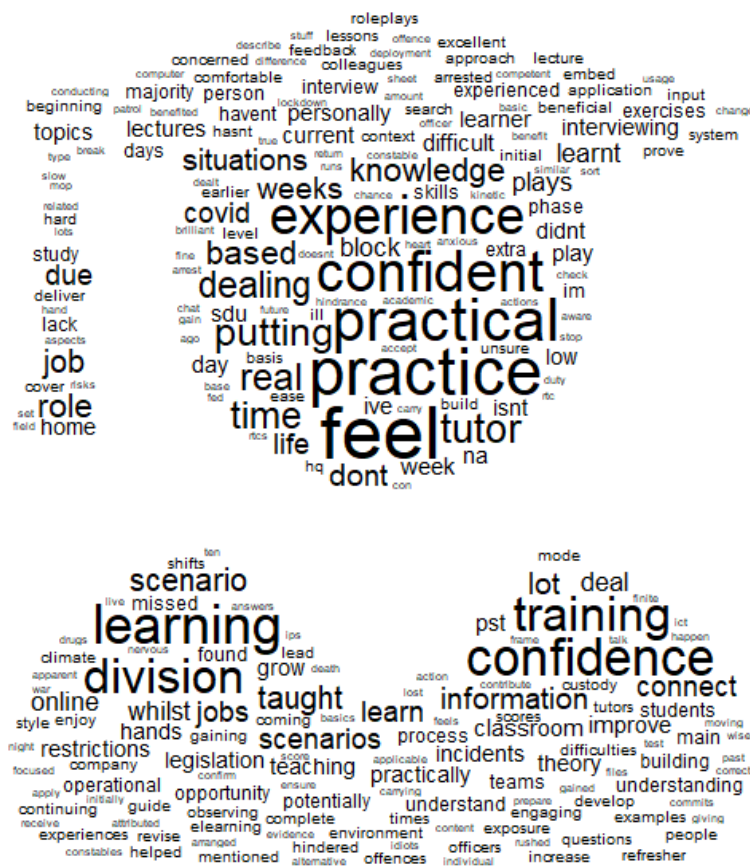


Policing Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF): Student Confidence, Engagement and Wellbeing



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Introduction

This report is an addendum to an earlier report by Birdsall et al. (2022) for Lancashire Constabulary, titled 'Comparison of Students' Views Across Police Entry Routes'. The initial report included a study which analysed the responses of students (trainee police officers) who were undergoing new educational entry routes into policing (IPLDP, PCDA, DHEP), to a survey conducted by Lancashire Constabulary. The survey focused on students' confidence, engagement, wellbeing, and views across the different entry routes.

Responses were measured at three different time points, after weeks one, twenty-four (end of classroom phase) and thirty-four (end of tutor phase). The focus for week one was capturing student motivations for joining the police and preparedness for their course. The end of classroom and end of tutor phases measures were concerned with students' confidence, engagement, and well-being, as well as reviews of each phase. The initial report statistically compared responses between cohorts at earlier time points of the course (weeks 1, 24, and 34). The study for this report focused on the longitudinal aspects of the survey, namely confidence, engagement, and wellbeing and provides insight into change over the period of the courses within and between the three different cohorts.

Purpose of addendum

The purpose of this addendum was to build on the findings of the first report. As referred to by Birdsall et al. (2022, p.2) in the summary of their introduction of their initial report, the data was limited because the course was ongoing at the time, thus restricting the timepoints to individual assessment. The addition of two subsequent and significant time points in the course, enabled not only individual timepoint analysis as previously conducted but also meaningful analysis of change in trainee police officers' confidence, engagement, and wellbeing as they progressed through their respective entry routes. Therefore, the analysis in this study incorporates the previously measured timepoints two and three (end of classroom and end of tutor phases) and two additional timepoints four and five (mid-course and end of course).

Police entry route context and evaluation timepoints

It should be noted that whilst the end of the course (probation) for IPLDP and DHEP entry routes is 2 years, the PCDA pathway is three years. Therefore, the mid-course time point for IPLDP and DHEP cohorts was 12 months, and 18 months for PCDA. The entry routes consist

of a mix of classroom-based learning of between 18-22 weeks and on the job learning alongside a designated tutor usually between 10-12 weeks in the students' first year. The PCDA and DHEP entry routes differ in the education levels set for the classroom-based learning. Whilst PCDA cohorts are taught at education levels 4 (year 1) and 5 (year 2), it is set at level 6 for DHEP students, who will have already achieved an undergraduate degree.

Relevant to this stage of evaluation, the surveys were administered at timepoints (tp) 2 to 5. As previously stated tp2 and tp3 were the end of classroom phase (week 24) and the end of tutor phase (week 34) of the respective courses. Mid-course (tp4) surveys were administered after the completion of year 1 for IPLDP and DEHP, and after 18 months for PCDA, as the students continued their educational and operational development through alternate periods of study and practice. The final surveys were completed at the end of the course (probation period) which was two or three years depending on entry route.

Summary

It is important for the development of the Police Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF) that the effects of the different entry routes on trainee police officers are evaluated. Police officers' confidence in knowledge, skills and procedures is crucial for the operational success of the organisation, as is their engagement in education and training and their wellbeing. The aim of the study was to better understand the experiences of the trainee police officers across the three entry routes, specifically the effects on their confidence in key areas of policing, their engagement in the courses, and their wellbeing. To achieve this, the study tested for significant changes in student confidence, engagement, and wellbeing between each of the four timepoints and explored explanations for any change.

