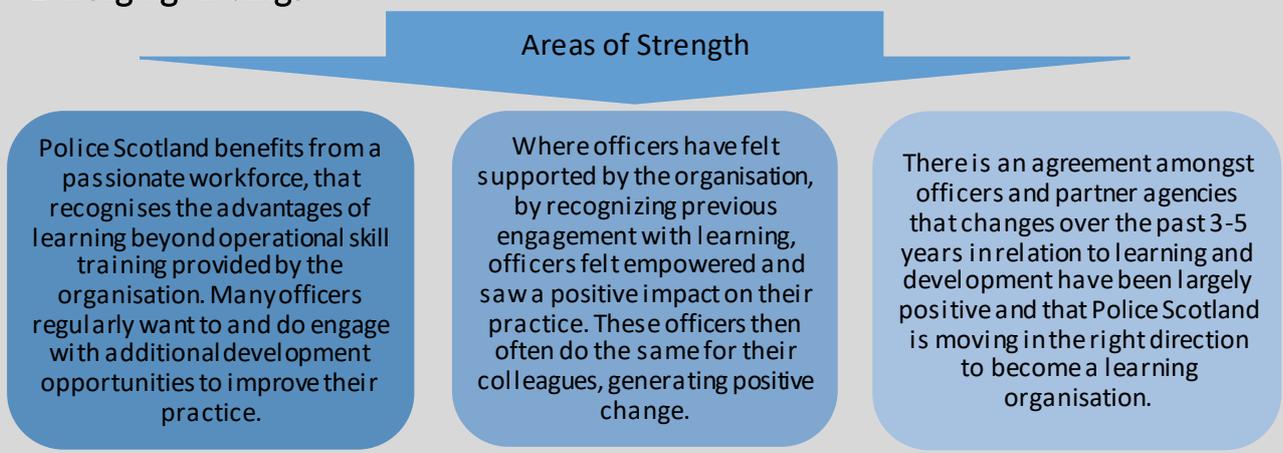
# Executive Summary

This report presents the emerging findings from a Ph.D. study, funded by Edinburgh Napier University, and supported by the Scottish Institute for Policing Research, exploring the role and value of learning within Police Scotland. Data was collected between October 2019 and February 2021.



The themes presented here are preliminary and will be explored further for the final thesis submission in December 2021.

## Emerging findings



### Perceptions of current opportunities

- Courses, especially e-learning packages are often considered 'tick box' exercises, not meaningfully transferring knowledge, or embedding learning.
- Role/Rank specific courses are often significantly delayed, making them less relevant for the officer and not addressing their current needs.
- There are few learning opportunities beyond operational skills training, leading to officers having to look externally for opportunities, which are often not recognised by the organisation.
- Informal and peer learning are the main modes of learning post-probation, rarely underpinned by structured learning or opportunities to reflect.

### Police Culture around learning

- Participants feel that there is a lack of transparency when it comes to the distribution of development opportunities, leading to feelings of organisational injustice.
- Officers argue that Police Scotland is still largely inward looking and holding on to traditional values which sometimes act as a barrier to innovation and organisational learning.

## Transitions between roles/ranks

Participants argue that transitions between ranks and roles are often not managed well by the organisation. The gap between organisational expectations and officer needs lead to steep learning curves, added pressures on both police officers and partner agencies and interrupted working relationships and projects.

## Leadership, Management and CPD

- Participants mention a lack of leadership development opportunities, especially in relation to people management skills. This leaves middle and senior management officers ill-prepared to support officer wellbeing and development.
- There is little consistency in the support middle and senior management officers provide to their officers and staff. This has adverse effects on officer's development because line managers are often considered the gatekeepers to further development.
- Officers who felt unsupported by their managers and the organisation are increasingly losing faith in Police Scotland supporting their development and recognising their talent. Because of this they are losing motivation to look for development opportunities which could improve their practice.

## Key questions emerging

How can Police Scotland provide a learning environment where opportunities are fairly distributed based on officer needs?

How can learning be embedded in the organisation to create organisational memory and a learning culture?

How can Police Scotland strike a balance between supporting individual learning needs, organisational learning needs and learning needs dictated by external pressures?

## Preliminary implications

1. A 'one size fits all' approach to courses based on frontloading officers with information is not good enough to promote meaningful learning that can influence practice. Courses need to be learner-led and encourage discussion to embed understanding and develop shared values.
2. Learning acquired outside of the policing environment should be recognised and used by the organisation. This can help fill skill gaps in the organisation, while also empowering officers.
3. Officers need to be prepared for moving roles and provided with timely training and development that addresses training gaps before they emerge, especially but not only, for highly demanding operational roles.
4. To avoid extended transition periods when officers start new roles, Police Scotland has to provide more time and space for effective handovers between officers and a record of key activities and projects that should be continued in the new role.
5. Development conversations should be mandatory for all officers, and at least annually, to identify what the organisation can do, and what the officer should do, to develop personally and professionally.
6. Improved people management skills must be developed as a matter of urgency for all middle management and senior management officers. Officers need to learn how to develop and support their staff effectively to influence top-down change (Whatne, 2011). This will address the current mixed picture of support for staff development and avoid feelings of organisational injustice, which the literature suggests can lead to early voluntary resignation (Charman & Bennet, 2021).
7. To commit to the concept of the learning organisation, Police Scotland needs to develop a learning culture (Senge, 1990). This needs to be driven from the top-down and the bottom-up and encourage communication across the organisation to identify what modes of learning are most beneficial.

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# Introduction

Police forces across the world realise that a culture of lifelong learning is central to adapting to modern challenges and developing an agile and flexible workforce that can address the complexities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In response to this, Police Scotland has started to think in a more in-depth manner about their workforce planning and people strategies, identifying how they best *support, engage and empower* their staff (Police Scotland, 2021). The literature on this topic provides a plethora of different approaches to learning and development that might be beneficial to develop lifelong learners, improve practice and transform the police force into a learning organisation (Green & Tong, 2020; Heslop & Police, 2010; Janssens et al., 2017; Ordon et al., 2019). However, learning does not happen in a vacuum and therefore, it is important to identify practices and opportunities that will be relevant for the force in question. To assess to what degree current practices within Police Scotland nurture or hinder learning and development, and what development might be required to address future workforce needs, this study has asked the following questions:



1. How do police officers assess their engagement with internal and external learning opportunities in relation to rank, years of service and educational background?



2. In what way do police officers consider Police Scotland to be a learning organisation and how are possible changes to police learning understood in this context?



3. What are police partner professions perspectives on the role of learning within their own organisation, within Police Scotland and for partnership working?



4. How do policing students understand the role of learning in police officer development?

This report presents emerging findings from an ongoing Ph.D. project which is funded by Edinburgh Napier University and is being carried out with the support of the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR) and Police Scotland. The above research questions were addressed through a mixed-methods approach collecting data between October 2019 and February 2021 face-to-face and online.

## 33 semi-structured Interviews with **Police Officers**

- 2 – 30+ years' service
- Constables
- Frontline Management (Sergeants including temporary Sergeants)
- Middle management (Inspector & Chief Inspector)
- Senior management (Superintendent & Chief Superintendent)
- National and Local Divisions & different educational backgrounds

## 381 Survey responses from **Police Officers**

- 1- 30+ years' service
- Constable to Superintendent
- National and Local Divisions
- Different educational backgrounds

## 15 semi-structured Interviews with **Partner professionals**

- Justice Social Workers
- Community Safety
- Education
- Third sector
- NHS
- Other Criminal Justice

## 3 Focus Groups with Edinburgh Napier University **Policing Students**

- 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year Students with the intention to join Police Scotland upon completion of their degree.

