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A partnership approach to higher educational accreditation of the UK's national Direct Entry Superintendents programme

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Abstract

The evolution of the UK's high profile and first ever Direct Entry (DE) Superintendents programme followed the recommendations for policing identified by Winsor (2012) and the UK Government's vision of enabling 'fresh thinking and fresh blood [to be] brought in from outside the profession' (Green, 2013). The eighteen-month DE programme aims to attract highly talented and proven leaders from alternative sectors directly into executive policing roles. The College of Policing's (2015) own review identifies the importance for executive leaders to demonstrate on-going personal development. As a result a joint College of Policing and Teesside University team worked together to develop the Post Graduate Certificate in Strategic Police Leadership which was mapped onto the new DE education and training programme, resulting in the provision of an educational award which meets the needs of the contemporary police service. The programme has been designed primarily to be both academically and vocationally challenging, recognising the education and training previously completed by direct-entry superintendents, who may not have any previous policing experience, who are joining the police service in senior executive roles. The aim being that on successful completion of the eighteen-month mandatory higher educational programme, learners will be able to operate independently across a wide range of strategic leadership deployments as competent uniformed superintendents, bringing with them a range of new skills and ideas to the service.

Keywords: Direct entry superintendents, Higher education accreditation, Partnership working.

Introduction

There is a continuing quest for professionalism within the police service (Home Affairs Committee, 2013; Lee and Punch, 2004), with the professional body for the police service across England and Wales, The College of Policing, being at the heart of this drive for change.

Dear (2011) suggests that in order to deal with a leadership crisis within the police service, recruitment should copy the approach of the Armed Forces and big business by nurturing talented individuals in order for them to quickly rise to senior levels. Despite the controversial nature of this direct-entry approach to the senior levels of policing, which was first attempted in the 1930's (Lee and Punch, 2004), the influential report by Winsor (2012) facilitated such a change to modern policing by enabling forces to directly recruit police officers as superintendents.

There is a general consensus across both the private and public sectors that good leaders are of paramount importance to ensure effective performance (Dobby, Anscombe and Tuffin, 2004). There is recognition of a range of leadership styles across the police service.

With such a drive forward, the College of Policing embarked in 2014 on the development of an eighteen-month Direct-Entry (DE) training programme for new superintendents aiming to attract highly talented and proven leaders from alternative sectors directly into these executive policing roles. Following the successful completion of a competitive tender, a joint College of Policing and Teesside University team worked together to develop a Postgraduate higher educational award which mapped on to what is now the DE superintendent's education and training programme.

Discussion

Lee and Punch (2004) suggest that higher education courses and partnerships between both police forces and institutions should not be focused purely on the development of policing courses, but instead should enhance the broader critical thinking and professional skills acquired through studying in higher education. The Direct-Entry (Superintendent) Programme seeks to do just that, by attracting highly talented and proven leaders from other public and private sectors who are then challenged professionally and academically with-

in both the policing workplace and classroom. These leaders, recruited because they are found to be exceptional and strategic in approach, have been brought into operational policing in order to make an immediate impact on the culture, efficiency and effectiveness of the service. These changes are to be achieved through:

1. Attracting individuals who will bring new perspectives from diverse backgrounds,
2. The creation of a cohort that has the potential to further develop and acquire the skills and experience in order to progress to the most senior chief officer ranks.
3. The new employees studying an accredited development programme that will ensure direct-entry superintendents are competent in their new roles and inspire confidence in their officers, staff and the public.

Whilst developing the concept of the Direct-Entry (DE) programme, wide consultation took place by the College of Policing with existing superintendents. Methodologies included focus groups, internal reviews and online surveys, which explored the selection process, curriculum, learning outcomes and the most appropriate assessment strategy. The result of the consultation led to the College of Policing designing an 18 month DE Superintendents programme, whereby new starters, once recruited from other sectors, would be appointed as warranted superintendents. They would follow an educational development programme which included block learning at the College of Policing, in-force operational rotations as a police constable, sergeant/inspector and superintendent along with an in force mentor.

At this point, a competitive national tender process led to the establishment of a joint College of Policing and Teesside University team partnering to work together to develop a post-graduate higher educational award. After the formal establishment of the partnership, Teesside University academic researchers approached and conducted individual interviews with the first cohort of recruited learners, these officers were serving with several of the 43 police forces England and Wales.