Note: Birdsall et al. (2022) provide a comprehensive literature review in their initial report. The review provides an overview of the development of the PEQF in England and Wales. This includes research into police education in collaboration with universities, and knowledge and challenges to the rollout of the PEQF. Being an addendum to the initial report, another literature review is not necessary here.

Method

Design

The project concerned a secondary source design, examining student police survey data that had been collated by the Learning and Development Department of Lancashire Constabulary, across the three different educational strands (IPLDP, PCDA and DHEP). The data related to both Lancashire Constabulary and Cumbria Constabulary, with survey responses collected over five time points: (tp1) end of week one, (tp2) end of classroom phase, (tp3) end of tutor phase, (tp4) mid-course, and (tp5) end of probation. The focus of this report was solely on data pertaining to Lancashire Constabulary. As the responses involved both quantitative and qualitative data, the study used a mixed methods approach to analyse the responses and provide insight.

Quantitative data were analysed using R (v4.3.0) through RStudio (V2023.09.0 Build 463). All scripts for processing and analysing data can be made available upon request. Qualitative data was analysed using MS Excel.

Quantitative Data

Data at tp1 mainly focused on demographics, whilst tp2 to tp5 data focused on repeated measures of Likert Scale items. The Likert Scale measures were thematically grouped into five key areas namely overall confidence, confidence in police knowledge, confidence in police skills and procedure, student engagement, and student well-being.

Self-reported overall confidence was a Likert type rating from 1-5 with 1 reflecting low overall confidence, and 5 representing a high level of overall confidence.

Likert-type items ranging from 1-10 were used to measure students self-reported confidence levels across various items of policing knowledge (see Table 1) and police skills and procedures (see Table 2). Higher scores reflected greater levels of self-reported confidence in policing knowledge, and policing skills and procedures respectively.

The survey questions at mid-course and end of probation phases were consistent with those at the end of classroom and end of tutor phases (see Birdsall et al., 2022 for list of survey questions).

Table 1: Measured components of self-reported confidence in policing knowledge.

Policing knowledge components
Powers of arrest
Powers of entry
Powers to stop and search people, vehicles, premises
Theft Act – Theft, burglary, robbery, handling, vehicle crime, fraud, abstract electricity
Assaults
Criminal damage offences
Offensive weapons, bladed articles, going equipped
Harassment, Anti-Social Behaviour, Hate crime
Public order, drunkenness, liquor licensing
Drug legislation,
RTCs, drink/drug driving
Traffic legislation - Driving docs., con. & use, lighting
Domestic abuse
Sexual offences
Child protection
Firearms

Table 2 Measured components of self-reported confidence in policing skills and procedures.

Policing skills and procedures
Use of constabulary computer programs/systems
Conducting searches of people, vehicles, property
Initial management and investigation of a crime
Dealing with missing persons/sudden death
Interviewing witnesses
Interviewing suspects
Arresting suspects/custody procedure (including PST)
Other disposals – Reporting suspects/PND/Fixed penalty/VDRS
Dealing with RTC

Completing checks on persons/vehicles – submitting intelligence

Dealing with property Lost/found/exhibits/prisoners

Mental Health – dealing with vulnerable, place of safety

Likert-type items ranging from 1-5 were used to measure student engagement (see Table 3) and student wellbeing (see Table 4). Higher scores reflected greater engagement and greater wellbeing respectively.

Table 3: Measured components of student engagement.

Student engagement statements

I've been able to make up my own mind about things

I've been dealing with problems well

I've been feeling relaxed

I've been feeling useful

I've been thinking clearly

I've been feeling close to other people

Table 4: Measured components of student wellbeing.

Student wellbeing statements

I have sufficient time and energy to engage in activities outside of work

My work leaves me with little energy to do any other non-work activity [Reverse scoring]

Tension and stress from work often adversely affects the rest of my life [Reverse scoring]

Due to work strain, I ignore my personal life needs [Reverse scoring]

Each Likert scale was applied at each of the four time points (tp2 to tp5) reflecting a repeated measures design. This resulted in 1 Likert-type response (overall confidence) and 4 Likert scale totals (self-reported confidence in police knowledge, self-reported confidence in police skills and procedure, student engagement, and student wellbeing). The methods of processing, and median imputation to handle missing data replicated those applied in the interim report by Birdsall et al. (2022). To determine internal consistency, Cronbach's Alpha was conducted on all items for each scale. As shown in Table 5 each scale achieved a

Cronbach's Alpha score > 7, demonstrating an acceptable, good, or excellent internal consistency, therefore all items across all Likert scales were included in the analysis.

Table 5 Cronbach's Alpha scores for Likert scales across four repeated measures thematic groups TP2 to TP5.

<i>Thematic groups</i>	<i>*Cronbach's Alpha α</i>			
	TP2	TP3	TP4	TP5
Police knowledge	0.95	0.93	0.92	0.93
Police skills and procedure	0.91	0.90	0.93	0.92
Student engagement	0.73	0.80	0.76	0.74
Student wellbeing	0.83	0.81	0.83	0.84

*Internal consistency interpretations $\alpha \geq 0.9$ = Excellent; $\alpha \geq 0.8$ and <0.9 = Good; $\alpha \geq 0.7$ and <0.8 = Acceptable

The main aim of the analysis was to determine differences in total Likert scale scores across time in relation to the five thematic groupings. Therefore, processing concerned determining whether each grouping was suitable for a one-way repeated measures ANOVA for each of the cohorts across the three educational strands.

Qualitative Data

In addition to the scoring metrics across each timepoint, students had an opportunity to provide further comments in relation to their scores via open-text boxes. On initial reading of the responses for familiarity, the research team found that the responses varied in terms of data quality, with some comments involving a couple of sentences of well-written and grammatically correct English, and other answers comprising of single-word responses, short-hand responses (as participant typed shortest response possible to get their point across), or referring to responses to other parts of the survey instrument with the current comments (i.e., "as above"). This was in addition to blank responses and responses that stated: "no comment" and "n/a".