## Key Emerging Findings

Emerging findings presented here will help Police Scotland to understand current barriers to meaningful engagement with learning. Four key emerging themes have been identified: perceptions of current opportunities, transitions, police culture, and leadership management. Academic literature is used where appropriate to support claims made by participants and identify ways in which these could be addressed. For a full review of the literature on this topic the final thesis should be consulted once it is submitted towards the end of 2021. In response to the HMICS Inspection of Police Scotland Training and Development (HMICS, 2020), some of the findings will specifically link to leadership development, although both initial and continuous professional development (CPD) at all levels has been explored in this study. If there is interest for more detailed information on any of the findings presented here, please contact the researcher or consult the final thesis once available in the Edinburgh Napier University repository.

### Areas of Strength

Police Scotland has a very passionate workforce when it comes to developing themselves, and encouraging learning in others:

*“Researching, studying, learning about different teaching styles, learning about how students react, [...] I was lucky enough that there was a programme [...] for the degree in teaching qualification further education, so funded myself through that” (Police, Constable 1)*

*“I’m always interested to learn and listen because that’s what you do, that’s the best way to get better and better and better because there will be things that certain folk do in certain areas that’ll be better for us and likewise for other people” (Police, frontline management 4)*

Officers feel motivated to engage with additional learning either to improve their practice or to support Police Scotland to address problems they have identified. This engagement with personal and professional development beyond mandatory operationally relevant training is often considered by officers to have a significant positive impact on practice. However, this often results in having to identify and engage with opportunities in their own time, off shift, with little support from Police Scotland to do so.

As Honess (2019) has stated, CPD is key to address the ever more complex policing role. Additionally, Matthews (1999) argued, individual interest and passion is an essential ingredient to generate positive workforce learning, in turn promoting a more positive learning environment. What is important to officers, especially when they engaged with opportunities in their time off, is that this engagement, where relevant to the organisation or their role, is recognised by Police Scotland and, where appropriate, used to improve practice.

Policing students on the other hand argued that they might expect the organisation to support them in their personal and professional development where relevant to the organisation:

*“Oh, absolutely. You're trying to do your job for them better. That would be the same as any employer putting their employees through training to do their job better. You would hope that they support you, be it financially, or give you the resources that you need to do that.” (Student 10, Focus Group 3)*

This suggests that a new generation of officers might have different demands on the organisation to support their development. This is important to recognise, and new recruits need to receive clear communication about what support might be available to them early on, to avoid alienating them if they join and there is a lack of support or what feels like an unfair distribution of opportunities across the organisation further down the line.

Where the engagement with extra-curricular learning and development opportunities is recognised by Police Scotland, when applying for roles or wanting to implement what has been learned, officers felt empowered by the organisation and their overall job satisfaction has increased.

*“I think it was alright purely because they were flexible with me on this occasion, I could actually sell myself and who I am and why I am good for the role, they gave me space to talk about also who I am away from the police, which I really appreciated, I think that really helps the department as well get better candidates.”  
(Police, Constable 2)*

*“My dissertation for my Masters, I came back to the police, and I did it on a policing subject that ultimately, I agreed to share my learning and ultimately my learning was adopted [...] that was really beneficial to the police, that's me saying that but there was a real read across”  
(Police, frontline management 4)*

Identifying ways in which Police Scotland can increase job satisfaction is key as it can avoid ‘job turnover, poor performance, work avoidance, decreased morale among co-workers, and physical and legal liability’ (Paoline & Gau, 2020, p. 55). As Constable 2 above illustrates, if recognising the person behind the police officer and the learning and passion they already have, which motivated them to join Police Scotland in the first place, increases their job satisfaction, then this is something Police Scotland should build on in the future. Unfortunately, instances where this has happened, amongst participants, are few and far between.

Considering the provision of development opportunities for officers, those development opportunities officers have found most beneficial, are those that come to the officer (geographically speaking), rather than the officer having to travel to centralised training establishments. As a line management officer illustrated here:

*“[this] training actually goes into that division and we deliver it in their police station and we're very unique [...], we actually catch them in their job at that time and it's relevant to them then 'cause people are changing. We got people who are on permanent back shift, people on permanent night shift, they work permanent weekends, why are we getting them to change, our training should go with them and we, the response we get from that is phenomenal” (Police, frontline management 2)*

More flexible training and development approaches are important because they encourage more officers to engage in further learning, distribute and embed learning across the organisation, and ensure that practice is continually improving across the country. Officers in training roles are increasingly recognising this and want to provide their resources to officers in other areas as they see the positive impact it can have.

*“The feedback that we got from the cops and their line managers were, they had a wee kinda spring in their step and they still have because they can now stop and deal with that, whereas before they’re like that ‘nae point in us touching that because we cannae do anything with that. We are just so isolated up here’ “ (Police, Constable 1)*

As this quotes from a constable in a training role states, when officers are offered development opportunities in their area, especially more remote areas in Scotland, where response officers often have to attend a wider range of calls (Fenwick, 2015), it can empower officers and improve their ability to address and prevent crime in their area more effectively. Therefore, leading to a more effective use of resources, firstly, because there is less abstraction of officers to travel to and from central training centres. Secondly, closing skill gaps across Scotland and enabling officers to address a wider range of calls, not having to depend on centralised resources. If trainers are willing to do this, Police Scotland should enable this where possible.

There is a hope that the rapid changes that came with the coronavirus outbreak in March 2020 and the increased IT capabilities of Police Scotland might develop the availability of training and development opportunities further.

*“... we didn’t have the IT stuff, we very quickly [...] the biggest question to me is why can’t we use this for courses, that way I don’t have to go down to Jackton to go for that management course for a week cause it takes me away from the family, I can actually just do it from here, there’s webinars are not new things, they’re new to Police Scotland but they’re not new and just I think they need to start making better use of that because you would get a lot more uptake if you thought you can sit at your desk and partake in something that’s of real interest to you.” (Police, middle management 1)*

This could offer Police Scotland a real opportunity to offer courses, both mandatory and optional, to a wider range of officers. Leading to a better-educated workforce, able to engage with learning and development in a way that puts less strain on resources and their officers’ personal lives.

However, to afford meaningful learning these courses should not only deliver content but support authentic professional learning (Webster-Wright, 2009). This means that online learning systems and video-conferencing needs to be used more effectively, and rather than a one-way transfer of knowledge should be based on discussion and embedding learning. Current approaches do not live up to this standard, as will be explored further when discussing perceptions of current opportunities.

Furthermore, participants agree that opportunities to network across divisions for officers and partner agencies are still important to encourage relationship building and peer learning.

*“We had a [...] development day the other day and [...] I think it’s good for both us and them to just spend a bit of time at events like that sharing and kind of getting a bit of perspective on it all ‘cause that’s the thing that kind of breaks down the fixed mindsets that kind of dominate both organisations from time to time” (Partner, justice social work practitioner 5)*

As Andy Lancaster from CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) argued, developing communities of practice is key to “enable people with a shared concern or passion to freely share practice and solutions” (2019, p. 2). Police officers recognised this and considered environments where they can share learning experiences with other partner professions beneficial to their practice, and their ability to work effectively together.

Overall, police officers and partner agencies have agreed that Police Scotland is heading in the right direction when it comes to learning and development:

*“Oh, absolutely I think it’s taken strides with you know, being open-minded, I would say to learning which in 2020 you know what I mean, you think well, nearly 2020, we should be [laughing]” (Police, Constable 3)*

*“Looking back, I do think the journey Police Scotland has been on and policing in Scotland in general has been quite significant in relation to training and the development of its people” (Partner, criminal justice practitioner and retired police officer)*

This open-mindedness and development of opportunities for staff to engage in learning and development is one key aspect of committing to the concept of a learning organisation as described by Garvin et al. (2008). It involves the organisation recognising that individual learning and self-legitimacy is as important as team learning and organisational learning, all of which do not happen in a vacuum or without one another (Cierna et al., 2017). Therefore, this suggests that officers within Police Scotland are taking note of the changes needed to develop a positive learning environment that empowers its people and addresses their needs, while adapting to the challenges of policing in Scotland in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Nevertheless, as figure 1 illustrates, being a learning organisation is much more than the provision of learning opportunities but involves several different building blocks that need to be addressed.

