

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

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March 2024

1. Introduction

This project sought to assess the effectiveness of Tameside's (Greater Manchester Police) initiation of the 'Tameside District Academy' (hereafter, 'the academy') to structure the learning and development of new officers. In addition, the project examined the mechanisms through which the Centre for Policing Research and Learning's (CPRL) Tutor Constables research shaped the academy's approach and the impact of this knowledge into policing practice. This report is designed to complement the internal review conducted by Greater Manchester Police (GMP) into the academy, which focused on quantitative measures of the academy's success (available on request from GMP).

1.1 National and Force-level Context

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). The resulting skills and experience gaps on Response Teams, across many forces, has been a consistent theme of the CPRL's Tutor Constables research programme ([Cockcroft et al., 2022](#); [Cockcroft et al., 2023](#); [Bowles et al., 2023](#)).

GMP has improved its practice in the training and support of new staff in recent years but has struggled for consistency. In 2021/2022, the PEEL report for GMP summarised that "the force needs to improve how it is developing its workforce to be fit for the future" and "the force doesn't have an effective understanding of the skills of the workforce or the learning and development needs of the

staff” (HMICFRS, 2022). However, in the most recent PEEL report, progress was noted, with the inspectors stating that “the force seeks to support its student officers but should be more consistent” and noting that “the force has trialed some additional support and coaching for its students”, including the academy intervention assessed in this report (HMICFRS, 2023).

To meet the challenges detailed above, Tameside District of GMP put in place a 15-week academy to develop police officers from IPS towards a level of competency where they could be expected to take on a full role in response policing. It was hypothesised that this additional support, delivered at the correct time, would support the retention of these officers. A specific account of how the academy came into being and how it was organised is included below.

1.2 The Academy

Responding to the CPRL Tutor Constables research program (Cockcroft et al., 2022; Cockcroft et al., 2023; Bowles et al., 2023) and following internal force evaluations, the Tameside District of GMP identified gaps in their young-in-service recruit’s knowledge and practice in the period immediately following completion of their Independent Patrol Status (IPS), particularly around file building and investigations. As identified through the CPRL research and supported by comparative research on tutoring (see HMIC, 2002), onboarding of new recruits (Williams et al., 2022) and on the training needs for young-in-service officers (Williams and Sondhi, 2022) there are significant welfare and retention issues in addition to these training gaps. Specifically, the CPRL Tutor Constables research programme identified retention issues with students who had passed the tutor period and found themselves newly independent. These included a need for non-deployable periods and periods of protected learning for new officers to consolidate their learning and development, and a benefit of rotations around specialist teams for the development of new in-service officers’ knowledge of all aspects of policing.

The CPRL Tutor Constables Phase 3 report (Bowles et al. 2023) had also identified the immediate post-Independent Patrol Status (post-IPS) period as a frequently challenging time for students, who experience the triple burden of picking up a crime workload on shift, university work for the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship (PCDA) students in the form of the Evidence Based Research Project and completion of their third year modules, or other formal work on the Degree Holder Entry Programme (DHEP) or graduate route into policing, and the need to begin to evidence their Occupational Competency Portfolio (OCP) and complete work for their Assessors. In addition, these officers are often treated as a competent single crew at a time in their career when, many suggest, they could be better supported into their independent patrol phase.

In June 2023, Tameside District (led by District Commander Davies) responded to these issues by adding an extra 15-week period to student officers’ learning in the immediate post-IPS period following the research recommendation to trade off short-term capacity on Response Teams in favour of producing better recruits, at a greater rate of retention (fewer resignations) and who will be good, resilient officers in perpetuity. This reflects the need to ensure that the District was considering long-term priorities versus short-term thinking in their approach to officer development.

The 15-week period (the academy) included specialist support on some aspects of policing where extra input was deemed necessary (including file building and investigations), rotations around various teams to gain specific experience, and supported periods of independent patrol in city and town centres, to be supported by Police Community Support Officer (PCSO).

The academy was set up to run from Hyde Police Station, under the command of an Inspector, with the day-to-day running of the academy to be completed by a Sergeant and a Constable, who were given a great deal of autonomy to design the programme of support in such a way as they wished to support the goals of the academy.

They were to receive all Officers on the Division who had newly completed their tutoring period, which itself was organised around intakes beginning every five weeks. Therefore, every five weeks there was to be an intake of anywhere from two to 15 Officers arriving at the academy as a new cohort. The variable number was due to the different sizes of original intake into tutoring, and some students being out of their initial tutoring cohort due to having had an extended tutoring period.

The original design of the academy, which changed throughout the research period, was to provide student officers with:

1. Five weeks in structured learning within the academy, with short rotations around teams within the Force for exposure and experience, dedicated time to work on progressing crimes that has been assigned to students in their tutoring period, and training inputs on different aspects of police practice. Followed by:
2. Five weeks on a Neighbourhood Policing team, gaining experience of independent patrol in the structured and (compared to response policing slow paced) environment of town centre foot patrols. Followed by:
3. A final five-week rotation on CID teams and 'Secondary Response Teams' (teams supporting and following up on the actions of the Response Teams responsible for first response) to develop experience of other aspects of policing practice in a supporting role.