To go some way in contextualising the quantitative findings, comments across each timepoint were subject to inductive content analysis. This involved collecting the comments relating to all confidence questions across each of the timepoints, and then examining recurring key words and phrases that represented similar content. The content was then counted across the students' comments to gain an insight into prevalence of each key term / phrase across the cohorts.

Analysis and Findings

Self-Reported Confidence Scores

Overall Confidence

As the data did not meet the assumptions of ANOVA, Friedman tests were run on each cohort to examine whether there was a difference in the reported confidence scores across the four timepoints. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in confidence across the IPLDP cohort ($\chi^2 (3) = 9.12, p = 0.027$) and the PCDA cohort ($\chi^2 (3) = 25.3, p < 0.001$). There was no statistically significant difference within the DHEP cohort ($\chi^2 (3) = 3.88, p > 0.05$).

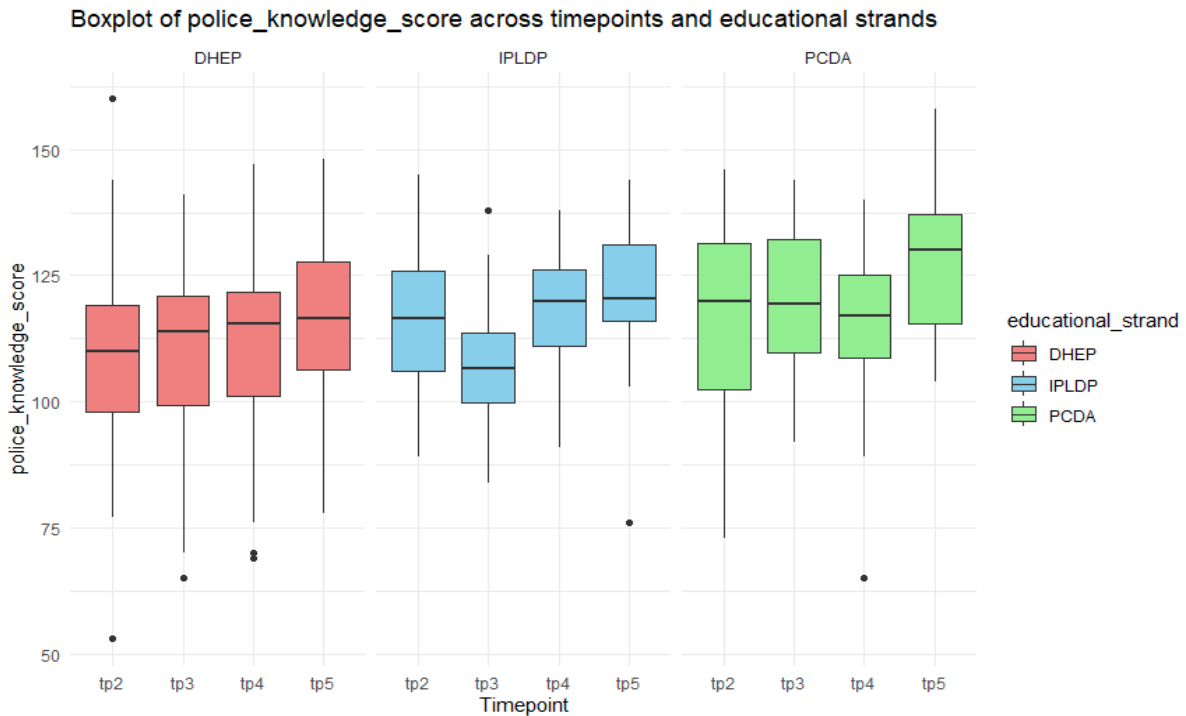
When using Wilcoxon signed rank test with Bonferroni correction for post-hoc analysis, the adjusted p value within the IPLDP cohort (and smaller sample size) meant that it was not possible to detect with statistical certainty which timepoints differed from each other (adj. $p > 0.05$). When conducting post-hoc testing on the PCDA cohort, there was a statistically significant difference in reported confidence between tp2 and tp5 (adj. $p = 0.001$), tp3 and tp5 (adj. $p = 0.011$), and tp4 and tp5 (adj. $p = 0.005$).

Overall, this meant that the PCDA cohort were found to report much greater levels of overall confidence within the final survey, in comparison to all other points of their course. The IPLDP cohort also had reported differences within confidence, but it was not possible to distinguish which groups differed with statistical certainty due to the smaller sample size and the adjusted p values.

Policing Knowledge

The data met the assumptions for a one-way repeated measures ANOVA to examine for differences in total policing knowledge scores reported by students across each of the four timepoints within each of the three educational strands. The analysis revealed no statistically significant differences in total confidence of policing knowledge scores across the DHEP cohort ($F (3,292) = 2.29, p = 0.078$) and the IPLDP cohort ($F (3,68) = 2.69, p = 0.053$), but that there was a statistically significant difference within the PCDA cohort, $F (3,108) = 4.24, p = 0.007$.