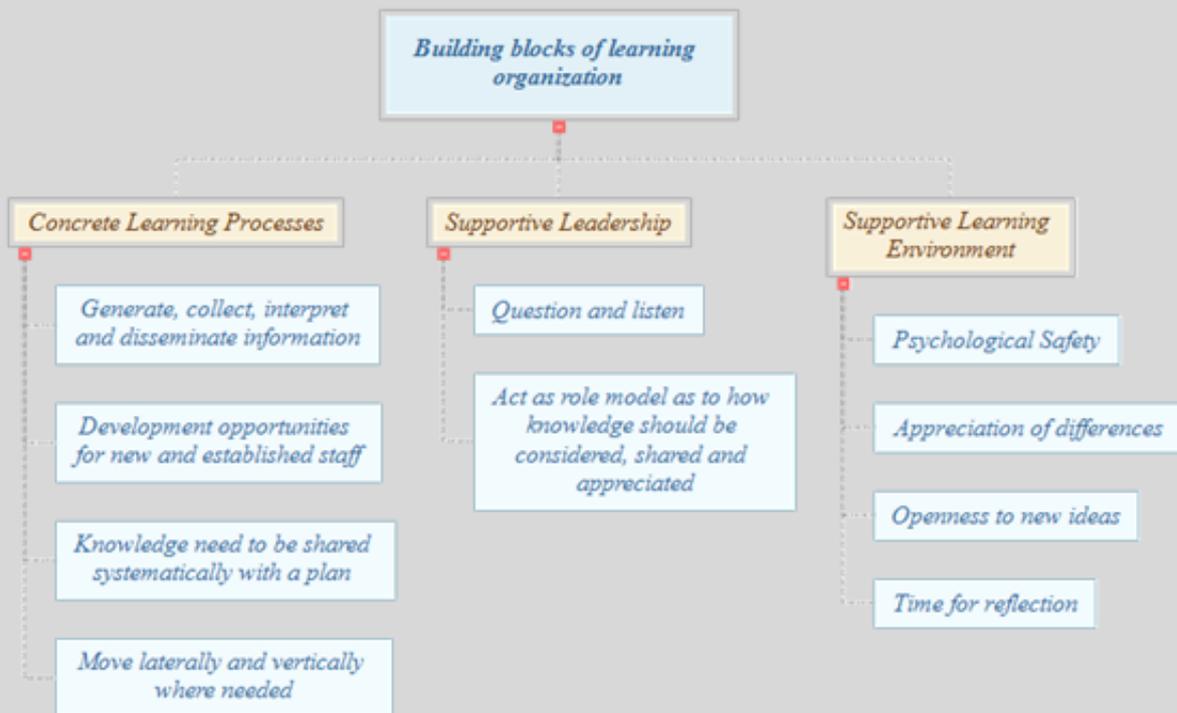


Figure 1: Building blocks of a learning organisation (Garvin et al., 2008).

As will be illustrated throughout this report, there is still some work to be done by Police Scotland to truly commit to some of these building blocks and build a learning environment that ‘promotes a culture of lifelong learning’ (Scottish Police Authority & Police Scotland, 2016) and an organisation equipped to adapt to future challenges.

### Perceptions of current development opportunities

Police officers and partner professionals often feel that development opportunities and learning is largely focused on the needs of the organisation rather than the needs of the officer.

*“I think they learn from the things they want to learn about. I think they’re a learning organisation when it comes to avoiding risk, for risk averseness. I’m not sure they’re a learning organisation for lots of other things that are actually important. And that might be being deeply unfair, but I think they’re a learning organisation to avoid criticism” (Partner, senior nurse practitioner and professor 1)*

*“Professional development of front-line response officers is non-existent unless it suits PS [Police Scotland] - i.e. D1 license when they have no one trained to drive the minibuses” (Survey response 1)*

As these quotes indicate, there is a general feeling that the provision of learning is dictated by the operational need of the organisation, which is often guided by public accountability and covering the organisations back against any practice that could lead to a public outcry. Officers feel that there is little engagement with the skills and knowledge individual officers and certain roles and ranks need to develop to improve practice, and to increase their confidence and competence in their role.

Charman (2017) argued that the fear of ‘doing the wrong thing’ can lead to the development of a ‘blue code of self-protection’. This leads to an unbalanced focus on learning dictated by self-protection rather than empowerment, innovation, and developing a workforce able to anticipate and adapt to future challenges. Officers and partner agencies agree that many opportunities only become available once they are deemed a priority by Police Scotland based on public interest. This needs to change if the police service is to move from reactive to proactive policing approaches needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Davies, 2016).

It was particularly the online provision of e-learning packages that has been called into question by officers:

*“No blunt as porridge, they’re rotten, every last one of them. They just give you tick box, so they’re basically the format is exactly the same, they look horrible, there’s not a lot of thought into it [...] it’s not engaging at all, it’s not intuitive and I understand why they do it because they are catering for the masses, there’s 17,000 of us after all... but I sometimes worry that it’s a ‘tick box’ check and forget exercise and it doesn’t stick to people” (Police, senior management 5)*

*“I think most of our training nowadays is you get a global email that says complete this moodle package and yea depending on whether it’s a [...] back-covering exercise, there may be some questions at the end.” (Police, Constable 5)*

*“it’s like you just kind of read enough to pass the test at the end, do you actually take it in? No, probably you don’t.” (Police, Constable 6)*

Police officers recognise the need to learn new legislation and practices in a continuously changing environment but argue that this is not done in the most effective way. Officers consider a lot of mandatory development provided by Police Scotland a ‘tick box’ exercise that as mentioned above, is focussed on public accountability and risk aversion, rather than meaningful development. It is often perceived in a way that moves responsibility away from the organisation to the individual, without much effort to check if the learning was understood and embedded in practice.

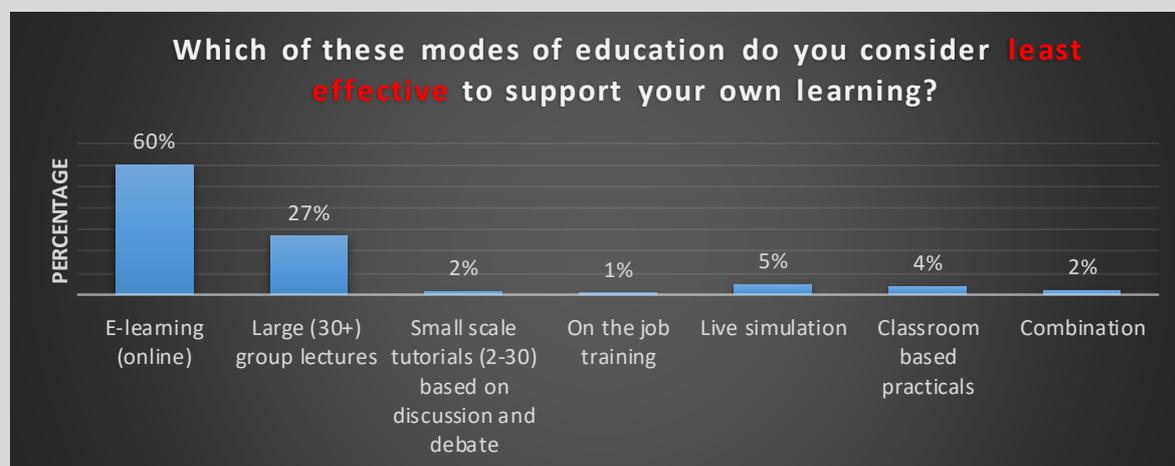


Figure 2: Survey responses to question 4.8: *Which of these modes of education do you consider least effective to support your own learning?*

The survey confirmed that police officers consider e-learning to be the least effective method to support their learning, whereas experiential learning, discussion-based learning, and a combination of these were considered most effective (see Figures 2 and 3).

