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New Recruits in the Police

A study of attitudes, values and beliefs

Andrew Millie and Steven Hirschler

A report for Lancashire Constabulary

Department of Law and Criminology
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July 2018

This research for this project took place between 2016 and 2018. It was funded by **Lancashire Constabulary** and was conducted independently by Professor Andrew Millie and Dr Steven Hirschler of the Department of Law and Criminology, **Edge Hill University**. The research occurred across two phases. In phase one (November 2016) one-to-one interviews were conducted with 60 new recruits, 40 of whom had been recruited to become 'Early Action' officers, and 20 were standard recruits to immediate response. Six months later (May-June 2017), as many of these as possible were re-interviewed, giving a further 49 interviews. The research resulted in a unique qualitative dataset of 109 interviews with new recruits that revealed a great deal about their attitudes, values and beliefs.

The authors are very grateful for the time given by all those who were interviewed, as well as the various people who helped to facilitate this study.

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1 Introduction

Background

There is much research on the culture of the police (e.g. Manning, 1989; Chan, 1996; Waddington, 1999; Loftus, 2009). For instance, Manning (1989:36) describes police culture as the “accepted practices, rules and principles of conduct that are situationally applied” as well as “generalized rationales and beliefs”. Alternatively, Chan (1996:110) talks of “informal occupational norms and values operating under the apparently rigid hierarchical structure of police organisations”. It is debatable whether there is a single ‘police culture’, with variation both between and within forces (Cockcroft, 2012). Yet, for good or ill, there are dominant police practices or cultures that, despite the best efforts of police reformers, are often resistant to change. Typically, officers are viewed as united by a common sense of purpose in safeguarding society. Reiner (2010:120), for instance, writes that “[t]he myth of police indispensability, of their essential social function ‘to protect and serve’, is central to the police worldview”. He continues, suggesting other common features of a ‘cop culture’ code of ethics, including a sense of mission, cynicism and pessimism, suspicion of others, and solidarity within the police – sometimes called a blue code of silence (Skolnick, 2008; Reiner, 2010; Westmarland, 2016). These features have been identified as partial explanations for historical and contemporary criticisms of police ideologies and practices, such as institutionalised racism, sexism and homophobia (Rowe, 2018).

Yet policing is more complicated than this, and clearly, not all officers hold such views. According to Bradford and Quinton (2014) representations of police culture can themselves contribute to the stereotyping of the police and a simplified view of an organisation that is increasingly diverse where employees hold a multitude of individual views and have unique workplace experiences (Fielding, 1988; Waddington, 1999). This diversity of views and ‘cultures’ was recognised by the College of Policing in formatting the Code of Ethics in 2014.

In this context, this research project investigated the extent to which new recruits in Lancashire Constabulary bring with them attitudes, values and beliefs – and

expectations – that reinforce dominant cultures; or alternatively, whether the attitudes, values and beliefs of new recruits mirror the Code of Ethics and challenge historic norms and practices. The study was also interested in whether and how soon new recruits were malleable and become aligned to the dominant attitudes, values and beliefs. The project built on previous work by one of the authors for Lancashire Constabulary on police volunteering that included consideration of volunteers' beliefs and values (Millie, 2016; 2018a; 2018b).

Whilst there is a long history of academic research in policing, very few studies have focused on the experiences of new recruits. Notable exceptions are Fielding (1988), Chan (2001) and Charman (2017). The current study adds to this by investigating the extent to which the attitudes, values and beliefs of new recruits reinforce or challenge the assumed dominant culture.

Methods

The research was funded by Lancashire Constabulary, although it was conducted independently of the service. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the service. The research was approved by Edge Hill University's faculty ethics committee and it adheres to the British Society of Criminology's statement of ethics for researchers.

All recruits are anonymized and given a unique identifier including a respondent number, the initials EA or IR to indicate if they had been recruited to Early Action or immediate response, and M or F for male or female – for instance, 42EA-F is respondent 42 who was initially recruited to Early Action and is also a female recruit. For various reasons discussed in the report, some Early Action recruits ended up working for immediate response; yet it is useful to indicate their initial recruit designation.

As noted, the research was designed to occur across two phases to gain insights into the perceptions of recruits soon after joining the police, and then again after six months on the job (see Table 1). All interviews were semi-structured and lasted approximately 15-20 minutes each. In November 2016 interviews were conducted with 60 new recruits. Two-thirds of these (respondents 1-40) had been recruited as Early Action officers, whilst a third (respondents 41-60) were recruited to immediate

response. Between May and June 2017 as many of these as possible were re-interviewed, resulting in a further 49 interviews – again including two-thirds that had been initially recruited to Early Action (n=33) and a third that had been recruited to immediate response (n=16). All 109 interviews are transcribed and analysed using NVivo, identifying key and emerging themes. The result was a unique dataset giving insight into the attitudes, values and beliefs of new recruits.

Table 1. Breakdown of the two phases of interviews with new recruits

	Phase 1 Interviews November 2016		Phase 2 Interviews May-June 2017	
Early Action	40	67%	33	67%
Immediate Response	20	33%	16	33%
Total	n=60		n=49	

Among the cohort of 60 recruits there was a diverse range of ages from early 20s through to some recruits in their 50s. In terms of gender, 60% of the recruits were male and 40% female. This compared to the 2011 Census figure for Lancashire of 49% male and 51% female. On the whole the recruits matched the county's ethnic profile which, according to the 2011 census figure for Lancashire, was 90% White British.

