

## **Abstract**

This paper argues that, as the Scottish Prison Service moves towards professionalisation, the ‘ethical’ component of an officer’s work increases in importance, and that learning in the ‘affective domain’ (that which addresses values, attitudes, and behaviours) should be more central to officer training. This paper will draw on preliminary findings from research which examines prison officer recruits and how they learn through training and early operational experience. The role of a prison officer, and the importance of attending to their values and attitudes in the context of a role which relies fundamentally on the exercise of judgement and the ability to care, will be discussed. Prison officer induction training will be outlined, in particular, the extent to which it allows officers to learn attitudes, beliefs and values, alongside knowledge and skills. Data from focus groups with prison officer recruits during their training revealed elements of learning which develops beliefs and values, though the majority of the training remained focused on the development of knowledge and skills. This paper concludes by suggesting ways affective learning could be better supported in officer induction training.

## **Keywords**

Professionalism; values; affective (learning); Scottish Prison Service; prison officer

# Professionalism and affective learning for new prison officers

## Learning values, attitudes and behaviours in training at the Scottish Prison Service

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### Introduction

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Howard Bloom and his colleagues identified different ‘domains’ of learning in the mid-20th century, which relate broadly to ‘knowledge’ (the cognitive domain), ‘beliefs’ (the affective domain) and ‘skills’ (the psychomotor domain) (Bloom et al., 1956). Different programmes of learning may require a different balance between these three domains, and many work-based learning programmes in particular will require the need for knowledge and beliefs to be *demonstrated* through skills (Helyer, 2016). This chapter will highlight the importance of learning relating to the ‘affective domain’ for the training of new prison officer recruits to the Scottish Prison Service (SPS), by drawing on preliminary data from research which seeks to understand recruits in greater detail. This chapter asks:

- Why is learning appropriate professional values important to the role of the role of the prison officer?
- How can values be learnt in the ‘affective domain’?
- How are values taught to SPS officer recruits in their induction training?
- How successful is SPS induction training at developing appropriate professional values?

This chapter is framed within a changing landscape of professional practice at the SPS.

Following the publication of the Organisational Review in 2013, it is now recognised that staff must have the right knowledge, understanding and skills so that they too can support the positive change of those in custody (SPS, 2013). Since then, reforms aimed at professionalising the service are underway in order to create 'a degree of skill and professionalism that has not before existed in the prison setting' (SPS, 2016: 1). There is no ‘one’ definition of professionalism (Whitecross, 2017), but two key aspects of ‘professional practice’ are the ability to make ‘complex decisions’ drawing on ‘technical knowledge, skills and informed judgement’ (Sullivan, 2005), and adherence to an ethical code, which can be enshrined in a (regulated) code of practice (Whitecross, 2016).

This chapter is based on officers working at the SPS, which is considerably smaller in scale than the Prison Service in England and Wales, employing just over 4,500 staff across Scotland. There are 15 prisons in Scotland, two of which are privately operated. It should be noted that although there are similarities between a Scottish prison officer and their counterpart in England and Wales, in recent years the SPS has taken a new trajectory under its most recent Chief Executive (McAra, 2017; Morrison and Sparks, 2015). A central strand of these changes is reforming the role of the prison officer, as outlined earlier. Therefore, although there will be

reference in this chapter to the literature based on prisons in England and Wales, this is primarily because there a great sparsity in the academic literature on Scottish prison officers, and there are many similarities in terms of the historic status of the profession, tendency to attract staff from military backgrounds and professional cultures, as described later.

Prison officers in Scotland are initially employed as Operation Officers, whose job is orientated more towards managing the security of a prison, though they do engage with people in custody. Tasks include, for example, controlling security (cameras and internal doors), patrolling the perimeter and checking vehicles on entry and exit, but also include escorting people in custody within the prison, working on reception (which processes people when arriving and leaving custody), monitoring visits and being on duty in prison halls during nightshift. All prison officers will begin in an Operations Officer role when employed by the SPS. After a number of years, they may then become promoted to a Residential Officer, whose role involves more intensive interaction with those in custody, working on the halls and acting as a Personal Officer to people in custody (see [SPS, 2017a](#)). Qualification requirements to be a prison officer are minimal (Five National 5 Qualifications including Maths and English, or equivalent qualifications or relevant people facing experience), though candidates must pass a basic numeracy and literacy assessment as part of their recruitment. The current operational workforce (those whose roles involve interacting directly with people in custody) are 25% female and 75% male, though current recruitment is nearly 50/50. Prison officers are very loyal to the service and many remain employed for the duration of their professional careers. This reflects the age profile of operational staff, the largest group of which is 56–60.

Everyone employed by the SPS is expected to behave in role according to the SPS organisational values. These are: *belief* that people can change; *respect* for individuals, their

needs and their human rights; *integrity* in the application of high ethical, moral and professional standards; *openness* when working with others to achieve the best outcomes; *courage* to care regardless of circumstances; and *humility* that we cannot do this on our own, we recognise we can learn from others (see [SPS, 2017b](#)).