When the research began in August 2023, three cohorts had attended the academy since its establishment. At this time, emerging evidence had suggested that the new initiative had resulted in better retention of new officers and better crime progression statistics (less time before the crime is progressed or closed) on relevant teams. A new cohort of Tameside recruits were due to complete their tutor period and begin the new 15- week post-IPS supported period in August.

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this project were twofold:

- 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.

- 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. Methods

The research shadowed a cohort of officers that began with the academy in August 2023 as an immersive case study. Mixed methods were employed to achieve the research objectives. Interviews, focus groups, document analysis and a survey of the available data (including crime statistics, retention data, and completion percentage of students' Operational Competence Portfolio [OCP]) were used to assess the effect of the academy intervention on this cohort of young-in-service officers. The cohort were followed throughout their academy journey and given an After-Action Review as they completed their academy training, after ten weeks rather than 15 as had been initially planned.

The following methods were employed to achieve these objectives:

1. An in-depth case study of a cohort of 9 Tameside recruits which, included participant observation of officers in training situations.
2. 16 semi-structured interviews with new officers (10)¹, Academy staff (3), assessors (1), and senior decision makers (2) in Tameside to explore the logic of the new training period and its effects on student officers.
3. An After-Action Review (AAR) workshop for the new cohort, completed at the end of their ten-week period in the academy², capturing their views on what went well, what could have been improved, what their expectations were, and what the process ultimately delivered for them.

Interviews and the AAR were recorded, transcribed, tagged and thematically coded using NVivo 12.

3. Findings

3.1 Interpretating the Findings

The findings are designed to (1) evaluate the relative effectiveness of the Tameside academy against its stated aims and objectives, (2) suggest areas of potential improvement or further consideration were a similar project to be undertaken again, in Tameside, GMP or in another force, and (3) collate what can be learned about the difficulties of, and barriers to, ensuring that knowledge is put into practice within police learning and development (L&D) structures.

¹ We interviewed 8 of the 9 recruits in the cohort. Two of them were interviewed twice at different periods of their time in the academy.

² As we describe below, the fifteen-week academy period was cut to ten-weeks for the cohort we were following.

Direct quotations from interviews are included in blue.

The research acknowledges the need to protect and support the development of young-in-service police officers to be necessary and of the utmost importance. Tameside developed an excellent and important initiative with the academy, intervening in officer development at a period when it would most benefit retention and when these officers' training needs are most acute. As such, the academy has to be considered to be an immensely positive and timely intervention on behalf of officers-in-training.

The value of the academy was picked up in GMP's most recent PEEL report, where the inspector wrote in evidence for GMP's Adequate rating for "Building, supporting and protecting the workforce" that "one district [in GMP] has developed a training academy to support its new students. Students complete a 15-week structured short-term programme where they are attached to the district's various operational teams. This provides students with a greater knowledge and understanding of operational policing. Student officers told us that they value the additional support provided by the academy" (HMICFRS, 2023).

The research recognises the academy's great value as an intervention as being immediately apparent in the existing evidence. GMP's quantitatively focused internal investigation of the academy (internal GMP evaluation available on request). provides excellent support for the academy as creating positive effects for the retention of young-in-service officers, and meeting training needs. Therefore, we wish to take as a given that the academy is a positive intervention, and instead focus on providing constructive feedback concerning other factors that could have been considered of in the design and implementation of the academy, and lessons that can be learned from the ways in which the academy operated and was transformed over its time in operation.

Such a focus on learning points and constructive areas for improvement should not be read as showing that the researchers concluded that the academy was a weak intervention or did not provide positive impact, but rather we have written this report to fill in gaps still existing outside of GMP's internal evaluation.

3.2 Design, Planning and Development of the Academy

3.2.1 Academy design

"the aim was to create a culture of learning...retaining student officers in a learning space for longer before they're just given a set of car keys and thrown to the wolves. It was moving away from the sink or swim culture in policing!"

The academy was initiated to (1) address specific gaps in student officer knowledge, particularly around GMP's reported weakness as a force in file building and investigating crimes, (2) build student officer confidence in their practice immediately post Independent Patrol Status [IPS] and encourage student officers to be comfortable in completing undefended duties, (3) build 'street craft', by which senior leaders mean the intuitive, practical, and craft knowledge side of policing practice, (4) allow space for student officers to progress in their portfolios towards Full Occupational Competency (OCP), and (5) provide opportunities to experience policing work on teams other than Response and to build relationships and network with these teams in such a way as to provide benefit for student officers' further career. It should be noted that these five goals are all ambitious

and that the academy had a large task to fulfil, by design. We return to these goals in order to evaluate the academy against them in section 3.3 of this report.

“They’re independent officers, so we need them to get back to street craft going, learning the skills. Bread and butter policing. Stop searching. And doing this as independent officers.”

Practitioner-led

The academy was designed in a ‘bottom-up’ fashion, with the officers seconded to set up and run the academy having a great degree of freedom to design the academy schedule and curriculum based on their learning and operational experience and their idea of what inputs (specialist trainings), rotations (to external teams) and other specific training would be most appropriate. In this way, the academy became practitioner-led and practitioner-designed. This had advantages, as the academy could evolve somewhat “organically”, with poorly reviewed inputs and rotations being removed or modified for subsequent cohorts. This meant that no cohort of the academy had the same experience, but an iterative approach ensured that the academy’s offer improved over time. There are also drawbacks to a purely practitioner-led approach, as we will see in 3.2.3 Learning and Pedagogy.