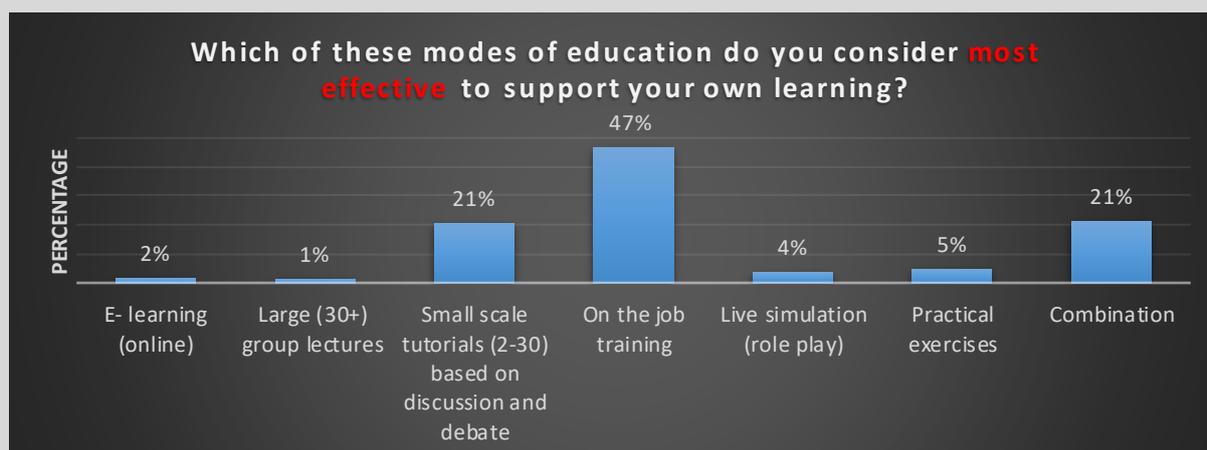


Figure 3: Survey response to Question 4.7: *Which of these modes of education do you consider most effective to support your own learning?*

It is not a surprise that many participants consider *on the job* learning the most effective mode of learning for them. However, as Lauritz et al. (2012) argue, simply committing to the fact that police officers tend to prefer on the job learning might not be helpful to develop the police officer and the police force of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They suggest that police officer education should still inspire and provide space for reflection, while offering hands-on learning, only committing to one mode over the other cannot develop the kind of omnipotent police officer the 21<sup>st</sup>-century police force requires.

A more flexible approach to learning and development is therefore required, promoting different kinds of learning dependent on the subject but always offering space for reflection. There has to be an acknowledgement that as Lancaster (2019) has argued, delivering e-learning with a compliance test is not enough anymore, and a Police force that wants to stay relevant has to improve its e-learning provision. He argues that learners are far more sophisticated and discerning now and participants of this study have supported this view. If Police Scotland wants to continue using e-learning as one of the main modes of providing mandatory learning packages, they have to invest more heavily in their development and ensure that there is follow up either through local team discussion or online forums, to ensure the learning has been embedded and officers have the chance to reflect on the topic, making it relevant to them.

To be able to develop as a learning organisation, knowledge needs to be shared systematically and with a plan (Garvin et al., 2008). However, police officers in this study stated that learning largely happens *on the street* or *on the job* and by chance, depending on who your tutor constable or line manager might be.

“...it’s very much you pick it up from other people, you do your own reading on it, you watch other people in action, and you learn the good bits and the bad bits from them” (Police, middle management 7)

“Most of what you’re learning to actually do the job, is on the job or a bit of your own study” (Police, senior management 6)

*"It's pretty apparent that when you leave something like a policing...organisation a lot of the stuff that we do they don't necessarily write down, it's passed on, it's learned on the job, it's learned through, you know, partnership working and mistakes" (Partner, Community Safety and retired Police Officer)*

*"it's all about I suppose you, as I've said you look at what your manager does and take the good bits and discard the bad bits and you kinda learn by doing, you might make mistakes along the way, I've certainly made in hindsight looking back some of the things I could have dealt with it slightly differently. Doesn't mean I was wrong, it's all about learning" (Police, middle management 5)*

Recognising that learning can happen in both formal and informal environments is important, but experience alone is not enough. As Janssens et al. (2017, p.104) argued engagement with more experienced colleagues can lead to higher learning outcomes however "merely gaining experience might not suffice". To be able to develop confidence and ensure competence in police officers, there need to be clear structures in place that encourage reflection on practice and support officers when transitioning into new roles. Additionally, to ensure consistency and fairness, there have to be structures in place to check what officers have learned informally and, on the street, and where gaps in skills and knowledge might still exist.

## Transitions

The impact of the focus on informal learning becomes especially apparent in the transitioning period from the Scottish Police College to response policing but also when transitioning between roles and ranks.

*"Police are very much you apply for a job and you're dumped in that job, you learn quickly" (Police, Constable 5)*

*"The learning [for probationer training] is very much here is a law, here is another law. Most learning is done out in the street" (Survey response 2)*

*"Our first few weeks in [business area] were horrendous because you think you know something and then you go to such an entirely different role ... nothing can prepare you for it and we always joked about hiding under the desk when the phone rang because we just didn't know what to do" (Police, frontline management 5)*

*"There is a big gap between probationer training and practice with a steep learning curve" (Police, Constable, 4)*

Officers stated that they often felt ill-prepared for new roles they started and had to embark on a steep learning journey, adding to an often already pressurised environment. Both officers and policing students from Edinburgh Napier University agree that due to the nature of policing and what you might encounter, learning on the job is considered an integral part of the learning experience of becoming a police officer. However, structured learning and skill development are considered as important, leading to survey respondents mentioning several aspects that could have helped them with the acclimatisation to response policing, if they had learned these at Tulliallan Police college (see Figure 4).

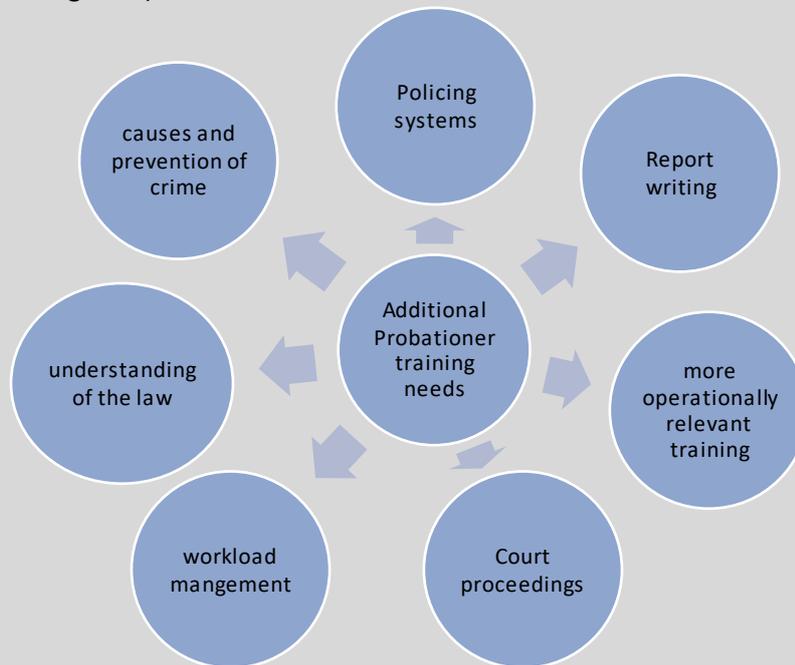


Figure 4: Survey responses for question 4.3 *Were there any skills or knowledge you would have liked to learn in your initial residential training period?* Focusing specifically on responses from officers with 1-6 years.