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## Literature review

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Two areas of literature will contextualise this chapter's research questions: first, that which examines the role of a prison officer in greater detail, and which highlights the importance of appropriate values through which professional behaviours occur; and second, learning in the 'affective domain', which highlights the importance of learning which develops beliefs and values, and discusses ways in which this can occur well.

### The role of a prison officer

The role of the prison officer is one which has traditionally held a low status, perhaps due in part to its low visibility ([Liebling et al., 2010](#)), its relatively low entry requirements, and its low pay, certainly at entry level. However, closer examination of officers' work when carried out well reveals it to require a high degree of skill and expertise, even if not evident to an onlooker and perhaps even taken for granted by the officer. As Hay and Sparks observed: 'Like a footballer, who can score a wonderful goal but not really describe how he did it, prison officers sometimes exercise social skills of such great refinement and complexity without dwelling upon or understanding what they are doing' ([1991](#): 1). Officers perform tasks underpinned by conflicting

rationales in a demanding environment with some of the most vulnerable and challenging individuals in our society. Officers are required to monitor risk and security and to maintain order, whilst at the same time empathising, supporting, building hope and demonstrating personal resilience (Crawley, 2004; Bennett et al., 2008; Liebling et al., 2010). Reforms currently underway in the SPS mean that in the future prison officers are expected to play a central role in helping to ‘unlock the potential’ of those in custody, by taking a greater role as ‘counsellors, role models, coaches and advocates of the people in their care’ (SPS, 2016), as well as the more traditional focus on security and order.

The skills required for the job are various, but some of the most important are interpersonal and communication skills. If officers possess these they will be able to harness relationships and deal with conflict before it escalates. Along with interpersonal skills, two other noteworthy skills are required for the role. The first is the use of discretion, which is carried out according to an understood set of moral principles (Liebling et al., 2010). If officers do this well, they are regarded by staff and people in custody as operating with ‘personal legitimacy’, the natural authority which is earned and then exercised in order to secure order, compliance and co-operation (Crawley, 2004; Liebling, 2011). Discretion, of course, is personal, subjective and usually acted on in the moment, it will be influenced very strongly by the values and sentiments of the individual taking decisions. As Liebling argues, prison officers must therefore require and demonstrate the ‘appropriate *attitudes* as well as conduct’ (2011: 486) [my italics].

Secondly, officers must have the ability to care in an emotive professional arena, whilst managing any conflict with personal and emotional responses to crimes committed (Tait, 2008). However, caring and supporting must also be balanced with the ability to perform the job with confidence, experience and knowledge, resulting in a feeling of safety and security within

prisons, defined by Liebling and Crewe as ‘basic professionalism’ (2017: 897). The ability to demonstrate compassion and care, alongside the maintenance of appropriate boundaries and rules, is what distinguishes a ‘good’ officer from any other (Crewe and Liebling, 2017; Tait, 2011).

The enclosed working environment, in such close proximity to people in custody, means officers are in many ways living with people in their care. In this context, the ability to feign a set of values which do not truly mirror one’s own will be challenging. Officers will perform best when they are authentic and professional, and they work through the ‘grain of [their] own personality’ (Liebling et al., 2010, p. 60). Though there may be specific skills required for different regimes or different populations in custody, values of honesty, integrity and truth are vital for all officers (Liebling et al., 2010, p. 60).

To summarise, the role of a prison officer is complex and often demanding. Along with interpersonal and communication skills, it requires a wise use of discretion and the ability to care in the contested emotional arena of crime and punishment. The proximity of officers to people in custody, and the insularity and intensity of the working environment, means that it becomes very difficult to act according to a set of values which are not one’s own. Officers perform their role best when the (professional) relationships they form with people in custody are built upon a genuine reflection of who they are.

Training for prison officers should therefore seek to develop the beliefs and values required for this complex role, alongside the knowledge and skills more traditionally associated with it.

## **Affective learning**

People learn in many ways in informal and informal learning environments. Though people may think of school and universities as places in which people learn facts, concepts and theory, in fact they are also learning physical skills (how to mix acids in a science experiment for example), and also developing a range of attitudes and emotions (for example, a belief in the importance of human rights, a horror of wars and atrocities, or an appreciation for art and music). These different areas of knowledge have been conceptualised as the three 'domains' of learning: the 'cognitive domain' relates to 'knowledge', the 'psychomotor domain' relates to manual or physical 'skills', and finally the 'affective' domain related to 'feelings, emotions, attitudes' (Bloom et al., 1956), though it is recognised that these domains will grow in tandem and feed into each other.