“We had an overall intention. We had an idea. We had parameters. And then we were allowed to build it. And build it is what we did. And that, I found, was an incredibly refreshing approach to everything policing, which usually is top down, system driven, as opposed to practitioner built.”

Opportunism

The design of rotations and input was, by necessity, opportunistic (based on the availability of individuals and teams). As many of them involved the cooperation of operational policing teams, these were subject to the late changes and cancellations that occur in the course of normal policing practice.

“But [planning rotations] was mainly [a question of] getting the buy-in from the units. Because are they going to end up getting more work to do. Because they’re so busy already, it’s going to be an extra pressure.”

Design of the academy schedule

An iterative approach meant that each cohort had a different schedule within the academy. However, on the whole a similar approach was taken with each cohort. There would be an initial five weeks housed within the academy, to comprise of a mixture of “crime days” (where students officers could progress their crimes workload, with support from the academy staff), inputs, trainings and small (one day) rotations. A second five weeks would be spent on Neighbourhood teams, gaining experience of independent patrol in a more protected manner than they would on Response. A final five-week period (removed in October 2023) would contain rotations to CID and to a secondary Response team (an investigation progression unit).

Communication of schedule and changes

Due in part to unavoidable late changes in inputs and rotations, and in part to some staffing absence issues, there were problems in communicating the schedule of the academy and the frequent changes to activities and deployments. There were also some gaps in communication with students about the purpose of the academy, the purpose of individual parts of the academy curriculum, and in what students could expect to be asked to do next after the end of the academy period. This led to the academy being evaluated as somewhat disorganised in some areas by the cohort that were the focus of the research.

“This was called an academy day, and because we’ve not had one before, we didn’t really know what to expect. If we knew that we could get cars and go out, we would’ve started doing that a lot sooner. But yes, that felt a bit trial and error, if I’m being quite honest.”

Staffing

The academy was staffed with two officers, a Sergeant and a Constable. Both were brought into the academy project opportunistically due to their availability, but both had appropriate experience and their practice was reviewed very well by students. It was clear, however, from interviews with students and staff, that the academy was under-staffed when compared to a staffing level that they would have considered ideal for the task; it did not have sufficient staff to be resilient to staff leave and illness; it did not have sufficient staff to comfortably cope with the number of student officers that it had incoming; and, it did not have sufficient staff to achieve all of its ambitious aims (as detailed in 4.2.1).

“So, two staff isn’t a lot, a Sergeant and a coordinator isn’t a lot for the 25 officers³. On a response team, you’d have typically five Sergeants here for that, and the Inspector.”

Location

The location of the academy in Hyde was noted as an advantage by many staff and student officers. It was clear that it was harder to abstract student officers from the academy as they were removed from the base of Response team operations at Ashton-under-Lyne [Ashton]. Hyde was deemed to be ‘out of the way’ and frustrating when students were required to be in attendance at Ashton. However, there were positive comments made about the physical space and environment of the academy, including the way in which the academy’s main area had been designed and decorated by academy staff.

“I think we’ve been really lucky with our location. That was good. What we’ve been able to... Because if we would have been at Ashton, we wouldn’t have been able to be protected as much as we have been, although we have been used and abused. The space is brilliant.”

Crime workload

One of the impacts of the short staffing of the academy, and of the GMP policy that student officers carry the crimes that they pick up over their tutor period with them into their post-IPS period, was that the academy staff became responsible for a large number of crimes, many of which were

³ 25 officers was the total number in the academy, across all cohorts, at the time of the interview.

complex crimes requiring a large amount of work for their progression. Student officers and academy staff struggled with this high load, student officers as they are early in their career, and academy staff due to the sheer volume of crimes they were holding.

This increased crime load in the academy led to a new 'crime policy' being initiated during the life of the academy, where student officers were limited in the number of crimes they could be carrying in the academy (to five) and crimes, especially complex crimes, and crimes with vulnerable victims, were pushed back to Tutors on Response teams. This led to some animosity from Response teams towards the academy for what was seen as adding to their workloads.

'Crime days', for student officers to process their crimes, were effective as a support, but were poorly communicated and directed by academy staff in a small number of cases early in academy rotations, leading to a reduction on their value.

"What we realised as well was we'd need to build in a few more crime days. Because the crimes they were bringing with them from the tutor phase still needed to be dealt with. Some of them were bringing really complex, high-risk domestic violence investigations and they just didn't have the skillset to deal with it or the time on the rotation. So, we built in more crime days, which I had to look at how can we then develop or target specific areas."

3.2.2 Academy activities and processes

Rotations

The academy included a number of rotations in the curriculum, from short exposures to particular teams (such as the Sexual Offenders Management Unit [SOMU], District Tasking Team [DTT], front desk, offender management) to longer rotations on Neighbourhood teams, CID and secondary Response teams.

Shorter rotations were evaluated by student officers as having been of variable quality and usefulness. Individual student interest was a factor, but it was also clear that some rotations allowed student officers to be more operationally involved than others, and that the rotations that offered student officers more to do practically, such as the DTT rotation, were evaluated as being considerably more valuable. Student officers spoke about how these rotations had been successful as networking opportunities and as opportunities to try out potential specialisms and routes within the force. This is consistent with the original intention of the rotations.

