Executive Summary
Reviewing the knowledge into practice effects of the CPRL Tutor Constable research on the development of the Tameside (GMP) academy

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1. Introduction

The retention of young-in-service recruits in policing is a growing challenge in the UK (Home Office, 2023; Dearden, 2023). The onboarding and young-in-service phase of a Police Officer's career is a time when gaps in their knowledge and practical skills are most pronounced. New officer recruitment through the national Uplift programme has reversed a decade of real terms cuts in Police Officer numbers but has created an environment where a great many officers are new to the service and are still in the process of gaining competency (Fright and Richards, 2023). Tutoring takes new Police Officers to the level of Independent Patrol Status (IPS), at which point they are considered safe and legal officers, but research has been clear that they are still to be considered early in their professional development of skills and practice (HMIC, 2002). Nonetheless, there are significant pressures on overstretched and understaffed police forces to use officers with IPS who are not yet post-probation and at the stage of Full Occupational Competency (FOC) as a resource for immediate deployment (Bowles et al., 2023).

Tameside District of GMP introduced a 15-week academy to support the bridging of the gap between IPS and full competency. This academy aimed to enhance officers' skills through a programme of structured learning, neighborhood policing experience, and rotations in CID and secondary response teams to provide a comprehensive training experience.

Research was conducted to examine the nature and effects of the extra supported post-IPS period (the academy) and to offer suggestions for how such projects could be improved or better implemented in the future. This research consisted of following a cohort of academy recruits through the academy in regular force visits, which were combined with interviews, focus groups and documentary analysis. The research also sought to explore how the knowledge generated from the CPRL Tutor Constable research program supported and influenced the design and implementation of the academy, looking at both the barriers and facilitators in getting this knowledge embedded into practice.

2. Findings

The research demonstrated that the perceived impact of the academy on student officers was largely positive, addressing key gaps in their knowledge and fostering confidence in exercising their powers independently. The academy effectively supported the acquisition of specific skills, such as file building, and provided opportunities for portfolio development. Networking opportunities and

exposure to different teams also contributed to its overall success. Overall, the academy proved to be a successful intervention, supporting officers' development at a critical stage in their careers.

The research did, however, highlight areas of improvement to ensure its continued sustainability and impact going forward that should be considered. These areas included:

- *Design, Planning and Development* - the academy was established in a practitioner-led manner, allowing the freedom to shape the curriculum based on expertise and experiences. This approach fostered an organic evolution of the academy's offerings, with adjustments made based on student officer feedback and experience. There were challenges with communication and staffing shortages. The schedule varied for each cohort, with rotations and inputs sometimes opportunistically planned, often leading to late changes and difficulties in communication between the academy staff and student officers. Despite positive aspects such as the location of the academy and the physical environment, staffing issues and high crime workloads posed significant challenges, leading to the implementation of new policies to manage the workload and improve support for student officers.

- *Academy activities and processes* – these involved various rotations aimed at exposing student officers to different policing tasks and teams. Shorter rotations were perceived to have varying degrees of usefulness, with rotations involving more practical involvement being more highly valued. The Neighbourhood rotation, despite not entirely meeting its intended objectives, was still regarded as successful in improving confidence and fostering interest in Neighbourhood policing. However, some students felt there were too many rotations of inconsistent quality, and logistical issues such as timing of annual leave and access to vehicles affected their training experience. There was a need for clearer policies to address these practical concerns and enhance the overall student officer experience.

- *Learning and Pedagogy* - the learning and pedagogical approach in the academy encompassed various methods and experiences. Classroom-based learning was generally valued, although less engaging for some student officers. However, the academy succeeded in fostering a respectful environment conducive to learning, where officers felt comfortable admitting ignorance and enhancing their confidence and skills. Practical components like scenario days and traffic operations were particularly successful in enhancing learning. However, there was a lack of recognition of different learning styles among student officers, and a more inclusive approach could have been adopted. The curriculum lacked explicit design, with a focus on addressing force-level knowledge gaps rather than a structured approach. Feedback loops helped refine the curriculum, but a more proactive approach to curriculum design and assessment could have been beneficial. The academy's slow-time approach to learning was generally appreciated. The timing of the academy was a point of debate among student officers, with some feeling it came too early in their training journey, while others thought it should have been introduced earlier.

    Overall, the academy's content was deemed valuable despite timing concerns. Integration of rotations into the curriculum and clearer articulation of learning objectives could have enhanced

their effectiveness.

- *Adapting to organisational challenges* - despite its success, the academy also led to unintended consequences for the force. For example, the academy officers were at times more highly trained in procedures, leading to clashes with more seasoned officers and potential resentment from officers in other districts who did not receive similar support, leading to a sense of unfairness. External scrutiny prompted discussions about replicating the academy elsewhere, but logistical constraints and competition with existing roles posed challenges. Additionally, the academy's success in retaining officers increased the workload for assessors, causing short-term backlogs. Resource constraints operating across the force limited the academy's ability to maintain its operations and protected time, especially when faced with increasing demands on response.

3.   Considerations

Moving forward, several considerations are essential for the continued success and wider implementation of the academy:

➢ Resource allocation – balancing competing demands for limited resources is crucial. Organisational-level strategic decisions may be necessary to prioritise the academy as an initiative.

➢ Sustainability - ensuring ongoing support and resources for the academy is vital for its continued effectiveness. Developing a clear theory of change to underpin the academy's goals can provide transparency and support its sustainability.

➢ Stakeholder engagement - addressing perceptions of inequity and maintaining stakeholder buy-in is crucial for the academy's long-term viability.

➢ Flexibility and adaptability - remaining responsive to changing circumstances and feedback is essential for adjusting the academy's design and implementation to maximise its impact.

➢ Learning design principles - reviewing the curriculum of the academy and incorporating learning design principles, such as protected time for reflection and active learning methods, can enhance its effectiveness. Drawing explicitly from recommendations for learner development can ensure delivery aligns with both capacity considerations and the needs of student officers.

While the academy shows promise as an evidence-based solution to address officer retention and professional development, navigating the organisational environment and addressing resource constraints will be vital for the successful wider implementation and sustainability of this or similar interventions in the future.

References

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