As in the cognitive domain where learning could be understood as growing from a simple level of 'knowledge', to an advanced level of 'evaluation' (Bloom et al., 1956), so too Bloom and his colleagues organised the affective domain in a hierarchy from a simple to a more advanced level of learning. As with the cognitive domain, where the hierarchy increases according to the internalisation, application and synthesis of knowledge, so too in the affective domain, growth in learning on feelings and attitudes grows from a beginning level of an *awareness* of values, to a higher level in which a value system becomes a fully *integrated* outlook, belief system and pattern of behaviours. It is recognised that this stage may take a period of time beyond the scope of a single programme of study, as Reeves argues, 'it takes maturity to find lasting answers to questions such as: Who am I, and What do I stand for?' (1990: 615). Learning in the affective domain does not replace, or take priority over, cognitive learning; these domains should occur in tandem and feed into each other. It is through the



synthesis and evaluation of knowledge and understanding that values and beliefs develop, are contextualised, and can be demonstrated in *behaviours*.

There are a number of reasons why the affective domain may have been so neglected in the design and delivery of learning in relation to its cognitive partner. Firstly, its goals are (or can be at the higher levels), much more long-term than those in the cognitive domain (Hauenstein, 1998: 59). Secondly, they are certainly more difficult to measure (Cate and De Haes, 2000). Thirdly, and finally, in a world of social pluralism in which we live within a multiplicity of belief systems (Reeves, 1990), insisting on a particular set of internal values (and potentially issuing grades on this basis), can render the accusation of policing ‘freedom of thought’ rather than focusing on the ‘performance in role’ (Cate and De Haes, 2000: 40). As argued earlier, however, beliefs, values and attitudes profoundly affect performance in roles (Neuman and Forsyth, 2008); thus the need to include this aspect of learning in curriculum design must remain despite the resistance it may face.

Affective learning has latterly grown in importance in the field of professional learning. This is linked closely to emerging concerns with professionalism and professional standards in a number of sectors and the consequential focus to prioritise matters of ethical conduct within professional learning once again (see, for example, Creuss and Creuss, 2006 for medicine, and Whitecross, 2017 for law).

Including professional values in formal learning experiences can be challenging and may not be as enduring as learning informally from role-models or through communities of practice; professional values are often ‘caught, not taught’ (Van Valkenburg and Holden, cited in Neuman and Forsyth, 2008: 248). Nonetheless, formal learning experiences are easier to control, and should be an essential starting point. Including beliefs and values in curriculum design and

delivery requires different approaches than those in the cognitive domain. The literature suggests different ways in which affective learning can be supported in professional learning.

First, framing learning around a set of organisational values or mission can direct learning design and delivery (Neuman and Forsyth, 2008). Secondly, focusing on professional *behaviours* as an articulation of a set of beliefs and values addresses the concerns that affective learning and assessment is policing ‘freedom of thought’ (Cate and De Haes, 2000). Third, that although teaching values in professional settings can occur as stand-alone topics, they should also be woven throughout the whole curriculum (Creuss and Creuss, 2006). Fourth, affective learning occurs best when active (rather than passive) learning activities are deployed, and when professional values and personal values are related and integrated (Neuman and Forsyth, 2008). Fifth, experiential learning (structured periods of learning in the workplace), and reflecting on (and in) action (Schon, 1987) will support affective learning. Learning activities involving reflection are key to learning in the affective domain (Neuman and Forsyth, 2008; Creuss and Creuss, 2006), because any reorganisation of personal values requires self-awareness, the ability to connect ideas to practice, and an openness to reconfiguring future action as a result of a revised outlook. Sixth, assessment strategies should include an affective learning focus. What is important is what has been *learnt*, not what has been *taught* (Creuss and Creuss, 2006) and, as the axiom states, ‘assessment drives the learning’ (Wood, 2009). Assessment strategies are therefore a key means of assuring affective learning has occurred and of supporting this process. Furthermore, assessing learning on values and attitudes gives this subject ‘weight’ in relation to its cognitive counterparts, even though these areas are undoubtedly more problematic to assess than cognitive learning (Cate and De Haes, 2000). This may be because of the ‘how’ question (Self-report? Peer observation of professional behaviour?), but also a residual discomfort with

assessing how people *feel* about an issue, even if their professional behaviours seem, at the moment of assessment, to be adequate (Cate and De Haes, 2000).

The literature therefore suggests that the training for prison officers should attend to aspects of learning which can develop attitudes and the appropriate moral underpinning to be able to use discretion well, and to be able to care even in the most contested emotional arena. Learning which develops these skills will occur in the affective domain which focuses on feelings, emotions and attitudes (Bloom et al., 1956). Affective learning can be enabled by framing learning around a set of organisational values, assessing professional behaviours through which attitudes and values are expressed, weaving values throughout the entire curriculum, deploying active and experiential learning approaches which also promote reflection, and finally, by including affective learning measurements in assessment strategies.