"They enjoyed it. They benefitted greatly from the first five weeks, which is all the rotations of team exposures and what this team does, what this team can't do, what this team can do. Because that's something you don't pick up for a long time with experience."

Neighbourhood rotation

The five-week Neighbourhood Policing Team [Neighbourhood] rotation was intended by academy staff to provide an opportunity for solo patrol in a structured manner for student officers, so as to pick up easy to process and low tariff crime and become 'comfortable being seen and wearing the uniform.' It was intended that this rotation would be an opportunity to pick up 'street craft' and to gain confidence in acting independently.

It was found that student officers were, instead, made more part of Neighbourhood teams' existing patrols whilst on this rotation and had limited opportunities for the independent town centre patrols that were originally envisioned by academy staff.

However, the Neighbourhood team rotation was held up by student officers as successful, useful for improving confidence, and led to two officers from the cohort we followed transferring to Neighbourhood policing teams, having been exposed to this area of policing and having made useful contacts.

"It was a great experience for me. Because you're out there every day. You're locking up. You're processing offenders. You're out in the community. You're building files. You have quick turnarounds. Convictions. It's all cutting your teeth on basic slow time stuff."

Number and quality of rotations

Some students commented on the number of rotations critically. More critical comments claimed that rotations were of variable quality, were too many in number, and were too disconnected from their other training (inputs provided by the academy). Some rotations had more 'buy-in' from teams external to the academy and were designed to be more engaging and useful for student officers (e.g., DTT, investigating death), but academy staff struggled with the lack of support provided by some other teams (e.g. front desk, custody).

Logistics and practicalities

The academy suffered from student officers, who had been prevented from taking annual leave throughout their initial training and tutoring periods, taking leave within the initial weeks of the academy. Often this fell in periods where the most useful inputs and trainings (file-building and investigating crime) were scheduled.

Students who had not completed their policing driving qualifications were disadvantaged on crime days, when they were less able than their peers with access to vehicles to visit victims and to progress and follow up on their crime workload.

Further, the crime workload carried by students from their tutor period was an issue to the academy being as effective as it could have been, as staff and students were 'swamped' by crimes that needed to be progressed, until the initiation of the new Tameside 'crime policy' part way through the life cycle of the Academy (see 4.2.1 *Crime workload*).

The practicalities of the student experience and the logistics of their academy deployment could have been given closure attention and clearer policies developed to support the student officer experience from the outset.

3.2.3 Learning and Pedagogy

Classroom based learning

A number of inputs and trainings (with the exception of practical scenarios and a traffic operation) were delivered in a classroom environment. Student officers reflected that trainings and inputs were useful and generally valuable. However, student officers noted that they were not always engaging or easy to follow for all. Student officers reflected on the classroom feeling like being “back at school” and noted how this led to some student officers disengaging or even “acting up” like “school kids.” Student officers commented that the classroom atmosphere contributed to them being less proactive and engaged on days when inputs and trainings were being offered, as they would not be productive or proactive in their work during their free time and breaks.

“Other [feedback was] that classroom-based content was not as useful for students. And they much preferred the hands-on, learn by doing approach with real examples than having a fictitious example to work on.”

Creating a positive environment

Our after-action review (AAR) noted that students felt that the academy had been successful in creating a respectful environment for learning. They further noted that the academy felt like a ‘safe space’ to admit ignorance, and that this in turn led to their growing confidence with their practice. They evaluated the academy as having made them more well-rounded as officers as well as being more confident and consistent in their policing skills.

Rotations and applying learning

There was an opportunity missed in the planning of the rotations (see 3.2.2), where these could have been designed to follow on from and directly reinforce, or otherwise add to, material learned in inputs and trainings. Rotations were somewhat disconnected from the general flow of academy training, which focused on force-level gaps in knowledge around investigating crime and on file-building.

Input quality

Some inputs were evaluated as being particularly effective by students. Other inputs were, however, evaluated by student officers as being less useful, not particularly engaging, or both. These were generally removed from the schedule for subsequent cohorts through good iterative processes of continuous improvement from cohort to cohort.

The in-house investigating crime training, which led directly into file-building training and included a scenario day, was a centerpiece of the academy period. This was reviewed as being especially well designed and valuable by all interviewed. The file-building input was of particular value and led to reports of academy graduates being more knowledgeable on the building and progressing of CPS files than their more experienced Response team colleagues. It was suggested that all existing officers should be given this particular training.

The focus of this period of intervention was around one extended scenario built around a fictitious domestic violence (DV) crime, that led through from investigating the crime into building a file. This was an excellent example of training being made more effective through the use of real world and realistic scenarios (see Muijs and Reynolds, 2017).

Scenario days and the traffic operation were seen as very successful, demonstrating the value of non-classroom based and practical components to learning. Crime investigation and interview scenario days were held at intervals within the academy period. These were reflected on by student officers as being more realistic and of more value than scenario trainings held during the period of their initial training (Sedgley Park). Realistic scenarios to test learning were held on two or three occasions for each cohort. These were excellent opportunities to test learning and to test student officers' confidence within controlled conditions.

The traffic input, where student officers completed a full traffic live operation was evaluated as excellent by all involved and was an example of particularly innovative items of learning within the academy's curriculum.

"I might have done a little bit more work at the start around the quality of the inputs, because I think some of those grew a bit organically, and some, I think, the students thought were better than others."