Figure 4 only indicates those survey answers from officers with 1-6 years’ service, however, similar answers were repeated by officers with longer service brackets. The fact that these answers are recurring from officers with 30+ years’ service as well as those with less than 3 years’ service, indicates that Police Scotland is continually failing to address probationers' training needs and missing an opportunity to ease the transition to operational policing, which could improve practice.

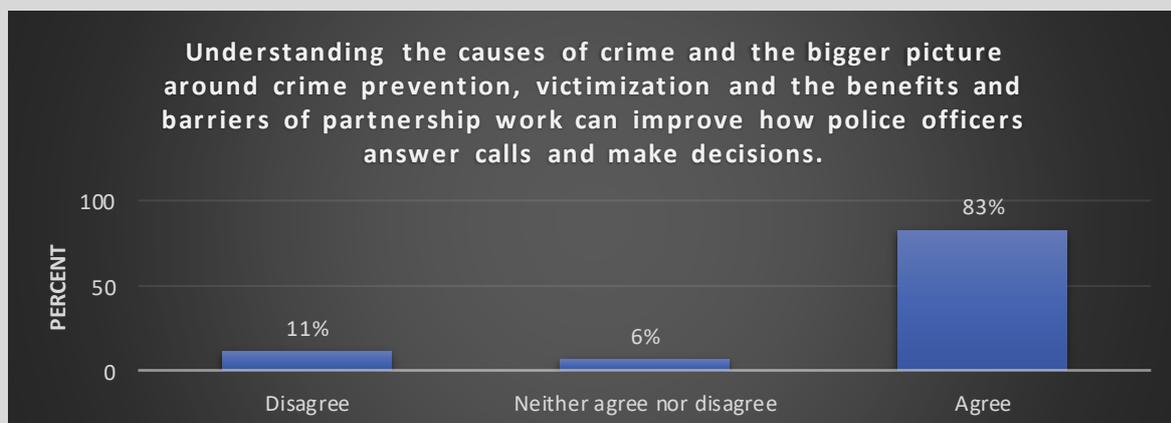


Figure 5: Survey responses to question 8.5\_2: *To what degree do you agree with the following statement: Understanding the causes of crime and the bigger picture around crime prevention, victimization and the benefits and barriers of partnership work can improve how police officers answer calls and make decisions.*

Figure 5 illustrates that survey respondents largely agree that a wider understanding of crime and the causes of crime could improve practice and should be taught during the initial probationary period. Policing students from Edinburgh Napier University support this and argue that:

*“I just think that it’s important, while they don’t have to have a degree to go straight into the police, you have so much power as a police officer and I think that it’s maybe a little bit irresponsible just to go straight into the police force without [...] doing some research about just the wider issues involved in policing and the influence it can have on different people depending on their culture or like you know like race, sex, or whatever so I just think it gave you, or it gave me so far a better understanding of the influence I can have as a police officer” (Student 1, Focus Group 1)*

This supports calls for a more comprehensive initial probationary period at Tulliallan Police College. However, current resource restrictions limit Police Scotland’s ability to prolong initial training periods. Therefore, further engagement with Higher Education for the continuous development of Police Officers, and the promotion of additional learning and development opportunities throughout an officer’s career, might be a way to address current resource restrictions and ensure officers are still able to gain a wider understanding of their role within society to improve practice. Nevertheless, the time that is available for initial probationer learning needs to be used as meaningfully as possible to avoid steep learning curves when officers start their career with Police Scotland.

*“I didn’t really have a tutor much purely because of resources. I was only paired with my tutor for maybe a couple of months and then I started working with different people which made it a little bit more difficult as well because those people didn’t know what I knew or what I didn’t know and obviously they’d happily helped me if I would have known what questions to ask” (Police, Constable 2)*

Officers argue that there is a disconnect between initial residential probationer training and the realities of the job. This gap was often increased by differences in experiences with tutor constables, with some officers having very limited support and others being ‘lucky enough’ to have a tutor with enough service and knowledge to provide guidance and transform classroom learning into real-life experience. If the tutor constable population is becoming less experienced, as participants suggest, a longer initial learning period might be more appropriate, or tutor constables should go through a longer training period, to develop the skills needed to effectively support probationers. This is supported by findings in the Home Office (2002) report recommending the selection and training of tutor constables needs to be more rigorous to ensure quality assurance, resilience, and the recognition of the role.

This lack of role preparation is also apparent when officers move on from response policing or up the ranks.

*“We’re not great at that [role preparation] to be honest and so no, I was able to in my own time I shadowed the previous Inspector when I say shadowed, I had two or three days with him in the month before I left and he fired a lot of documents to me” (Police, middle management 1)*

*“Unfortunately, in the police, hindsight is a wonderful thing and there tends to be a feeling that [...] when something goes wrong [...], people always just do the best they can do [...], it goes back to the training that they have, so people are often hung out to dry unfortunately.” (Police, frontline management 5)*

Officers across ranks and roles often feel isolated in their learning experience and with a lack of initial knowledge and support to prepare for and develop in roles, officers often do not know where to find information and what or who to ask. Indicating a lack of support from Police Scotland to ensure Officers can hit the ground running. This is also adversely felt by partner agencies:

*“generally it’s been great there’s not been a problem with whoever new has come in but you start at the beginning of building all that relationship up again so currently the DCI you know she’s fantastic, she’s absolutely brilliant but she’s been with us probably since about last October/November time and I would say we’re up in running now so that’s a chunk out of a two year period and if she’s moving on in two years you know that means that we’re only really getting 18 months of very solid work on the subject before we’re kind of back to square one” (Partner, Third Sector 1)*

Partners such as this third sector professional argue that their partnership work is set back by having to rebuild trust, knowledge, and shared values when a new officer comes in. Additionally, dependent on the officers’ knowledge and values, they sometimes come in and cancel projects that their predecessor has spent a significant amount of time building up because they cannot continue them while wrapping their head around the new role. This has led to gaps in service provision and added pressure for both officers and partner professions.

Although unforeseen circumstances can lead to unexpected staff movement in policing, systems should be in place that ensures handover periods are used where possible. Additionally, it is paramount that Police Scotland provides appropriate and timely training so that officers have the skills and knowledge they need to do their job well. If officers are actively encouraged and supported to engage in CPD, they might be better prepared for new roles before they apply for them, easing the transition between roles, leading to better practice and improved partnership working. Additionally, to ensure the continuity and support for projects, they should not be associated with specific officers but be embedded in and supported by the organisation. This way, when new officers come in, they know that this project should be continued as part of their role. This could improve organisational memory in the long run.

Participants do not only mention the lack of preparation for roles but do also not always feel that Police Scotland appreciates and recognises learning and development officers have engaged with and does not promote learning and development well throughout the organisation.

## Police Culture

As Garvin et al. (2008) point out, to develop a learning organisation Police Scotland needs to develop a supportive learning environment that promotes:

- Psychological safety
- Appreciation of differences
- Openness to new ideas
- Time for reflection

As will be illustrated in this section there are some underlying cultural barriers to achieve this.

Officers state that value and trust is associated with policing experience rather than knowledge and skills beyond policing experience. Officers, therefore, mention an inherent feeling of suspiciousness to views that differ from traditional policing values and a lack of appreciation of differences (Garvin et al., 2008). This focus, some participants argue, leads to a system where officers are promoted into roles based on length of service rather than skills and experience, leading to certain personalities being chosen over others and a situation where the same thoughts and values are reproduced repeatedly. This can inhibit innovation and change.