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## Methodology

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This chapter focuses on how prison officer induction training at the SPS teaches in the affective domain by developing feelings, emotions, attitudes and values. Data comes from a research project examining how new officer recruits learnt and developed during training and early operational experience. Approval for this research was granted by the Scottish Prison Service Research Access and Ethics Committee in spring 2017.

The number of officers recruited to the service varies year by year, but has averaged around 140 per year, staggered in cohorts of an average size of 35. This research focused on a single cohort of recruits, chosen at a random point in the year, totalling 31. Because the sample size is small, the results are not intended to be statistically significant, and it is likely there will

be some small variation across different cohorts of recruits joining at other times of the year. However, this group were not felt by the SPS to be atypical, and their selection process mirrored that of other cohorts of recruits to the service.

Data for this chapter come firstly from curriculum analysis of the Officer Foundation Programme (OFP) induction training, which outlines the content of training and its teaching methodologies. Empirical data for this chapter are drawn from focus groups with recruits at the outset of their training (Phase 1) and the conclusion of their training six weeks later (Phase 2). Participation in this research was voluntary, a point emphasised to recruits in information sheets and consent forms, and verbally by the researcher. However, the author is mindful of the fact that she was also an employee of the service at the time of the research, and that recruits may have felt a degree of pressure to take part, not least as they were eager to make a good impression at the beginning of their career with the service. Therefore, although every care was taken to avoid coercion, the status of the participants and of the researcher mean that true informed consent may have been compromised. For the same reasons, participants may also have felt constrained in their ability to be completely free in opinions provided during focus groups. Despite all assurances provided around confidentiality and anonymity, it is likely that their status as newly employed prison officers at the beginning of their career, and the researcher's position as an employee of the service, may have compromised the extent to which they felt free to be completely free to voice their opinions in this forum.

The same officers participated in Phases 1 and 2, enabling a reflection of their learning throughout their training. Phases 1 and 2 each had four separate focus groups held concurrently over one afternoon, with between six to eight officers in each. Out of a total cohort size of 31, 30 officers participated in focus groups in Phase 1 and 29 participated in Phase 2. There were 18

males and 12 females in the first round of focus groups and 18 males and 11 females in the second round of focus groups. Questions during focus groups in Phase 1 examined their motivations for joining the service, their expectations of the role and of their training, and their experiences in their first week's visit to the prison environment (which occurs prior to starting at the SPS College). Questions during Phase 2 focus groups examined their experiences of learning during training and their perceptions and beliefs relating to prisons, crime and people in custody. Please see the Appendix for an outline of focus group questioning schedules.

Focus groups were transcribed and all participants were anonymised in this process. Data were analysed using qualitative analysis software which allowed key themes to be identified. Because data was qualitative and arose from a small and non-representative sample, the findings do not identify prevalence and are not intended to represent all recruits to the service. Themes identified in the findings section of the chapter therefore represent commonly occurring themes in focus groups during Phases 1 and 2.

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## **Findings**

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This section will discuss how prison officer recruits learn feelings, emotions, attitudes and values in their induction training, the OFP. It will begin by outlining the course content and teaching methods, before discussing data from recruits at the beginning and conclusion of their training.

### **The Officer Foundation Training Programme: curriculum analysis**

The OFP is the mandatory training for all new prison officers who join the service as Operations Officers. As discussed earlier, the Operations Officers' role is orientated to a greater extent towards the security aspects of working within prisons than the promoted Residential Officer role, which is based to a greater degree on working and engaging with men and women in custody. Nonetheless, there are two key reasons why induction training should also attend to the development of their attitudes, beliefs and values required for working with people in custody. First, Operations Officers do hold positions of influence and support with people in custody in their role, for example during night shifts, monitoring visits, escorting people throughout the prison, and processing upon arrival and release. Second, the OFP training is in many ways the most important training that officers will take part in during their professional careers: it is mandatory (much other training is optional); it is the longest training they will receive from the service; and it comes at the beginning of their service, thereby setting the tone and establishing expectations for the rest of their professional lives. It is therefore important that their induction training equips them with the correct value based required to work in the service *in any role*, alongside knowledge about the security focused more process driven competencies required to be an Operations Officer.

The OFP begins with a relatively informal orientation week within the prison environment and is followed by a six-week training course, with an optional seventh week for those working with specific populations in custody. The majority of the six-week training takes place in the SPS College, though there is also learning in a simulated prison environment, and recently some learning in live operational environments has also been introduced (on the topic of 'searching' for example). The OFP contributes towards the the Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) in Custodial Care, which recruits must complete in their first two years in post.