Figure 1: Police knowledge scores by timepoint and educational strand



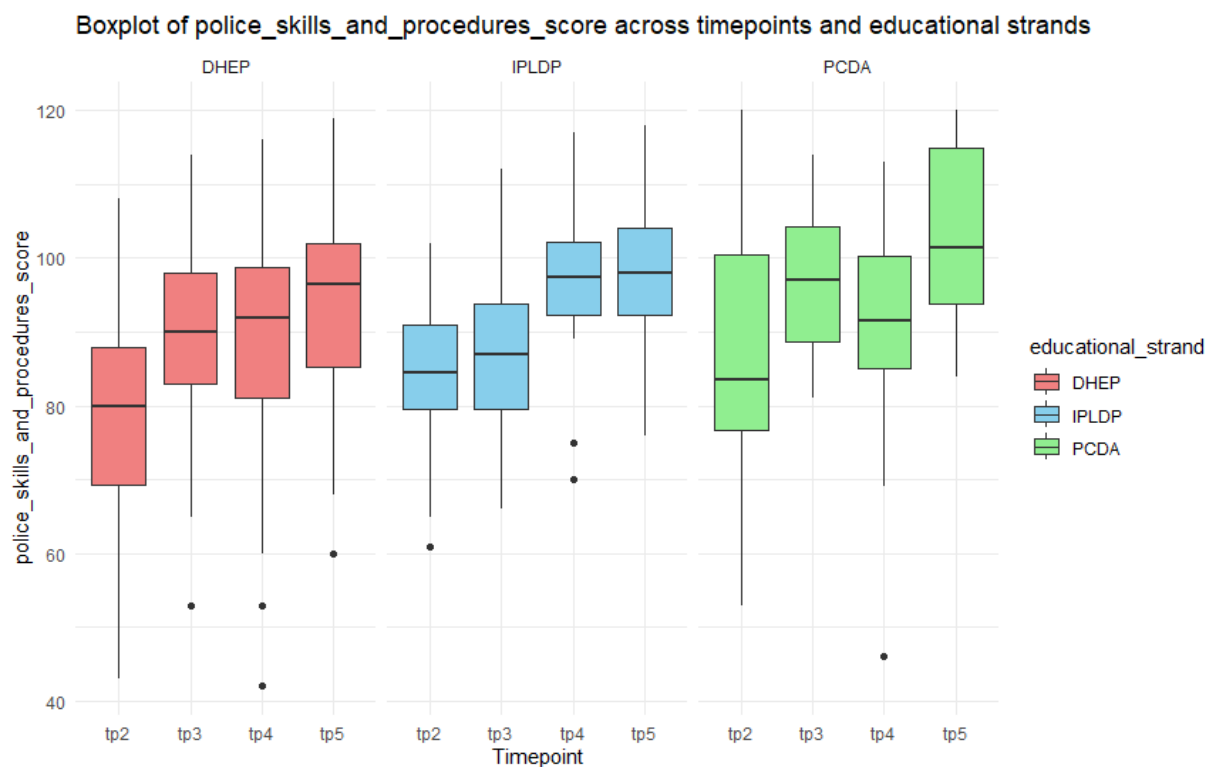
Using Tukey's HSD for post-hoc testing within the PCDA cohort, the differences were found between tp2 and tp5 (adj. $p = 0.027$) and tp4 and tp5 (adj. $p = 0.007$).

Overall, as illustrated in Figure 1 above, whilst all groups generally showed a slight trend of increased confidence of policing knowledge across the timepoints, there was a distinct increase in confidence in policing knowledge reported by the PCDA cohort in the final survey (tp5) in comparison to the beginning (tp2) and middle (tp4) of their course. Although as the diagram illustrates a notable dip in confidence in the IPLDP and DHEP cohorts but at different timepoints, between tp2 and tp3 for IPLDP and tp3 and tp4 for PCDA.

Policing Skills & Procedures

Having met the assumptions, data were again subject to a one-way repeated measures ANOVA to detect differences between the total scores reported by the students relative to their self-reported confidence in policing skills and procedures across each of the four timepoints within each student cohort. The analysis revealed a statically significant difference within all three cohorts: DHEP ($F(3, 292) = 16.6, p < 0.001$); IPLDP ($F(3, 68) = 6.93, p < 0.001$); and PCDA ($F(3, 108) = 8.47, p < 0.001$).

Figure 2: Police skills and procedure scores by timepoint and educational strand.



With regards to DHEP, post-hoc testing using Tukey's HSD identified that tp2 and tp3 (adj. $p < 0.001$), tp2 and tp4 (adj. $p < 0.001$), and tp2 and tp5 (adj. $p < 0.001$) had statistically significant differences in skills and procedure scores. The IPLDP cohort had statistically significant differences between tp2 and tp4 (adj. $p = 0.007$), tp2 and tp5 (adj. $p = 0.001$), as well as tp3 and tp5 (adj. $p = 0.025$). Finally, the PCDA cohort had statistically significant differences in total skills and procedure scores between tp2 and tp3 (adj. $p = 0.015$), tp2 and tp5 (adj. $p < 0.001$), as well as tp4 and tp5 (adj. $p = 0.004$).

On the whole, the analysis found that across all three cohorts, students reported higher scores relating to their confidence in policing skills and procedures towards the end of their course, in comparison to when they first began.

Comments Relating to Confidence

As previously illustrated the quantitative analysis revealed a general positive progression in student confidence in policing knowledge, and policing skills and procedures across the three cohorts, over time. At the end of each of the four key timepoints the students were asked to comment on their confidence and provide suggestions on what would make them feel more

confident in relation to each of these three areas of policing. A content analysis was conducted across all comments using frequency and relevance to confidence as a measure.

End of classroom phase (tp2)

Seven students (4.9%) did not provide any comments at the end of this phase. There were commonalities and no notable differences in the comments at tp2 across the three different cohorts. References to 'practical application' of the knowledge, skills, and procedures learned in the 21-week classroom-based learning was most commonly reported. A total of 37 (27%) of the 137 students who responded explicitly inferred that 'practice-based learning' would enhance their confidence in these areas. One PCDA student expressed an expectation that this would be the case.