Feedback loops

There were student evaluations built into the academy that led to less successful rotations, inputs and trainings being removed from the schedule for future cohorts (e.g., custody and front desk rotations). These evaluations generally worked well to keep the best parts of the academy's offer. This does, however, reflect a reactive approach to designing a curriculum. Starting from a position of 'what do these students need to know and in what order' would be an alternative approach that would lead to potentially useful inputs that just had not worked (either because of the personnel delivering the training, the specific materials used etc.) in that particular iteration being retained and improved rather than discarded.

"To be honest with you, the first [cohort] actually really went to plan the way that I planned it. It was the ones following it that I think when we've had to swap and change things around because things weren't working in a particular week. Or [something] wasn't necessary."

Learning styles

There was little recognition in the academy that student officers have different learning styles, different needs, and different personal strategies for approaching their training gaps. The classroom approach favoured for inputs and trainings worked better for some students (typically those with a background of learning in essay subjects) and less well for others (including for neuro-diverse students and students with additional learning needs). More practical material beyond the scenarios, more audio-visual material (although some was used to good effect), more activities and creative work, and more small group discussion-based tasks would all have made for more inclusive classroom-based components, although many of these techniques were already used in some inputs and trainings.

Curriculum design

There was very little explicit curriculum design in the academy, beyond an identification of force-level gaps in skills and knowledge and an anecdotal sense of what senior staff understood to be gaps and weaknesses in student officers' initial training. A training needs assessment and some pedagogical design so as to organise the curriculum into a logical order and reinforce learning with appropriate rotations would have helped to embed student officers' learning.

There also could have been more (formative and summative) assessment and evaluation within the process to check student officer progress and to evaluate inputs and trainings.

A reflexive learning diary was trialed, which was an excellent innovation and could have had a great positive impact. However, there was ultimately not sufficient buy-in and reinforcement to make this an effective intervention.

“INTERVIEWER: There wasn't a particular learning [behind the academy]?”

PARTICIPANT: No, I've often [questioned] the thinking around it. [The approach was], we have competent officers that are either being deemed competent, lawful and safe, but they're not quite yet capable. So, how do we make them capable. And that was just a theory.”

Slow time learning

Student officers were very positive on the extra time given to learning in the academy and the 'slow time' approach taken to student officer development. One described it positively as 'a middle point between tutoring and Response.' Some students felt that their progress was 'slowed down' by their removal from Response at the end of their tutor period, but a large majority of student officers came to appreciate the benefits of a slowed down approach to learning, and, by the end of their academy rotation, students were frequently citing the pace of work and learning on the academy as a positive part of the intervention.

“I think that's what I found tricky about the academy. Everyone is at different levels. Yes. And it felt a bit like a copy of a classroom... It's just I think when you get a bunch of people of a similar age. With everyone being at different levels, you have some people maybe not being confident or not understanding things or not have these experiences. I just felt like things were a bit slow at times. That's all.”

A significant issue affecting the success of rotations was the lack of embedding of the rotations into the wider curriculum of the academy. For example, the logic behind each rotation was not well articulated to students (in the form of 'what do we [the academy staff] want students to get out of this rotation?') and there was no mechanism in place to follow up on and embed learning from the rotations, or feed learning from the rotations into further practice and allow that learning to inform subsequent activities. Rotations work best when it is clearly articulated to students what they are meant to take from them and when these learnings are tested, reflected on, or otherwise evaluated.

“There used to be [in policing] plenty more rotations within your probationary period. There isn't that flexibility now because of the numbers and the demand. So, it wasn't that I came out of, let's say, tutorship and then I spent an attachment here, there and everywhere. It was a bit more ad hoc... So, whilst I may have been exposed to different aspects over a period of 18 months, we were

trying to condense that into the first five weeks to try and capture that experience.”

The timing of the academy

Student officers differed in their opinions when asked as to whether the academy inputs, trainings and rotations came too late or too early in their introduction to policing. Some saw themselves as being at a very early stage of their learning journey and thought that the academy would have been more effective after some more time spent on Response teams, learning the essential craft of policing. Others were of the opinion that the academy, as it addressed what they saw as basic training needs that should, in their opinion, have been addressed before they gained IPS, came too late in their development. We suggest that this tension may be due to how different student officers’ level of experience, knowledge and confidence is at the completion of the tutoring phase and that it would have been impossible for the academy to have emerged at a time in officers’ training when it was perfectly pitched for everyone. What was not variable was how student officers were clear that the information imparted by the academy was valuable and a necessary part of training.

“Other than that, I do think [the academy] was a good idea, but I just think it happens far too soon. One minute you’d get your head around something and then we moved straight on to something else. And then I feel like someone’s going to go and throw me on Response in a minute and I’m not going to have a clue.”

3.2.4 Organisational factors

Resourcing

Student officers noted that the academy was under-resourced, both in terms of staff and in terms of equipment. A lack of vehicles available was cited as a particular issue. The limited budget for the academy was a concern for staff and for student officers alike.

Officers abstracted from academy duties

The academy proved to be, in some ways, not as resilient to changes in the Tameside District and to GMP as a force as would have been ideal for its continued successful functioning. During the academy’s operational period, changes to demand, throughput of new officers, and force organisation led to decreased numbers on Response teams and a shortfall of available Response officers. Academy student officers were abstracted from their academy duties, sometimes at very short notice, with increasing frequency throughout the operational period of the academy.