*“Because it’s too out the norm, they want clones, they want people that will turn up, do exactly what they’re told and not rock the boat, that’s what they want but do you know what? That’s rubbish, it just, it produces nothing, mediocrity. You know?! [...] they claim to want creativity and innovation but then when you do it?! ohhh...” (Police, middle management 6)*

*“Yea I mean there’s a huge deal of emphasis placed upon service in the police, and I would argue that emphasis increases as you go down in service so for example when you first join the police, you’re a probationer, you not got much service, you’re not necessarily trusted with a lot of autonomy and things like that you know so, your value or your perceived value at least increases with service” (Police, Constable, 7)*

This is exacerbated by a lack of support and recognition by Police Scotland of officers extra-curricular learning. As identified above in the areas of strength, where this is done, officers feel empowered and can see a positive impact on practice. However, the picture a lot of officers painted was that this is very rarely the case and dependent on individuals rather than values promoted by the organisation.

*“The risk of that is that if you’ve got a management string who don’t recognise or [...] the system and the process, it’s not engineered to say great young person, lots of skills, proven track record, three years let’s channel them to certain things” (Police, senior management 2)*

*“there’s police officers in general have a lot of skills because they bring skills from outside in and we don’t always channel that properly ... you know build on what you have you know there’s, there’s people that have got so much skill and it’s almost like it doesn’t matter because it is not been taught by the police so we can attempt to discount it or forget about it” (Police, frontline management 7)*

Officers often argue that they struggle to integrate their passion and motivation to learn into their roles and career development because the organisational culture focuses on personalities and experience rather than skills and knowledge. Additionally, officers state that knowledge, skills, and learning from before joining Police Scotland is rarely recognised by the organisation to empower officers and support their CPD. If Police Scotland wants to truly ensure the right people are in the right roles (Police Scotland, 2021), decisions should be based on officers' skills and knowledge relevant to the role no matter where these come from. Furthermore, this suggests that talent within the organisation is not used to its full potential, which can lead to a lack of job satisfaction leading to possible negative occupational behaviours (Paoline & Gau, 2020).

A more inclusive and transparent selection process is needed. Furthermore, when officers do fail a selection process, they need to learn how exactly they can improve, and mandatory development conversations should identify a clear path forward for the officer. As Taxman & Gordon (2009, p.695) confirm, this is important for employees to feel that opportunities are fairly distributed and there is a sense of procedural justice, that decisions made are based on fair and ethical procedures, this can be 'related to acceptance of change, stronger commitment to the organisation, and better understanding and agreement with organisational goals'. Additionally, perceptions of organisational justice can be linked to the extent to which Police Officers feel valued by their organisation (Jacobs et al., 2014). If Police Scotland wants to empower their workforce, identifying ways in which to increase transparency in selection processes and recognition of skill and talent is key. One first step is the recognition that not all learning comes from within the organisation.

*“we are often so focussed on the doing that we don't have time to do the thinking bit of it, and that recognition getting away from that culture and that arrogance of you've not been in the uniform for 25 years what do you know, getting away from that is only gonna be overcome both in time and by demonstrating the value of education of engaging with academia, research and all of that and taking on other ideas and being open and receptive to that rather than completely resistant to it which I think the organisation or at least individuals often are so” (Police, middle management 2)*

Officers feel that engagement with Higher Education both for development opportunities and improving practice is often tokenistic and half-hearted. Examples included officers being put on university courses for specialist roles with the view to improve practice but within a year or two into the course, the organisation has another priority area and is not supporting this course anymore. Leaving the officer on a course that they might enjoy but that is unlikely to be used in practice beyond what they can implement in their own role. Engagement with Higher Education needs to be structured and based on a long-term plan of implementation and embedding the learning. Officers who have initially been supported and have then been left to their own devices by the organisation increasingly lose faith in Police Scotland to promote meaningful learning and empower their staff.

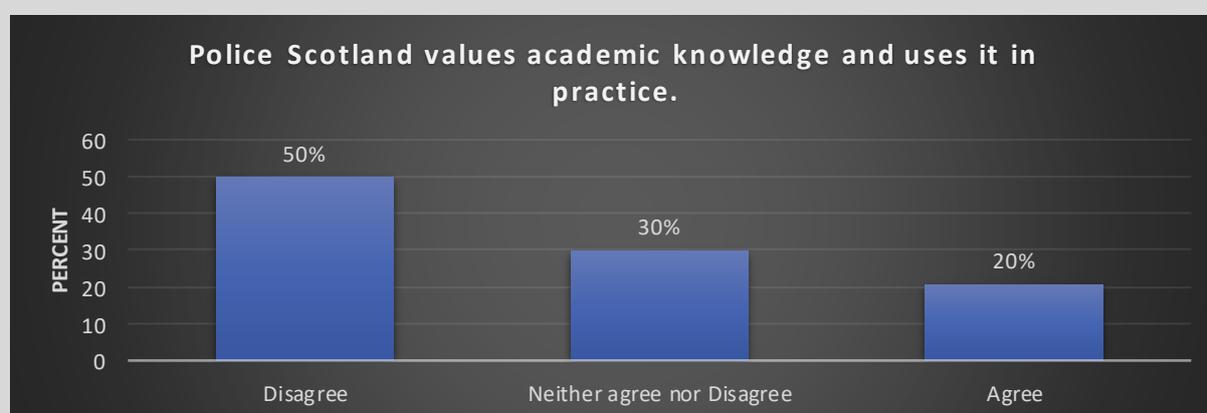


Figure 6: Survey responses to question 8.5: *To what degree do you agree with the following statement: Police Scotland values academic knowledge and uses it in practice.*

There is some disagreement to what extent Police Scotland engages with Higher Education (see figure 6) and to what degree they should engage with Higher Education. However, officers, partner agencies, and policing students agree that further engagement with higher education would largely

have a positive effect on Police Scotland. Survey respondents agree that specifically for areas that are not considered traditional policing topics, such as leadership development, cybercrime, IT, and business knowledge, higher education could be particularly important to fill skill gaps. This is done in some areas, but there is little in the way of clear structured long-term approaches to ensure that this learning is embedded and part of the organisation. A mapping exercise to identify current engagement with Higher Education and taking stock of what this engagement should look like in the future might be the first step in addressing these inconsistencies. However, this needs to come with an organisational culture shift that supports learning beyond operational need.

The wider organisational drive to support learning and development is often lacking as illustrated by these officers' experiences:

*"Everyone acknowledged it was great, gone nowhere and don't get me wrong I've not had the stuffing knocked out me [...] but you just you build and build and build these things and then you just get no buy in at all. We didn't come up with it at the top, they [Police Scotland] don't like bottom-up stuff at all, not that's challenging that's out with the norm, they say they do, they say all the right things"*  
(Police, middle management 6)

*"a lot of police officers especially promoted police officers get through their shift despite the organisation not because of it so just as much as we are the ones that when we're in partnership with a can-do organisation that takes all the actions and drives stuff through, is task orientated so in our day job [we do the same]"*  
(Police, senior management 7)

*"I've got someone [...] came to me looking to support for this (course), absolutely, not a problem, we put you on that and then I said do us a favour, can you go and engage with our early careers learning people [...] and they said no we're not supporting anybody. So, the individual never got the opportunity to go and I'm saying [...], look as a business I'm happy for him to be released in terms of time, as a business I've got an actual need for them to get this qualification and as a business I will give them projects to work on that align to that and it's because there's nae money and you can't go, which is bonkers. So the chap never went."* (Police, senior management 8)

There is a consensus amongst officers that when learning opportunities are developed and identified by officers, these are often not supported by the senior leadership team, leading to a loss of learning and loss of learning opportunities. At times this is due to resources, however, officers argue that this is often due to a lack of understanding of the need for these development opportunities, or a gap between the needs of the organisation and the needs of the officers. Increased communication is needed to improve this and ensure that where opportunities are not supported, there is transparency amongst the reasons why and the leadership team or line managers identify ways in which the training needs can be addressed differently in the future. Otherwise, officers who feel unsupported by the organisation have an increased sense of organisational injustice, which Charman & Bennett (2021) argued can lead to increased numbers of voluntary resignations in the future. Communication and a culture that promotes transparency and supports its officers are key to improve this situation.