"For me personally, I need to practice in order to confirm my knowledge in that area. There are certain aspects that I have marked low because I haven't experienced many incidents that would involve the skills, such as interviewing suspects, something I have now been taught which I will put into practice in the next ten-week phase."

Students did refer to the benefits of practical elements of the classroom learning phase, which role plays were a key part. Indeed 15 students at tp2 suggested more role plays would have benefitted their confidence during that period, as it enabled them to practically apply the learnt knowledge, skills, and procedures. However, enforced online learning environments during the lockdown periods of the pandemic restricted the capability to role play. Six students referred to the impact of Covid-19 on classroom learning as it restricted the practical element and benefits that role-playing would normally have offered in the classroom phase. The impact was captured by one DHEP student who stated at the time:

"We have missed out on the practical side of things due to Covid; I am someone who learns better by doing and putting things into action. I've missed out on that like others, so I won't have a full understating on these topic areas until I can do the process myself, see what I am good at or what I need more practice at."

Whilst there was acknowledgement of the benefits of the classroom phase, it was felt to be limited in terms of developing confidence. As another DHEP student put it, "I think there is only

so much you can do theory wise". It was generally reported that confidence would grow with practical application in the field. In looking forward to the next phase a DHEP student reflected:

"I feel the majority of my worries are simply not having done them, doing them whilst out on division and on a more regular basis will definitely lead me to being more confident and I'm sure I'll have the support of my tutor to do this."

A point re-iterated by one of the IPLDP cohort.

"More practical work as theoretical work doesn't properly show us how to carry out these actions."

Others commented on the limitations of the classroom environment in replicating real-life situations like "sudden death or road traffic collisions", exacerbated further by online learning environments, a consequence of the Covid-19 restrictions at the time, as well as experiencing technical difficulties from time to time.

End of tutor phase (tp3)

Twenty-four students (16.7%) did not provide any comment at the end of this phase. The comments and suggestions of 35 (29.2%) of the 120 students who commented at the end of the 10-week tutor phase referred to 'time' in relation to growing their confidence. Three themes could be identified in relation to time. The most common (n=21, 17.5%) were comments inferring that confidence would come with more time on the job as they naturally develop their knowledge, skills, and procedures. This PCDA student alluded to this stating:

"I think I will just gain confidence overtime by sealing with these jobs independently, I know my team quite well and know who to ask if I am struggling with anything More time dealing with different jobs."

Six students (5%) who commented suggested more time in this tutor phase would have benefitted their confidence in the three areas. This was particularly prevalent in the IPLDP cohort. In making the point one IPLDP student commented on the benefits of a longer period and working with more people.

“A longer time in tutor period or working with more than one person so you can learn different ways of dealing with things.”

Another IPLDP student portrayed a sense of unease at the tutor phase ending, and their confidence would be enhanced with provision of periodic tutor check-ins.

I feel that after the tutor phase ends and you are considered able to attend jobs alone, there should then be the occasional follow-up shift (approx. 1 per set) where your tutor reviews your open investigations and cases, offers advice and feedback, and assists in identifying ways to progress them.

Five students (4.2%) referred to time in the context of broadness. One PCDA student captured this stating:

“Like stated previously, more exposure to different situations would make me more confident I have seen things once or twice and am confident I could undertake them however for my confidence to build I need to do it a few times.”

More exposure to different situations during this period was something commented on by students across the cohorts. The following three comments provide a sample of the various contexts' where exposure was deemed important.

“The opportunity to go and work with different departments such as CID, Child Protection, Traffic, in order to gain more specific experience. Other students were given this opportunity however I asked and was informed this is something which is only supposed to be completed by an independent.” (PCDA student)

“Gaining further experience from dealing with a large number of jobs.” (IPLDP student)

“Again, more experience and dealings with different aspects of policing. There are certain areas of policing that I have not dealt with as much as others like DV incidents.”
(DHEP student)

One notable area of concern was student confidence in the use of Connect at the end of this phase. Nine (7.5%) of those who provide comments referred to the need for more training on the use of this system during this period. This was most comprehensively explained by this DHEP student.

“More Connect training is definitely required. There is nowhere near enough in the classroom phase or tutor phase. There should be full lectures and scheduled time whilst on deployment to learn connect. There is so much to it, and I do not feel anywhere near confident with it. I absolutely love the job but connect makes me worry about dealing with cases and investigations as I am unsure on how to manage it correctly.”

Comments generally reflected a keenness to continue the practical environment that the tutor phase provided, and that the 10 weeks was insufficient time to receive the necessary exposure to a variety of jobs and other people in the organisation.

Mid-course comments

Forty-nine (34%) of the 144 students did not provide any comments at the mid-course point. Consistent with the previous timepoint, ‘time’ commonly featured, with 27 students (29.5%) of those who commented referring to it. Again, it was mostly in the context of confidence growing with more time spent on the job or learning. However, at this point there was generally more suggestions of specifically where that time should be spent, with DHEP students offering the most insight. None of the 18 IPLDP students and only three (8.6%) of the 35 PCDA cohort referred to time, whilst 24 (26.4%) of the 91 DHEP students did so, many in detail. Some like this student as in the previous period put time in the context of generally gaining experience and confidence by working in the field.

“I think I will get more confident with time and experience. I am happy that I could initially deal with anything I am faced with, and I know who I could talk to for advice should it be required. I would just like more operational experience.”

Other comments like here, suggested more time in the one place would benefit learning and confidence. The following two student's comments alluded to the disruptive nature of training blocks during the period.