These interviews examined how the classroom-based work would prepare individuals for their new role as superintendents, the experiences they had within the role, how the proposed learning outcomes related to their role and the relevance of the assessment processes. Westmarland (2011) suggests that it can be difficult to gain the trust of the police service to work with them, although on this occasion, the development of trust between the partners providing the programme of study and the learners seemed almost seamless. This could be due to the academic staff involved having an understanding and previous experience of the police environment, the College of Policing team having an existing understanding and experience of working with educational providers and the sharing of a common goal with tight timescales for successful completion.

The common goal was to map and accredit the DE superintendent's education and training development programme to a post-graduate higher educational award over a six-month period prior to its launch in October 2015. Initial programme discussions and explorations identified the requirement for the proposed compulsory higher education award of a post-graduate certificate (although the credits of the award are currently under review). The partners debated the merits of a number of titles for the award agreeing on a post-graduate certificate in Strategic Police Leadership. This award was subdivided into two equally credited academic modules: (1) Policing and community practice, (2) Strategic police management. Thus enabling the aligning of curriculum content and assessment to manageable and identifiable routes of educational progression. At this point, it became clear that there was a misunderstanding in terms of language use between organisations. For example, words such as 'module' and 'mentor' had different meanings within both the College of Policing and Teesside University. Although easily overcome, this simple interpretation of words and phrases on both sides could have affected the outcomes of the partnership.

In order to ensure the success of the programme of study, the learning and teaching strategy was designed to encourage a progressive acquisition of subject knowledge and professional skills (such as legislation, custody procedures, public protection, decision-making models, critical incident management, ethical and professional behaviours) by moving from study methods during block teaching which have a greater de-

gree of support and assistance gradually towards more independence and self-direction during work-based phases, where the DE Superintendents took on more responsibility for their role.

The DE Superintendents spend approximately 30 % of the 18-month programme with College of Policing tutors, at one of the College's national sites, where the taught elements of the programme are predominantly delivered. These sessions are also supported by subject matter experts from the College, Teesside University academics and a number of guest speakers (who provide valuable illustrations of the impact of strategic leadership). The other 70 % of the programme is spent in-force, where the DE Superintendents are supported by coaches and mentors in the workplace. The learning and teaching methods used throughout the programme include lectures, seminars, workshops, case studies, peer group discussions, work-based learning, independent study, e-learning and online materials via a police learning portal, along with both individual and group tutorials.

The assessments for the programme and award of the postgraduate certificate were designed to assess learners' subject specific knowledge, academic and applied skills, cognitive and intellectual skills, along with transferable skills applicable to the workplace. These were focused around the two modules, which are both academically assessed and have more vocationally focussed pass/fail components. The learners must demonstrate, through their assessments, the acquisition of the skills of academic research and writing at post-graduate level in relation to community partnerships. They must demonstrate the core legal knowledge required to operate at the rank of superintendent and occupational competence in the workplace at the levels of constable, sergeant/inspector and superintendent. Finally DE Superintendents must demonstrate the ability to communicate orally and take questions at a strategic level in relation to a business improvement project delivering their force's strategic priorities.

Conclusion

The first cohort of DE Superintendents, studying for the mandatory accredited postgraduate certificate in Strategic Police Leadership, are due to complete their award and be confirmed in their posts in April 2017. A second cohort to study a postgraduate award will

commence in November 2016, although a follow up review of the existing programme suggests that, due to the learning hours completed by the DE Superintendents along with their degree of learning, the level of postgraduate award should be increased.

The College of Policing's Leadership Review (2015) recognises the requirement for the police service to adopt the use of qualifications which recognise the professional knowledge and expertise of police officers at various ranks. In time this will assist in enhancing the overall professional recognition of policing and support Winsor's (2012) aspirations for the recognition of the service as a profession.

The success of the DE Superintendents higher education accredited programme has led to the introduction of a Direct-Entry programme at the rank of inspector, which will commence in November 2016. The DE Inspector's education and training programme will also be mapped against a postgraduate award. Although the DE leadership programmes are still in their infancy and it is early to evidence the impact of the recruitment of talented and proven leaders on the culture, efficiency and effectiveness of the police service. Once the DE Inspectors have commenced their studies, just over a third of the 43 police forces across England and Wales will have officers studying such a programme.

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