The OFP faces the difficult task of balancing on one hand the need for assurance regarding competency on key security related tasks in adherence with policy and legislation, with on the other hand learning which may be more theoretically informed and perceived as less important for operational assurance attuned to safety and risk. This is reflected in the schedule of the OFP, which, over the six-week timetable, focuses to a large degree on the tasks and skills required for the operational aspects of the role. These include a full week of Control and Restraint (C&R) (how to de-escalate conflict and legally restrain someone in a violent situation) and sessions on tasks such as operating radios, controlling internal and external security, searching people in custody, cell searching, and how to write reports. A minority of sessions within the OFP focus on learning which could be considered as primarily focused on learning in the affective domain. These include the first two days of the training which focus on ‘understanding the organisation’, including a discussion on organisational values, a day focused on equality and diversity, a session on ‘desistance’ (the theoretical framework which explains how people stop offending, a key part of which is based around the working through relationships and building hope and belief in change) and a half-day session on reflective practice. Organisational values are therefore addressed as stand-alone topics, and attempts are also made to embed these into other topics throughout the training: for example, how to search an individual with dignity and respect, whilst also maintaining custodial security within the parameters of policy and legislation.

The SPS College is seeking to incorporate more ‘active learning’ methodologies and to move away from an overreliance on overhead presentations. Sessions addressing domains of affective learning are especially suited to this. For example, in a session on values and reflective practice, the recruits are asked to compare cultural values, organisational values and their own

personal values, and discuss how potential conflicts between these are managed and resolved. In the session on ‘desistance’, they take part in a ‘Socratic circle’ in which they are required to discuss how they feel about whether individuals in custody can change in different contexts. Some learning exercises ask the recruits to argue a point from an opposing point of view they themselves hold: for example, whether people in custody should have the right to smoke, or the right to vote, or to compare a professional response to a situation (for example, working with a child sex offender when one is a parent), from the perspective of an officer, a senior manager or from an HR manager.

Nonetheless, the majority of the OFP is focused on developing competencies in the tasks and processes required to provide operational assurances for the role. There remain sessions which rely on learning via overheads or e-learning, or through learning skills such as how to operate an X-ray machine, or how to search a cell. It is also notable that the only summative assessments on the OFP are ‘control and restraint’ and ‘escorting’ people in custody, because they form part of the SVQ in Custodial Care. The rest of the OFP is not assessed, although there are a number of reviews based on the ‘behavioural competency framework’ (BCF) (SPS, 2017c). In these reviews, the recruits are graded according to a number of behaviours, though it is notable that these were written before the refreshed Mission and Values of the Service and are not aligned to them. The BCF does include one single reference to values: ‘you understand the vision of SPS – you understand how your job supports and delivers correctional excellence (and you demonstrate this in line with the values of the organisation)’. However, overall the BCF is heavily skewed towards other behaviours, including business delivery, communication and developing the organisation (SPS, 2017c). Furthermore, no recruit has failed these reviews,



though several have been given some additional time before they may have a second attempt. They are thus formative, not summative, and not aligned explicitly with the values of the service.

To summarise, the key role of the OFP is to provide the operational assurances required to perform the role of an Operations Officer and is therefore heavily skewed towards ensuring officers complete the training knowing how to perform security focused tasks in line with legislative and policy requirements. There are a minority of sessions within the training which address learning more aligned with the affective domain, and there is an attempt to ensure that *all* learning within the OFP remains aligned with the values of the service, although these often do not rely on active learning methods and they are not summative assessed.

## **Affective learning in the Officer Foundation**

### **Programme: recruit experiences**

The following section of the chapter draws on focus groups with recruits at the outset (Phase 1) and conclusion (Phase 2) of the OFP training (see the Appendix for focus group questionnaire schedules).

### **Outset of training: Phase 1**

When recruits arrived at the SPS College for the beginning of the OFP, they had already had one week's informal orientation in their establishment in which they would return to work on completion of training. This week helped to orientate many of them to a custodial environment, which was useful given that many of them had not been inside a prison before. One recurring

theme in all focus groups when recounting this week's visit was a surprise at how calm and friendly the prison environment was and how good the relationships were between officers and people in custody. As recruits put it:

I was expecting like bars everywhere and prisoners just locked up and – yeah, one of that. I expected it to be a dreary place but it just wasn't. . . .

Yeah, marching, queues to and from lunch.

I was surprised at the relationship the Officers and the prisoners had, that was the main thing that I – well, I couldn't really believe it, that it was that informal and, sort of, not friendly but not antagonistic, which is what I thought it would be. . . .

I mean, you don't forget they're a prisoner but you expect them to hate you straight off the bat, if you've got a white shirt on that's it, don't want to speak to you – but they're happy to converse and tell you about their day, tell you what they've done.

The recruits had therefore chosen to become prison officers with an expectation of working in a combative and adversarial professional environment in which there is more hostility between people in custody and prison staff than is the case in the SPS in 2017. This therefore underlines the need for prison officer training to emphasise the relational aspects to the role, as well as the more security-focused elements they were anticipating.