"The more time I spend on section in one place, the more confident I feel, changing teams does not help and not do long periods away in training blocks. I would suggest having more security in your place of work and shorter training blocks." (DHEP student)

"More time spent policing and less time spent going back and forward to training as this put's breaks on my progress and consistency. More opportunities for searches and to work with other departments." (DHEP student)

Sixteen students (16.8%) suggested more training would help enhance their confidence. Like at the end of the tutor phase, the Connect system was felt to be an area where confidence was lacking. Five students specifically referred to the need for more training around Connect. But more training and support with other areas was also mentioned. Both were captured in the comments of one IPLDP student.

"More support with interviewing & better tuition in interviewing techniques. Poor support with connect during tutor period due to tutor's lack of knowledge has left me feeling I don't know what I'm doing on it."

Like the previous period many students mid-course still felt confidence would come with time on the job, with more support and training in areas where confidence may be lacking.

End of probation phase

Sixty-nine students (47.9%) did not provide any comments in relation to their confidence in policing knowledge, skills, and procedures at the end of the probation phase. The quantity of the comments was much less at this time point than the previous three. Forty-three (57.3%) of the 75 students who commented alluded to it now being a case of gaining experience from practice with some further training that would continue to grow their confidence.

“Only more experience over time.” (IPLDP)

“Just working through my career and dealing with different jobs.” (DHEP)

“More appropriate training on training days, less repetition in learning blocks.” (PCDA)

Some comments in relation to confidence appeared to be aimed at future cohorts based on their own experiences. The applicability of learning was a key factor in the comments. Some like one DHEP student suggested this was not always the case.

“Ensure the desk-based learning is applicable to the day-to-day use of such information of a response officer. Training school and response training seem a bit disjointed. It might help to give tutors access to key lesson material such as on statements.”

Across the four time periods measured, practical application of learning was consistently referred to. This DHEP student summed this up.

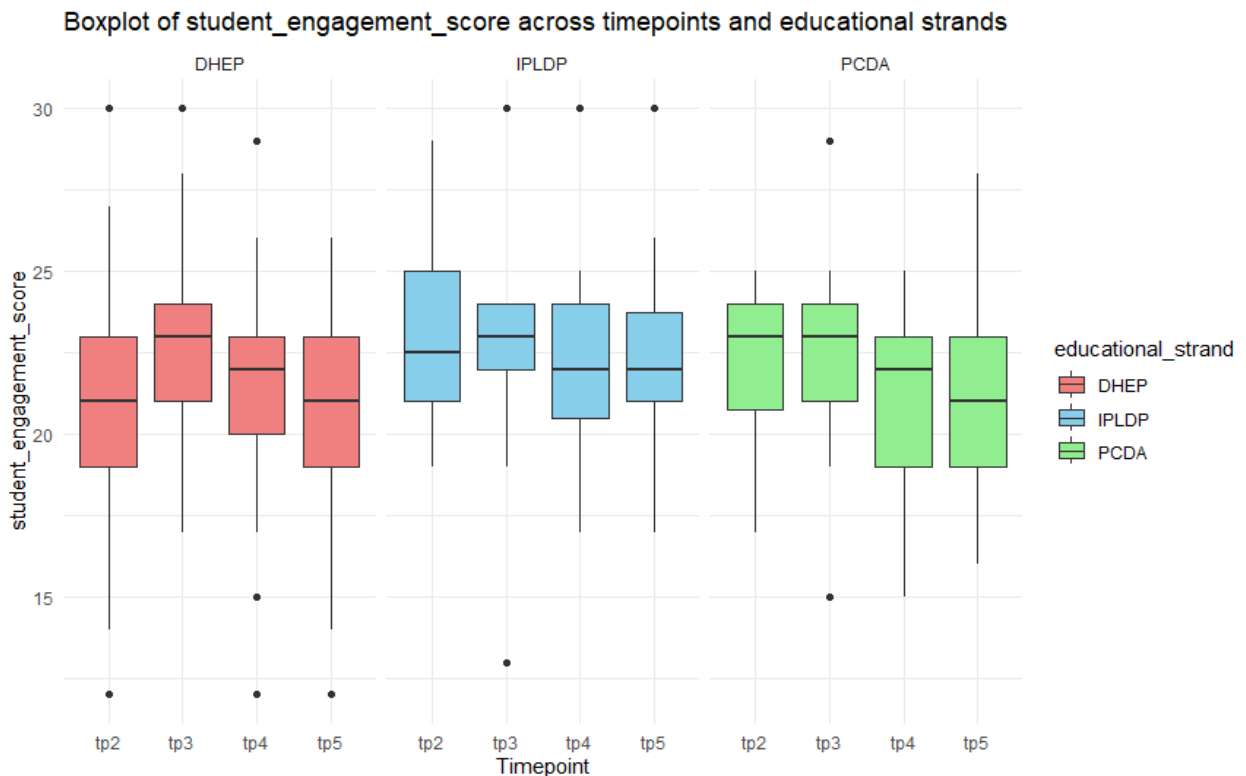
“More practical training during the probationary period. Many days in university have been spent covering topics that have been covered previously, sometimes on two or three other occasions. This is time that could have been used to obtain practical skills including intoxiliser training, phone read training etc which are all essential for being competent and efficient in the role. There is a particular shortage of this training on my team, and I feel this would have been a more useful way of spending my time.”

The number of students providing comments in relation to confidence consistently reduced at each measured time point. At the end of the classroom phase (tp2) 137 students provided comments, this reduced to 120 students at tp3 the end of tutor phase, to 95 students at tp4 mid-course, and finally 75 students at the end of the probation phase (tp5). The quantity of comments also reduced over time with the average number of words per student reducing at each time point from 26 words at tp2 to 12 words at tp5.