*"I don't rely on the organisation to continue to develop me, there's a personal responsibility for your own development. I've landed in this role here, don't know much about [this area] [...] but I've enrolled myself on an online programme [...], there's colleagues in here that have been here for a while that haven't had that development, but they haven't also pushed their own personal development, so there's something about an organisational responsibility but there's also an obligation on an individual by pursuing their dreams and desires." (Police, senior management 8)*

*"Nobody encourages you; nobody says you know I think you could, nobody, it's a bit like the additional learning opportunities, if you don't put yourself forward generally unless you have a backer and [...] unless you find it and apply for it yourself nobody is gonna tell me about it" (Police, Constable 5)*

Police Officers often feel that the lack of organisational drive behind learning and development can be frustrating and disheartening. Many officers argue that you can engage with CPD but because it is not mandatory, you could also just work as a constable for 30 years and not engage in any further learning. This complacency in relation to CPD is dangerous as it prohibits innovation and continuous improvement of practice. If Police Scotland wants to develop a Police force and Police Officers that can address the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it needs to promote a learning culture that promotes and drives learning beyond mandatory CPD opportunities. As Lancaster (2019) states, the organisation should support the wider learning in people's lives to develop a commitment to lifelong learning. Therefore, annual development conversations should be mandatory to identify how officers can develop and who has responsibility in driving that development – the organisation or the officer. The current Police Scotland Workforce plan only suggests to 'promote the importance of development conversations' during the new mandatory 'my career' conversations, but development conversations should be at the centre of these sessions and as mandatory as the 'my career' conversation itself (Police Scotland, 2021). This would avoid the currently very mixed picture of support when asked if Police Officers feel motivated by the organisation to engage with ongoing training and education opportunities (see figure 7).

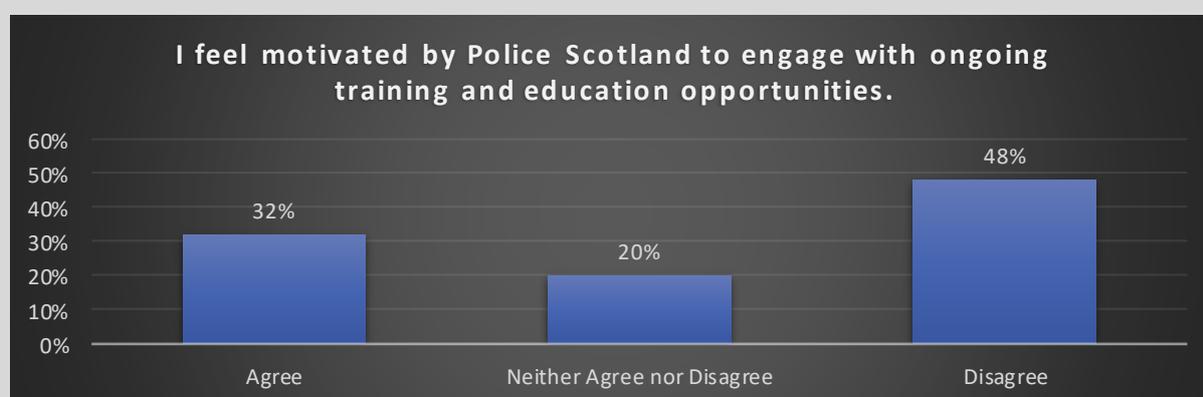


Figure 7: Survey Responses to question 7.5: Please indicate to what degree you agree with the following statement: I feel motivated by Police Scotland to engage with ongoing training and education opportunities.

Survey respondents mentioned several different reasons to engage with optional CPD opportunities, however, a majority (59.3%) of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that there are enough CPD opportunities available for their role.

*“In the past 5-10 years optional training has become scarce and it is very rare that officers have the chance to receive training unless it is role specific.” (Survey response 3)*

This reiterates the point made earlier that training and development opportunities are largely based on organisational need rather than officer needs, decreasing job satisfaction and limiting officer’s opportunities to develop themselves and more importantly their practice further. Officers indicate that the main reasons why they did not engage with available development opportunities were:

- Time Commitment
- Not the right courses offered
- Costs
- Lack of awareness of opportunities available
- Inability to get onto the Promotion Diploma
- Pressures of the job

Police Scotland cannot address all of these factors, however, the communication around CPD and the support and encouragement for officers to continuously engage with it should be at the centre of the new ‘My Career’ process. Through this, ways in which to address time and funding constraints could be discussed and ways in which to address them identified. Police Scotland has to take responsibility for their workforce and their development needs. This does not mean that they have to provide everything officers ask for, but they have to identify a more consistent and robust framework for leadership, training, and development as suggested by the HMICS (2020) inspection, that takes into account the importance of lifelong learning and engagement with CPD throughout one’s career. To be able to do this effectively, current barriers to management and leadership development must also be considered.

## Leadership and management

*“Yea it was for me personally there were still gaps and you just hope one of these gaps isn’t critical and label the risk in a time when there is no one else available to ask and that was alright.” (Police, senior management 7)*

*“There isn’t anything that I think properly prepares you to be a leader in the organisation and there’s nothing at chief inspector rank, there’s no course that I’m aware of that you can go on as a chief inspector” (Police, middle management 7)*

Officers in leadership positions often do not feel supported by the organisation to develop the skills and knowledge required to be a leader. In line with recent findings from the HMICS (2020) inspection on leadership development within Police Scotland, participants support claims that there are not enough leadership development opportunities. The literature on learning and development states that effective leadership is key to support workforce development and improve organisational practice (Garvin et al., 2008; Serrat, 2017; Weisburd & Neyroud, 2011). Additionally, as Garvin et al. (2008) argued, officers in leadership positions should act as role models as to how knowledge should be considered, shared, and appreciated. If they do not know how to effectively engage with learning

and development and are not supported to do so, how are lower-ranking officers supposed to learn and develop?

As the HMICS (2020, p.4) report states, officers might be well prepared to address critical operational incidents, although even this aspect sometimes presented as an area for improvement for some participants, they often ‘lack emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and strategic perspective’. This was supported by police officers in this study:

*“we’ve had a succession of people who’ve been successful but then get to Superintendent, Chief Superintendent [...] and we have promoted a range of people in these senior positions, who are not comfortable with emotional intelligence, who are not comfortable with understanding and working in difficult sets of circumstances, who don’t have the mental acuity to be able to do some of those things, so there’s been a bit of a, bit of a crisis in terms of leadership development” (Police, senior management 6)*

*“There are some who get to chief inspector having never been on that course and never having managed an incident like that, where’s the credibility there? And where is the organisational reassurance that that individual who’s now sitting in my role and you know god forbid, we get a plane crash today at Glasgow airport [...] if I’ve never done that course, and I’ve never done that role at a lower level seeds type incident [...] so the training is not compulsory, performance of that role is not compulsory” (Police, middle management 7)*

Officers across ranks and roles as well as partner agencies mention that some officers promoted into certain senior-level ranks appear unprepared or not ready for the responsibility they are given. Some officers mention a lack of training and development, whereas others talk about the previously mentioned culture that still focuses on promoting certain personalities over individuals with the skillset and knowledge to do well in the role. When it comes to leadership development all the barriers to learning identified in previous sections, are often concentrated even further, leading to overwhelmed officers, who feel unsupported by the organisation, increasingly having to engage with extra learning in their own time to be able to do their job.

Additionally, there is a need for appropriate, and relevant, leadership training before starting supervisory roles. In line with HMICS (2020) recommendations, training beyond technical abilities for leaders and managers needs to be provided as a matter of urgency. This study specifically found that it is especially people management skills that need to be developed, to enable officers to support the wellbeing and career development of their staff.