Despite the fact that many of them were surprised by how positive the relationships between officers and people in custody were, when asked what the most anticipated aspect of training was, the most frequent response in all Phase 1 focus groups was C&R, the week-long

training in de-escalating conflict and the legal use of force against people in custody in violent situations. As one of the recruits put it when asked what part of training they were looking forwards to the most, they said: 'Control and restraint, everyone's looking forward to that, let's be honest'. This seemed to relate to the fact that C&R was a physical learning experience (in opposition to the Microsoft PowerPoint-heavy sessions they were expecting for the rest of their training), and the fact that many of them felt a genuine trepidation about safety in a custodial environment. It also suggested a misunderstanding of the nature of the prison officer role, which is not orientated primarily around conflict with people in custody as many of them seemed to expect. The fact that C&R was the most anticipated part of training underlines the need to focus on affective aspects of learning which develop the more care orientated aspects of the job in line with the values of the service.

Many of the recruits voiced trepidation of learning prior to starting their training, for many this was because they had not enjoyed formal education at school, compounded by the fact that school was some time in the past now.

I think it's just the unknown. I generally just thought it was going to be, like, test after test after test and I left school a long, long time ago and I've not done tests and things so I was a wee bit worried about that.

However, their attitude towards learning was not helped by their first week's visits in prisons, in which they encountered many negative views of formal learning and training (particularly amongst the longer serving staff). Furthermore, that some recruits held a Higher Education qualification was not held with much value by these staff in the prison environment. As one recruit put it:

The longer a serviceman's been in the worse the story is. It seems to be anybody who has been in less than 10 years will tell you it's a fine place, College is good, been in more than 10 years they'll tell you it's the worst place on earth.

I think as well it had something to do with the fact that most of [the prison officers] did their training on the job when they started. . . . It's like most people, when you get a situation with folk have been to Uni and folk who haven't and it's like, [sarcastic voice] 'aw you went to Uni' type situation.

During their orientation week prior to starting at the SPS College, many of the recruits had been told by existing staff to approach the OPF by, as one recruit put it: 'getting your head down and getting it done' without engaging with the training, but just doing enough to complete it, and that the 'real learning would happen on the job'. Although there was also enthusiasm for learning from others throughout the prison estate, for many others, training at the College clearly remains regarded as a 'tick box' exercise by many, something that you need to 'get through' without engaging with or of learning adding value to your work. The attitude towards learning held by staff throughout the SPS (particularly the longer-serving officers) matters for new recruits' learning because there are two week-long blocks of the OFP which take place in the prisons setting (the orientation week at the start and some periods of learning in operational environments).

Focus groups with recruits at the beginning of their training therefore underlined the need for affective learning to occur during the OFP. That a number of recruits had chosen to become prison officers with the understanding that they would be working in a hostile environment in which conflict with people in custody and violence were the norm suggests the need for a far greater understanding of the aspects of role relating to relationships, care and support, in the

recruits. The context in which this needs to occur, however, is one in which there was significant trepidation about learning from some recruits, and an organisational culture which could be dismissive of the value of formal learning and qualifications, and of training at the College.

## **Conclusion of training: Phase 2**

As argued earlier, the OFP attempts to balance the requirement to provide organisational assurance on competencies on key security-related tasks required to operate safely and in line with legislative and policy requirements with learning which may be more aligned with theoretical and value-focused topics. Nonetheless, the OFP does support the development of learning in the affective domain, which is so imperative for prison officers who must work according to the organisational values. Though caution must be taken over what is achievable over a six-week training course based primarily in a classroom setting, recruits did recount learning which seemed to have begun to evolve from a simple level of ‘awareness’ of beliefs and attitudes required for the role, towards becoming a more ‘integrated’ outlook, as Bloom and his colleagues articulated ([Krathwohl et al., 1956](#)). Although the expectation that a fully integrated change in beliefs, attitudes and behaviours could occur within a short period of time is unrealistic ([Reeves, 1990](#)), many of the recruits did nonetheless feel as though training had changed their beliefs around being a prison officer and about people in custody during this period.

The most discussed aspect of this in all focus groups was the value of learning about desistance and the importance of working through relationships with those in custody. As recruits articulated:

I think probably coming into the job you're just expecting . . . security, watching the people in custody, moving the people in custody, front of house and things . . . but when you come into it and you start week one . . . and then you find out it's all based on building relationships. It's quite different probably from what you would think.

Yeah, that was definitely the biggest change in expectation for me was the fact that you spend so much more time building relationships, I thought it was all just about watching the all the time and staying vigilant and keeping an eye on everything constantly, aye definitely. Seeing that, you know, the more experienced Officers they're in building relationships with some of the guys, it's definitely a lot different than I thought.

Things on the course like the Desistance, it never even occurred to me that as an Operations Officer you have that role to play where you would – I know it's not a direct thing, you're going to do the Desistance in the classroom, but just chatting to folk that's the only thing for me that sort of stuck out [during training].

This made the recruits generally feel more positive about their role and about working with people in custody, as another recruit commented:

I think it makes [my expectation about the job] better because I think it gives you more of a purpose for being there, rather than just, you know being watching over the security of prison, it gives you more of a purpose and more of an opportunity to actually help some of the people that are in the prison.