“The only way to protect them, like you said, is to do it before they arrive and they become a visible resource, that tangible individual, but in doing that, you lose out the benefit of the realism and the application of policing to them. It’s really hard to get that balance. I don’t think you can do it properly.”

Senior buy-in and support

Academy staff and managers spoke about lacking ‘top level cover’ and ‘senior buy-in’ for their work in the academy, leading to their being vulnerable to student officers being abstracted for other

duties. The situation become worse over time as academy student officers were increasingly seen as a 'resource to be used.' It was noted that, once such abstraction has begun, it can easily become a 'norm' and increase in pace and severity.

It was recognised that, under the command-and-control hierarchy of policing, and given the unpredictable and variable demands of policing, it is always possible that abstraction will occur. However, on the academy, deployment sometimes became a 'battle' between officers over the deployment of academy student officers and a 'race' to achieve senior support so as to either keep student officers on their academy schedule or to deploy them elsewhere. This added to a sense of uncertainty and a lack of clarity experienced by student officers in the academy and was evaluated by these officers as a drawback to the academy experience as it led to uncertainty.

Rules of engagement'

It was noted by academy staff and managers that the 'rules of engagement' around the abstraction and redeployment of academy student officers were unclear, and that clearer guidelines and principles could have allowed for better forward planning and less disruption to the academy schedule. It was acknowledged that putting in place such guidelines can be complex when senior managers have different and competing priorities and value differently the importance of Learning and Development (L&D) interventions.

“[Abstraction from the academy] wasn't there from the beginning though. We were quite protected to start off with. And then it started to come in. I don't know whether it's due to the new response model that's come in. The new crime allocation. The new Crime Futures [Policy].”

3.3 Perceived impact of the academy for the student

Key message: IPS does not equate to confidence in the exercise of powers

The research recognised that Tameside was correct to realise that student officers completing their tutoring period do not very often feel confident to independently patrol or to exercise their powers. Other research (HMIC, 2002) clearly demonstrated that IPS may legally denote that an officer is 'safe and legal', but this is significantly different from these officers being able to competently undertake their duties along (as evidenced by 'Full Occupational Competency').

The period immediately after the tutoring phase is a period of stress and high workload for student officers across all UK police forces and is a period when retaining new officers is particularly difficult (Bowles et al., 2023).

Tameside's academy programme recognised these important structural issues and initiated a period of slow time learning, structured and supported learning and practice, which led directly to student officers being more confident in exercising their powers and patrolling independently. This had immediate measurable effects in supporting Tameside to retain more student officers (as evidenced in the Tameside academy Briefing, an abridged version of which is available on request).

A small number of students within the study reported that they had 'gone backwards' with their confidence in the academy, due to having fallen out of the practice of daily patrol that they had

developed whilst on Response. However, the majority had clearly benefited from the academy in terms of both their knowledge and their confidence.

Below, we evaluate the goals of the academy against the evidence:

- (1) Specific gaps in officer knowledge were addressed by inputs, trainings and rotations. Academy graduates were often more knowledgeable on specific aspects of police work (for example file building) than the teams they went on to join after the academy. This produced tensions of its own, with academy graduates seen, in some cases, as 'over-working' or as 'showing up' more experienced Response officers.

"I'm glad because now I've got time to develop myself further. I've already got some training... I've already learnt quite a few things and I've been here a week on this academy. And I think I've got fifteen weeks of learning, progressing myself, I'm looking forward to it."

- (2) Student officer confidence was clearly built on and supported by the academy. Student officers were, on the whole, more likely to say that they felt confident patrolling on their own, understanding and exercising their powers than before the academy and also (anecdotally) compared to their peers who had not been through the academy program.

"I think it's given me a lot of reassurance, because it's showed me that I know much more than I think I know. And I feel like when I would be asked questions, what does this mean, what [unclear], I feel like, to an extent, I know the answers. And seeing my colleagues come and ask me for help. That's really reassuring."

- (3) It is unclear whether or not the academy supported the acquisition of 'street craft', due in part to how nebulous the concept is. Neighbourhood rotations were popular but were not seen by academy staff as quite the 'street craft' acquisition solution that they were originally envisaged to be. Further work to understand the term 'street craft' (or craft knowledge in policing), and to unpack the ways in which the Police separate 'academic/theoretical' knowledge (techne) from 'practical' knowledge (metis) within their own understanding of learning and enskilment would be useful to frame what practitioners understand the 'problem' of craft knowledge acquisition to be (see Kumar, 2019).

- (4) The academy allowed time and space for student officers to progress their portfolios for accreditation at FOC. Numerical data for this, showing that academy cohorts were often significantly in front of non-academy comparative cohorts in their completion of their portfolios is available elsewhere (see GMP internal report available on request). The academy was also able to particularly target parts of the portfolio that are hard to achieve in the course of 'normal' Response team policing, for example traffic related skills and community engagement requirements.

"They very quickly realised the benefits of the portfolio, what [the academy is] going to achieve on there. It's the kind of realisation now that we then brought in a portfolio input for the officers to explain what the portfolio is and what they can achieve whilst they're in the academy."