*“it’s the human side of things [...] when one of your team comes in and says can I have a word with you and you either waited to hear what personal nightmare they’re going through and then deciding how to best help that individual so no I’m not getting any training in that.”  
(Police, frontline management 5)*

*“People management stuff [...] especially in that looking after absence you know even conduct, no involvement in that before but all of a sudden I’m the head of that for the division with no training, none and never had any by the day I left” (Police, senior management 1)*

Without developing these skills there is no drive for officers to engage in further development and changes and improvements are unlikely to happen. Additionally, the lack of consistent provision of people management training and development, leads to inconsistent practices across the organisation, explaining how some officers have felt more supported than others. Line managers are considered the gatekeepers to learning and development, to identify it, and to engage with it. If Police Scotland does not provide an organisation-wide approach to the promotion and support of personal and professional development, there will be increasing numbers of officers feeling that their treatment was unjust and unfair and this can have adverse effects on their practice, wellbeing, and commitment to the organisation (Sarah Charman & Bennett, 2021).

## Emerging Implications

The emerging findings of this report provide insight into the perceptions of the current provision of learning and development within Police Scotland, while adding valuable views from partner agencies and policing students. I am conscious that with the new Police Scotland Workforce Plan and People Strategy there are several potentially positive changes being implemented imminently. However, Police Scotland should take note of the findings presented here to develop their strategies further in the future and ensure their officers' views are heard and acted upon. This will ensure that officers feel prepared to address the policing challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and more importantly feel supported by the organisation to do so, increasing their wellbeing, confidence, and competence. The emerging implications for Police Scotland from this study so far are summarised below:

### Mode of learning

- Online courses and power-point focused delivery of training focussed on how to pass the exam is increasingly receiving negative feedback from Police Officers. They often do not take any or only very little knowledge away from these courses.
- A 'one size fits all' approach to courses based on frontloading officers with information is not good enough to promote meaningful learning that can influence practice. Courses need to be learner-led and encourage discussion to embed understanding and develop shared values.
- As Lancaster (2019) stated, the 21<sup>st</sup>-century police officer does not only learn in the classroom or *on the beat* but needs to know how to take part in self-directed learning and reflection. Police Scotland needs to build the foundation for this by engaging with their officers and providing diverse opportunities to learn, while supporting officers to learn *how to learn* and reflect.
- Higher Education is often considered one of the key institutions to promote self-directed learning (Dominey & Hill, 2010), and therefore, further involvement with Higher Education when developing more meaningful learning activities could be beneficial.
- The relationship between Police and Higher Education needs to be clearer and more structured to avoid half-hearted attempts of engagement that can leave officers to lose faith in Police Scotland and not wanting to engage further with CPD opportunities.

## **Recognition of learning**

- The literature suggests that to develop a learning organisation there needs to be an appreciation of diversity of thought (Garvin et al., 2008) and as Herrington (2021) argued learning from others is key, both from within and outside of the organisation.
- A heavy focus on experiential learning and lack of interest and recognition of learning from other sources develops a culture that does not promote psychological safety but inhibits it. Leading to officers not feeling encouraged to share their views if it does not conform to Police Scotland's traditional culture and values. Restricting the knowledge and skill utilised by Police Scotland can limit the ability to work effectively in partnership with others and discourage innovation and change.
- Therefore, learning acquired outside of the policing environment should be recognised and used by the organisation. This can help fill skill gaps in the organisation, while also empowering officers. The new 'My Career' process should therefore encourage officers to reflect beyond operational experience and not only within the competency and values framework.

## **Transitions**

- Police Officers and partner agencies discuss a lack of role preparation and long transition periods when moving roles. This is often due to a lack of timely training, lack of handovers, and lack of succession planning.
- Officers need to be prepared for moving roles and provided with timely training and development that addresses training gaps before they emerge.
- The new 'My Career' development conversations could be the first step in identifying where and when officers might move, to develop clearer succession plans.
- To avoid extended transition periods when officers start new roles, Police Scotland has to provide more time and space for effective handovers between officers and a record of key activities and projects that should be continued in the new role.
- The current competency and values framework is a good first step to set out behaviours and values that the organisation wants to promote, but officers have often added additional aspects to the role that are worth continuing. To ensure that knowledge and projects stay in that part of the organisation, rather than with the officer, there should be handover templates that let current officers discuss what the role entails and what they have been working on and why. These should be developed throughout the officers' time in their role, to avoid missing out on important information if there is no time for an elaborate handover. This could improve partnership working and consistency for officers in their team, as well as organisational memory.

## **Leadership development and People Management**

- Senior-level officers echoed a lot of what the HMICS (2020) inspections had found. There is a lack of leadership development and there needs to be a review of the resources allocated to develop a leadership, training, and development framework.
- Officers' experiences of learning and development differ significantly dependent on the line managers they have. Many line and senior management officers feel ill-prepared to support the wellbeing and development of officers in their teams.

- As the Gatekeepers to many development opportunities, people management skills have to be developed as a matter of urgency for all line management and senior management officers. Officers need to learn how to develop and support their staff effectively to influence top-down change (Whatne, 2011). This will address the current mixed picture of support for staff development and avoid feelings of organisational injustice which the literature suggests can lead to early voluntary resignation (Charman & Bennet, 2021).
- Development conversations should be mandatory, and at least annually, to identify what the organisation can do and what the officer should do to develop personally and professionally. The suggested performance reviews by the 'My Career' conversations are not enough to identify and actively encourage development.

### **Police Culture**

- Officers identified a lack of organisational drive behind development and learning within Police Scotland. This can lead to increased pressures on individual officers to identify and engage with learning outside of the organisation to improve their practice. Often with little support from the organisation
- A lack of a positive culture around learning and development beyond experiential learning and the perceived inward-looking nature of the organisation is felt by both officers and partner agencies. This leads to a culture that discourages officers coming forward about their development needs if these are not operational, even though they could improve policing practice.
- To commit to the concept of the learning organisation Police Scotland needs to develop a learning culture (Senge, 1990). This needs to be driven from the top-down and the bottom-up and encourage communication across the organisation to identify what modes of learning are most beneficial and what officer needs are.
- Police Scotland has to take responsibility for driving development of its staff not only by providing more information and access to courses, but actively encouraging officers to engage. They should share responsibility for professional development and empower officers by guiding them in the right direction. A learning culture should be developed at Probationer level and officers should be advised what they can expect from the organisation and what the organisation expects from them to develop this culture. Clear communication from the start is key and this needs to be followed through by tutor constables, line managers, and senior managers.

## Concluding remarks

Findings presented in this report are only preliminary and it is anticipated that the Ph.D. thesis and or a summary of it will be shared with Police Scotland towards the end of 2021. Nevertheless, these initial findings present current good practice as well as areas for improvement. It illustrates that officers and partner agencies agree that in some areas Police Scotland is moving in the right direction to become a learning organisation. However, and more importantly, it offers critical views of the different participant groups around leadership development, specifically people management skills, a lack of organisational drive and support for CPD, and a lack of empowering the workforce through recognition of diversity of skill and knowledge beyond operational experience.

Findings so far suggest that there needs to be more agreement and clear communication from the top-down about what learning means to the organisation and an understanding that current and future police officers might lose faith in the organisation if meaningful learning is not promoted and supported consistently throughout the organisation. After the year 2020, where a lot of learning and development had to be put on hold due to the coronavirus pandemic, it is more important now than ever to take a step back and decide how learning and development might be used and promoted in the future to develop police officers and the police organisation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As mentioned previously, further evaluation of these findings is currently in progress and for a final report of the findings of this study, please consult the final thesis once published in the Edinburgh Napier University Repository. If you would like further information on any of the themes discussed here or the project in general, please contact: Larissa Engelmann ([l.engelmann@napier.ac.uk](mailto:l.engelmann@napier.ac.uk))

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