Self-Reported Engagement Scores

Analysis of total student engagement scores revealed a statistically significant difference in scores across the DHEP cohort ($F(3, 292) = 4.61, p = 0.045$). There were no statistically significant differences in student engagement scores across the IPLDP ($F(3, 68) = 0.40, p = 0.748$) and PCDA cohorts ($F(3, 108) = 2.66, p = 0.052$).

Figure 3: Student engagement scores by timepoints and educational strands.



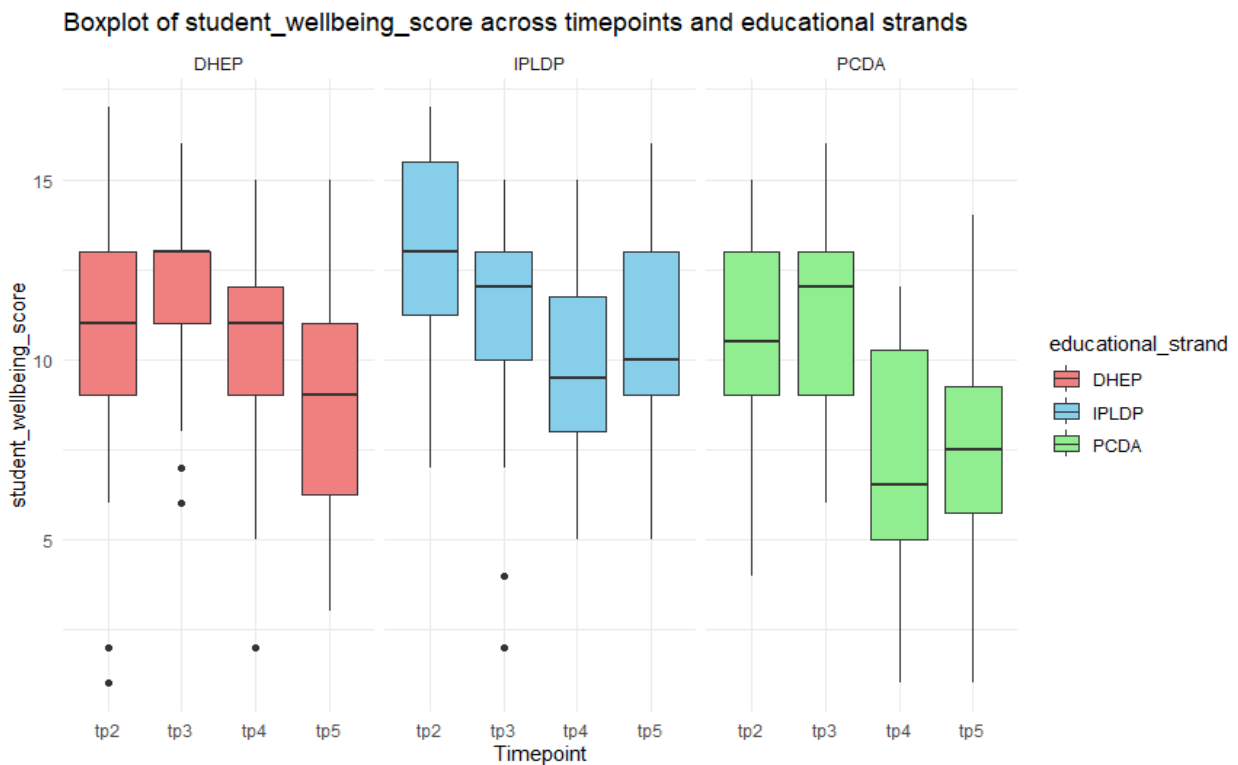
Tukey's HSD post-hoc tests found that it was the difference between tp2 and tp3 (adj. $p = 0.026$) and tp3 and tp5 (adj. $p = 0.36$) that presented statistically significant differences for the DHEP cohort. However, as Figure 3 illustrates, there was a general if slight decrease across all 3 cohorts towards the later stages of their course when compared to the beginning of their course.

Overall, the analysis revealed a slight decrease in student engagement towards the end of their courses. Although this trend was only statistically significant for the DHEP cohort when considering the higher level of student engagement in tp3 in comparison to other timepoints in that cohort.

Self-Reported Wellbeing Scores

The final Likert scale examined student wellbeing across the four timepoints. A one-way repeated measures ANOVA found a statistically significant difference in student wellbeing scores across all three cohorts: DHEPs ($F(3, 292) = 15.2, p < 0.001$); IPLDPs ($F(3, 68) = 3.50, p = 0.020$); and PCDAs ($F(3, 108) = 12.50, p < 0.001$).

Figure 4: Student wellbeing scores by timepoint and educational strand.



Post-hoc testing revealed that for the DHEP cohort, tp2 and tp5 (adj. $p < 0.001$), tp3 and tp4 (adj. $p = 0.015$), tp3 and tp5 (adj. $p < 0.001$) and tp4 and tp5 (adj. $p = 0.002$) all differed. For the IPLDP cohort, there was a statistically significant difference between tp2 and tp4 (adj. $p = 0.012$). Finally, for the PCDA cohort there was a statistically significant difference in wellbeing scores between tp2 and tp4 (adj. $p < 0.001$), tp2 and tp5 (adj. $p = 0.004$), tp3 and tp4 (adj. $p < 0.001$) and tp3 and tp5 (adj. $p < 0.001$).