(5) The networking effects of inputs, trainings and rotations were small but significant (as evidenced by academy students opting to join the Neighbourhood policing team on completion of their Neighbourhood rotation). Students commented that meeting officers from other teams had been 'useful' and anticipated that this would make some aspects of their ongoing policing careers easier.

"It's building the relations as well. I already knew a few of them, but in terms of...as far as progressing crimes further, I've got... I've now got contacts, they've left email addresses, all that. Phone numbers or collar numbers, and they're contacts where I can go to."

It is clear that, when compared against its implicit aims, the academy was a successful intervention at a crucial time in a young-in-service officers' development.

4. Discussion and Considerations

4.1 The Academy Programme

The academy programme was (at least partially) about addressing gaps in other areas of L&D. It is clear that the academy - for all its successes in building student confidence and in providing exposures for student officers to other parts of force other than Response teams - was also designed to address key gaps in student officers' initial training and tutoring. The academy would not exist in the form it took if the initial training and tutoring periods undertaken by new recruits were more rigorous, effective, and if Tutor and Trainer evaluations of officers' competency were more reliable.

This addressing of gaps "down the line" from the original training period made sense in some ways; student officers could be deployed to various teams without the support of a Tutor and could practically engage in some of their learning in fully operational contexts. However, there were also some issues with additional training coming at this point in the student officers' journey. For example, student officers (as we have seen in 3.2.4) were seen, by some supervisors, as a resource of competent officers to be deployed, or even as 'hiding' from deployment in an academy that was a 'luxury' rather than a necessity. Officers who had been part of Response teams in their tutor period were 'taken away' from those teams and, therefore, felt a loss that they would not have been felt as if they had been through the academy earlier in their career. Additionally, trainers from the initial training period (at Sedgley Park and at Salford University), in some cases, saw the existence of the academy as an implicit critique of their practice and were not always entirely supportive of its work.

This section addresses some further implications of the academy existing to address gaps and weaknesses elsewhere:

Officers have different pre-recruitment experiences and needs, and these officers respond differently to the speed and pace of training, learning, and tutoring. Consequently, the academy was receiving student officers with dramatically different needs and was attempting to design a curriculum that addressed all of their varied needs. The effect of this was that, for some the academy was of clear and immediate value, but for others the pace was too slow. These more experienced officers, who in many cases had a wealth of experience as PCSOs, gained less value from the academy, and in some cases saw the academy as a brake in their development.

Academy graduates are officers who are trained to a high standard regarding procedures, but if they are still young-in-service officers, they are then likely to clash with more experienced officers on Response teams. The academy was successful in creating knowledgeable officers, especially around force-level gaps on procedures for investigating crime and file-building. This, however, formed a potential source of tension, where academy graduates were viewed by some more experienced officers as inexperienced, but also over-diligent in some aspects of practice. Academy graduates were generally praised by their new supervisors, but their new knowledge and attention to procedural detail was also not universally welcomed by all of their new colleagues.

The success of the Academy in addressing specific training gaps had a number of unintended consequences that worked against its ongoing success. Specifically:

- (1) The academy was used by student officers on other Districts, in the context of Regulation 12 and Regulation 13 cases, as evidence that they had not received the top standard of support. There was, more broadly, a sense of irregularity between Tameside and other Districts of GMP, leading to some envy and a sense of unfairness being fostered by some student officers who had not received academy support.
- (2) Successes of the academy led to some external scrutiny and a desire to create a replicable version that could be used in other Districts. Ironically, this was one of the reasons why Tameside's 15-week academy project (not deemed replicable on other Districts) was rolled back.
- (3) The success of the academy file-building input led to a desire to 'roll out' the training to more experienced officers. This would not have been sustainable for the academy as it was designed (see 4.2 sections on Staffing and Resourcing) and would have competed with its main role. There was some resentment from more experienced officers on the Tameside District that they had not been given the opportunities afforded to academy graduates.

The academy's success in retaining student officers and those student officers' higher rate of portfolio completion put more stress on the limited number of Tameside Assessors, who found that they had a higher-than-expected amount of work project to assess and found themselves with a short-term backlog of work.

4.2 Knowledge into practice

Getting research into practice is complex with many well documented facilitators and barriers underpinning this process (e.g., Lum and Koper, 2017; May et al., 2016), some of which were operating in this project and impacted its implementation into practice and continued sustainability. The study identified both positive aspects and challenges associated with implementing this innovation into practice. Positive aspects included:

- *Origin and Design:* The academy was developed internally as a response to identified needs within the force, a recognition that more was required to support officer retention and their continued professional development following their initial training and tutoring period. This is an example of a proactive approach to problem solving.

- *Evidence-informed:* The academy was ‘research-led’, indicating solid theoretical foundations and a systematic approach to addressing the problem of officer retention. The evolution of the academy during the research period, from cohort to cohort, was practitioner-led and was (to a limited extent) informed by an evidence base, both in terms of evaluations from cohorts of the academy and a wider amount of research and literature on the training needs of young-in-service officers (see Cockcroft et al., 2022; Cockcroft et al., 2023; HMIC, 2002).
- *Ownership and Leadership:* There was a clear sense of ownership and leadership at the local level with individuals with leadership responsibility championing the academy and shaping its implementation.
- *Perceived improvement:* Those involved in the design and delivery of the academy believed that it was an improvement over the existing situation, suggesting internal buy-in (at the local level) and confidence in its effectiveness. This was reinforced by performance measures from the various cohorts as to its short-term impact.
- *Testability and Adaptability:* The academy was piloted within the force, allowing for adjustments based on feedback and evidence.