The nature of focus groups means it is difficult to assess if all participants felt the same way, but the part of training which was referred to most positively by the greatest number of participants related to learning about desistance and the role that they had supporting this for people held in custody. Learning about desistance in the OFP occurred with a Socratic circle learning exercise which asked recruits to discuss and relate how they felt about the topic in a safe and supportive learning environment, an active learning approach which necessitates engagement with the topic on a personal as well as professional level.

Learning throughout the OFP also enabled the recruits to begin seeing the people in custody as people, rather than 'prisoners'.

I do see them as being different now, do you know what I mean, like, when I first walked in the prison for our first week, I was kind of like, 'whoa, like, what are these guys capable of', kind of thing but now it's like, they are just people and, like, in terms of they've made shitty choices or whatever.

Nonetheless, some recruits retained the separation between 'the person' and 'the crime'.

The people themselves my opinion's changed, but what they've done, it doesn't – do you know what I mean, yeah they might have had a terrible upbringing and stuff but what they've done it's not right, so they're in prison for a reason, so that part hasn't changed, but I've now got a better understanding of why they've done what they've done and stuff, but you're in prison for a reason, the Courts send you to us for a reason.

When asked where this more nuanced understanding of people in custody and the contexts of their offending came from, recruits seemed to think it was both learning substantive ‘topics’ (i.e. adverse childhood experiences in the prison population), but also just exposure to and contact with people in custody and the staff who worked with them, which in and of itself helped to break down those misconceptions.

Prior to starting here – well I, I know that I have thought that dealing on a face to face basis with inmates . . . would be harder – you think, oh – you’ve got a tag, you’ve got a label, but when you’re actually handling – working, you’re thinking this is a human being, that’s a person, do you know what I mean, interact with them.

Before we started [training], it was easy to sort of judge them because you never seem them, it’s not until you actually meet them and you think, well, ‘who am I to judge him’.

However, other areas of the OFP which attempted to develop affective learning were not regarded as highly by recruits. They felt as though the e-learning packages (which include learning about ‘equality and diversity’), did not result in any meaningful learning. During focus groups they recounted how they had clicked through the material as quickly as they could without really engaging with it. They felt as though these parts of training were designed in order to provide organisational assurance, rather than because anyone thought it would result in meaningful and enduring learning. As they reflected:

The e-learning was just 100% [the organisation protecting itself], that was just basically . . . it’s your signature, so that we can sign you off and if you do any of



this wrong – they know full well nobody’s actually sitting there reading that for 2 hours, they just want the box ticked.

The e-learning’s a joke to be honest.

Topics such as ‘equality and diversity’ are essential to the development of affective learning in the prisons setting because they underline the need for an understanding of individual differences and equal treatment. Though there is also a full day’s classroom session on ‘equality and diversity’, which acts as a facilitated discussion of the digital learning session which preceded it, the recruits nonetheless felt as though the e-learning content was there to provide the organisation with assurance (thereby putting responsibility on the learner for any operational mistakes), rather providing a meaningful way of ensuring learning of a particular topic. They similarly felt as though the policy-heavy elements of the training had little impact on them and were unlikely to have any enduring effect.

It’s just the fact that they can turn around and say, ‘well, we taught you the right way, it’s up to you now to do it whatever way you want’, it’s just tick a box.

I feel all the stuff at the College is mainly just so they can tick the box and say to you, ‘if you go back to your Establishment and say, you mess up on something’ – it’s your fault.

A three or four hour class on policies, it’s like, – personally, that’s my personal opinion I don’t know if everybody thinks the same but I feel like a lot of the classes are just for policy to tick a box.

Data from focus groups at the end of recruits’ induction training therefore revealed affective learning in relation particularly to the importance of relationships in the work of prison officers,

and to the importance of supporting desistance from crime. There was also an increased understanding of people in custody as individuals, rather than ‘prisoners’, and the socio-economic contexts of imprisonment. While some of this was undoubtedly due to formal learning experiences on the OFP, this was also supported by exposure to and interaction with, people in custody during periods of operational experience during their training. However, parts of the training which relied on overheads or e-learning were felt to have little impact for recruits. These, together with sessions on policy and process, were felt by the recruits to be motivated by providing operational assurance rather than a belief that they would result in meaningful and enduring learning, particularly in relation to attitudes and emotions.