As Figure 4 illustrates student wellbeing scores decreased across all three cohorts as their courses progressed. Furthermore, for all three cohorts, there appeared to be a consistent pattern of wellbeing decreasing at tp4, which then decreased further for the DHEP cohort, but balanced out for the IPLDP and PCDA cohorts.

Conclusion

There was a relatively consistent increase in self-reported confidence in policing knowledge, and self-reported confidence in policing skills and procedures across all three entry routes. However, there were some notable findings within the groups over time. At the end of the probation period (tp5), the PCDA cohort reported greater levels of overall confidence, confidence in their policing knowledge, and greater levels of confidence in their police skills and procedures. A clear explanation for the largest rise in this cohort could not be established from the students' comments. Although, the overall decrease in the number of comments at the end of probation could be indicative of how students no longer had a particular issue with confidence. Indeed, through their comments students consistently conveyed an expectation that confidence would naturally grow as their respective courses progressed. Therefore, it may be that student confidence increased over the timepoints as they felt they were sufficiently gaining the experience they needed to enhance their knowledge and skills. At the end of the probationary period (tp5) many students focused on how the course could be improved for future cohorts, illustrating a more reflective perspective from them as they reached the end of their course. It was clear from the analysis that confidence generally increased over time as expected by the students, with a couple of notable exceptions.

There were a couple of self-reported dips in confidence at different timepoints for those following the IPLDP and PCDA entry routes, but not by the DHEP students. For the IPLDP cohort the dip appeared at the end of tutor phase (tp3). Although this was only apparent in relation to confidence in policing knowledge. This suggests potentially greater focus on policing skills and procedures in the IPLDP entry route during the tutor phase. A dip in confidence was noted for PCDA students at the mid-course point (tp4). This applied to policing knowledge, and policing skills and procedure elements. Some insight into this dip may be gained from PCDA student responses to the question of what could have been done differently at this stage, where better communication and organisation was cited by some. This may be linked to what some students intimated as the disruptive nature of changing teams and training blocks, which appears to have had some impact on confidence. For the DHEP cohort, whilst they reported no drop in confidence only a steady increase across the timepoints, they consistently reported lower confidence than IPLDP and PCDA students. This may be partly explained by the lower percentage (29.5%) of DHEP students who had any policing experience either as a PCSO or Special Constable, compared to PCDA students (34.2%) and IPLDP students (50%). However, this would not explain why PCDA reported the greater levels

of confidence overall. The findings offer opportunity for further reflection on why dips during certain stages occurred, despite the expected overall uptrend. Of course, measuring student engagement across timepoints provides further opportunity for reflective practice.

IPLDP and PCDA students reported a greater level of engagement than their DHEP counterparts by the end of the classroom phase. Engagement measures related to the student's self-reflection on their ability to think about and deal with problems, and their feelings of usefulness and closeness to others. Analysis revealed a downward trend, albeit slight, as the courses progressed. It is noted that the early periods of the courses were blighted by national lockdowns as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, including a period between January and July 2021. It is conceivable that online education methods during this time had a long-term impact on engagement, as practical elements were reduced that may enhance individual efficacy around ability to think and deal with problems as they occur more naturally. It is logical to consider the impact these periods will have had on feelings of closeness to others. Student were not asked to elaborate on their responses and therefore it is difficult to examine fully the reasons for the downward trend in engagement. A downward trend was also visible in student wellbeing as the courses progressed.

Whilst all three cohorts reported a significant decrease in wellbeing from the end of classroom phase to the end of probation, IPLDP students typically reported higher levels of wellbeing than DHEP and PCDA students at tp2, the end of classroom phase and tp5, the end of probation. The lowest level score of wellbeing for the PCDA cohort, may reflect the difference in the length of time to complete the course, three years compared to two years for the other two entry routes. It is also noted that the assessment demands may be greater for the PCDA entry route. This may have impacted on the energy and stress levels of the PCDA students, as well as a reduction in time to engage in activities outside of work and study. It is worth noting that across all three cohorts, a decrease in wellbeing appeared to be particularly pronounced between tp3 end of tutor phase and tp4 mid-course. The results of the analysis indicate a reduction in wellbeing amongst the trainee police officers regardless of the entry route they undertake, perhaps a reflection that acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills to become a police officer is demanding.

The two metrics (engagement and wellbeing) may also be interlinked, as lower student wellbeing would likely lead to lower levels of engagement with their course and vice versa. Whilst there were no comments relating directly to these metrics, there were some comments relating to how students needed to balance the demands of training and operational policing,

pressure that would be likely to impact upon wellbeing and engagement through the latter stages of their courses as these demands became more pronounced.

Limitations

The study suffered some limitations in relation to data collection and analysis. Firstly, was that the data collection tool was created and administered by the police force, with only the end data being passed on to the research team. Some errors in the tools itself allowed students to miss answers and in some cases allow the selection of two options by mistake. Efforts were made by the learning and development department within the force following completion of the surveys to ensure data quality, such as contacting students to clarify responses.

Furthermore, the qualitative data from the survey provided a very brief insight into the students' experiences and views of the course, which did not provide a great deal of context in relation to the quantitative metrics. In future, a more suitable methodology for exploring the students' experiences would be to hold focus groups and / or interviews with a sample of students from each cohort. The more detailed information capture, as well as the ability to ask follow-up questions in relation to confidence, engagement, and wellbeing, would allow for more detailed insight into the students' experiences and thoughts about the course. This may also allow for a more nuanced understanding as to their levels of confidence, engagement and wellbeing as their course progressed, and the possible drivers behind changes to these personal states.

References

Birdsall, N. *et al.* (2022) Comparison of Students' views across Police Entry Routes: Report for Lancashire Constabulary, University of Central Lancashire, Preston.