There were, however, some challenges to its implementation which should not have been surprising given the organisational complexity of a force as large as GMP. Most notable of these included:

- *Competing demands within a wider organisational context:* The academy, like many pilot programmes that are given limited space and budget within police forces, was not sufficiently resilient to force-level changes and demand fluctuations to enable it to keep its shape and function within a fast-changing landscape of police practice. In this case, wider force changes (specifically a new crime policy plan, new crime allocation guidance, changes to numbers through Uplift, changes to the Tutor Unit, and the identification of tutoring as a weakness in GMP) meant that there were critical shortages across the force and changes to deployment priorities that impacted on the academy. The academy was not sufficiently resilient by design to withstand these changes, lacking the consistent on-hand senior support, the resourcing and established role within the force that would have put it in a more resilient and sustainable position. This lack of resilience manifested as uncertainty surrounding the academy’s role and future from very early on in the academy’s lifespan, and therefore in a lack of clarity in communications between academy staff and student officers. Both this uncertainty and the poor communication of changes proved to be destabilising for the student officer experience.
- *Resource restrictions/constraints:* Decisions across the force needed to be made as to where to allocate its finite resources and this was sometimes at the expense of the academy. For example, the unanticipated demand on response during the research period led to multiple requests from other senior leaders across the force for the academy officers to fill the gap which negatively impacted on the academy’s ‘protected’ time. Linked to this were the increasing demands on first the student officers and then the academy staff in managing the crime load,

further reducing available capacity. This force demands on resources competed with academy needs. A decision was reached to scale back the academy in length from 15 weeks to 10 weeks in an effort to combat this.

- *Perceptions of inequity of opportunity for those cohorts going through the academy over those who were not offered this opportunity:* Scaling up this intervention across the force was explored to combat this, but the research team were led to understand that consensus of opinion could not be reached as to how this could be achieved within current resourcing constraints.
- *There was no clear Theory of Change underpinning this approach, and changes occurred rapidly rather than being informed by robust evidence and an underpinning strategy:* This reactive approach could be explained through some structural factors. For example, business case and planning timescales encourage fast experimental pieces of work that are tested for a time and evaluated yet are usually not given a long lead-in period or space for careful design to be undertaken. Additionally, budgets tend to be restrictive for L&D interventions, especially pilots and experimental programmes of work, meaning that planning has to be fast and only resource-light interventions can be envisioned and tested. A Theory of Change and a robust system of evaluation and adjustments, utilising some pedagogical techniques and focusing on curriculum design, would have turned the academy into a piece of 'Action research' (Adelman, 1993). Such a piece of research could have both achieved more of its intended outcomes, and also provided a more robust evidence-base, which would potentially have allowed the academy to become a more sustainable and better embedded part of the Tameside L&D offer.
- *Learning and Development is too often seen as a luxury rather than a necessity for solving wider force-level issues:* This research adds to a wealth of data (Hartley and Khalil, 2018; Khalil et al., 2019; Fernie et al., 2019) that suggests that policing in the UK has a significant problem in embedding Learning and Development as a core and foundational part of police practice. Trainings, tutoring, CPD etc. are too often seen as luxuries or add-ons rather than vital parts of addressing core policing issues of all kinds. L&D is too seldom given the status and space required to produce the most successful and sustainable interventions. Frequent changes of L&D practice and policy (changes of tutor model, changes of force policy and guidance, a churn of new entry routes, and new initiatives such as the academy) can all be destabilising and fail to produce long-term benefits. For L&D initiatives to work, they must be given support, time and resources and bought into by managers and supervisors at all levels of the institution, or else they are too easily eroded and undermined in the daily pressure of policing and the challenges of meeting increased and novel demands.

4.3 Considerations going forward

- *Resource allocation:* balancing competing demands for finite resources is crucial for the continued and wider implementation of the academy. This may require strategic decisions at the organisational level to prioritise this as an initiative.

- *Sustainability*: ensuring ongoing support and resources for the academy is essential for its ongoing success and effectiveness. Developing an underlying theory of change underpinning the academy to deliver change at scale would provide greater transparency and would support this going forward.
- *Stakeholder engagement*: addressing perceptions of inequity and maintaining stakeholder buy-in is essential/important for the long-term viability of the academy
- *Flexibility and adaptability*: being responsive to changing circumstances and feedback is critical for adjusting the academy's design and implementation to optimise its impact.
- *Learning design principles*: review the 'curriculum' of the academy, drawing more explicitly from the recommendations from Bowles et al. (2022) which were reflected to an extent within the programme. For example, ensure protected time to allow for reflection on learning which could be achieved through the reintroduction of the reflective diary. The ability to engage in reflective practice is a key competency for professionals, providing evidence of understanding of content knowledge, professional judgment and application, and enhances critical self-reflection and self-awareness. Ensure that delivery is based on learner development considerations, as well as those pertaining to resourcing and capacity, and continue to evidence active learning (e.g., with a mix of scenarios, discussions, Q&A sessions and front loading of content).

In conclusion, while the academy shows promise as an evidence-based solution to address officer retention and professional development, navigating the complex organizational environment and addressing resource constraints will be key to its successful wider implementation and future sustainability.

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