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## **Affective learning in the OFP: discussion**

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Overall, the content of the training was orientated primarily towards the operational and security features of the role of an Operations Officer, rather than the development of attitudes, beliefs and values associated with supporting people in custody. However, affective learning was not neglected, and focus groups revealed affective learning had occurred for the recruits during their six-week training. The overall emphasis within the training on operational task and process is perhaps understandable given the more security-focused nature of an Operations Officer role within the SPS, and the fact that prisons environments will attend to safety and security before it can progress to the provision of care and support. However, as discussed earlier, officers’ induction training must not neglect affective learning for a number of important reasons. First, attending to attitudes and values will profoundly affect the professional behaviours which ensue (Neuman and Forsyth, 2008); the enactment of even the most ‘neutral’ policies, tasks and

processes will be shaped by the attitudes, beliefs and emotions of the groups and individuals in question. Second, prison officers are required to care in the contested emotional area of crime and punishment (Tait, 2008), and they must use judgement and exercise discretion according to a set of moral principles and an ethical code (Liebling et al., 2010). Even though people in the Operations Officer role may have less engagement with people in custody than in the promoted Residential Officer role, the need for them to demonstrate care and compassion for those in custody is not in the slightest diminished. Third, learning for and at work should change not only the learner, but also the wider working environment (Hager, 2004). New recruits are the ‘new blood’ of the organisation, and they have a role in affecting change in the organisation rather than assimilating to the existing cultural norm. Affective learning in induction training which attends to attitudes, beliefs and values will have a crucial role in enabling this.

As argued earlier, officers must have the ‘appropriate attitudes as well as conduct’ (Liebling, 2011: 486), attributes developed in the affective domain of learning. Learning in the OFP attempts to develop all three domains of learning identified by Bloom and his colleagues, though the knowledge and skills-based domains dominate the curriculum. Nonetheless, certain topics and learning approaches did affect the recruits’ attitudes and beliefs around imprisonment and the role of a prison officer, though other areas of the training were not experienced by the recruits as successful at this task. The extent to which the affective learning during OFP training endures after recruits have left the SPS College will depend on many factors, including, primarily, the external professional environment and requirement and support for ongoing CPD and reflection throughout professional life.

An evaluation of the SPS induction training for new recruits certainly reveals it to be enlightening in comparison with the degrading and humiliating officer training in the prison

service in England and Wales described by Crawley (2004) in the late 1990s, and more attuned to the aspects of the role which do not relate solely to security than in the training described by Arnolt (2008) in the mid 2000s. However, elements of the OFP remain rooted in learning operational tasks which would be better learnt in the workplace, leaving time in the classroom to discuss issues relating to the beliefs, attitudes and values associated with the role. Although it is unrealistic to expect profound learning to occur in a six-week induction training course, embedding reflection throughout the whole programme and introducing formative and summative assessments which measure affective learning would support greater learning in this domain. Beyond the OFP, creating meaningful learning structures in the workplace which ensure that learning will continue upon completion of the OFP is also crucial. These could include mandated CPD, regular reflective practice and robust ways of addressing behaviours in the workplace which may not be aligned to the values of the SPS.

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## Conclusion

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Integrating affective learning into professional learning in prison officer induction training is not straightforward. The value of developing attitudes beliefs and values alongside knowledge and skills in a limited period of time of learning, may be difficult to see for an organisation which requires assurances in competencies based to a large degree on tasks and processes. Examining personal attitudes and beliefs, not least those relating to the emotive subject of crime and punishment, must take place in a way which balances what the organisation requires (belief in the organisational values), with a process which allows individuals to confront their own values and to be prepared to reconsider them when necessary. This is especially difficult when training

does not provide the opportunity for these values to be expressed into professional behaviours, and when there are no assessment strategies which explicitly measure this.

The correct value base for prison officers is central given the importance of the attitudes through which discretion is exercised in custodial settings, and the centrality of care, alongside the ability to promote safety and manage risk. As Crawley (2004) observes, organisations are emotional places: they ‘encapsulate[s] the range of human feelings – the loves, hatreds, fears, compassions, frustrations, joys, guilt and envies – that develop over time wherever any social group interacts’ (Noon and Blyton, quoted in Crawley, 2004: 43). The intensity of the prison environment, combined with the emotive nature of crime, punishment and reintegration, mean the emotional component of an officer’s work must become more central to their learning.

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## **Appendix**

### **Focus group interview schedules**

#### *1) Start of OFP focus group*

- First week in establishments
  - 1 What was your overall impression of this time?
  - 2 What were you shown?
  - 3 What do you think will stick with you?
  - 4 Did anything surprise you?



- 5 What did you hear about the College and the OFP?
- 6 Have your expectations about the role changed?
- 7 What narratives did you hear about the role in this time? If you know people already in the service, what narratives around the role have you heard?

- Expectations

- 1 What are your expectations about your job as a prison officer?
- 2 What do you expect from the OFP?
- 3 What are you most/least looking forward to in the OFP?

## ***2) Conclusion of OFP focus group***

- OFP

- 1 OFP – what have you enjoyed, what has challenged, what will endure?
- 2 OFP – which did you enjoy the least?

- Perceptions and beliefs

- 1 Have your attitudes towards people in custody and imprisonment changed over the OFP?
- 2 Has your attitude towards the role changed?
- 3 Have your existing views been challenged? What was this experience like?