Structure of the report

The report is structured around six key sections. Following the introduction, section two focuses on the recruits' prior experience and reasons for joining the police. This is followed in section three by consideration of the recruits' personal values and beliefs, and the extent to which these have an impact on their policing. Section four looks at their experience of policing, including what they enjoy and do not enjoy, and what they might change. Section five considers the recruits' perception of police roles and of 'police culture'. The main findings from the study are presented in the final conclusions, section six.

2 Prior experience and reasons for joining the police

Motivations for joining the police

During interview one, having only just started their police training, respondents were asked to discuss some of their motivations for joining the police. Initially, they were asked to speak generally about reasons for joining while subsequent questions invited more specific answers, such as the level of prior engagement with the police before joining and the extent to which family or friends influenced their decisions to join. Five common themes arose from the respondents, including:

1. having prior related work and/or educational experience;
2. having a longstanding interest to join and/or having family members in the police;
3. seeking a unique working environment;
4. having a desire to help people; and
5. having positive perceptions of the police and police values.

For many respondents, prior experience in a police role, such as being a special constable or Police Community Support Officer (PCSO), served as a springboard for pursuing a career in the police. Four participants reported having been in a related police role for ten years or more. For those with experience working as a PCSO, the desire to have greater actionable powers often influenced their decision to apply for the position of Police Constable. For instance:

I've been in the police family for 11 years. I've been fortunate in that time to see a very large cross-section of society and form a basis of what I want to do in the future. So I've kind of been able to dip my toe in, in a lot of facets of policing, and it just got to the point where I wanted to do more, but my role wouldn't permit that (10EA-M).

I've been a PCSO for 11 years. [...] I've seen all the work that gets done, and thought I want to be more involved than when I was a PCSO, because it felt very much that I was restricted to what I could and couldn't do (12EA-M).

Other respondents explained that, while they did not have direct experience within the police, they believed previous employment prepared them for policing. In some instances, participants explained that they had work experience in the public sector and support services that regularly exposed them to police work and some of the expectations of the job. For instance, 52IR-M stated that his work for a local authority prepared him for community engagement:

I was in the council, so I was already in the public sector for the past seven years. I was dealing with vulnerable people, people with disabilities, individual needs, [and] people from different backgrounds. [...] . So, I just thought joining the police would be the perfect transition to going from the council [...] and to using that as a foundation to join the police, because, again, you're dealing with vulnerable people, people from different backgrounds, [and] diverse communities (52IR-M).

While most respondents cited related work experiences as contributing to their decision to join the police, some explained that their routes into the police were unconventional. For instance, one respondent explained that she had trained in legal defence prior to joining the police, but could not reconcile the nature of the work with her personal morality. "And I just thought one day, what am I doing? I'm on the wrong side here." (42IR-F)

While work experience contributed to respondents' interest in working for the police, they frequently cited an early desire to pursue a police career that stemmed from childhood passions – often influenced by popular media, including the portrayal of policing on television. Such responses suggest that positive media representations of the police may contribute to foundational interest in the job. This is reflected in the following statements:

It's something I've always wanted to do, I think since I was a kid, really. So, it was just one of those childhood things (44IR-M).

Ever since I [was] at school, [...] I used to love watching like the police programmes on TV, like Juliet Bravo, when I was very young. And like, things like The Bill and stuff, and I know they're a bit of a joke in the police community, but [...] it gave me an interest (38EA-M).

Early interest in the police was also related to respondents' exposure to family members working for the police. In some instances, respondents cited a long lineage of policing within their family or respect for family members in the profession.

I've got over 100 years [...] in my family [of] policing. So, my dad was a police officer, my granddad, and my great granddad was a police officer (21EA-M).

[It is a] typical story, really. My father was in the police, which initially is what made me want to join the police career. I've seen his career develop, and how he's been. So, I've idolised him, really, and the person that he is (45EA-M).

While these experiences were not universal across all respondents, they suggest that for some the notion of the 'police family' extends beyond a metaphor for solidarity among colleagues to being part of an actual family of police officers. That said, just over half of those who commented (26/48) did not see family and friends as an influence. For instance, 24EA-M commented that he was "...the first in my family to ever be anywhere related to the police, or all uniformed services in general".

Yet, for the remainder of the recruits, family and friends were of notable influence. For instance, according to 45IR-M, "...initially I wanted to join because of my father, but then I wanted to join because I could see, you know, the, the good work that you can do, and you can help people". The influence of friends is highlighted in the following quotation:

...that many people kept on saying, you know, 'Oh no, you, you should, you should go and try and be a policeman, you'd make a great policeman,' and I was thinking, no, I'm too old, too old. And, you know, over the last certainly five years, people kept banging on about it and I thought, no, I'll, I'll try, and here I am today, yeah. (30EA-M)

The two dominant reasons respondents gave for joining the police included a desire to help people and to pursue work that regularly offered unique experiences.

Respondents explained that a role in the police would allow them to make a positive difference in people's lives, although at times they were apologetic that their answers might seem 'clichéd'.

Originally, why I wanted to join the police - it might be a cliché answer - but I wanted to help people (06EA-M).

[It is] a bit of a cliché, really, but [I joined] to help people, because, at the end of the day, I feel as though it's a caring profession (48IR-F).

In a few instances, this expression of magnanimity was associated with earlier life experiences. For instance, 19EA-M explained that he had grown up on a council estate in an area with relatively high levels of crime. He stated that he felt out of place and wanted to, "make a difference, sort of inspire people to [avoid] mistakes like that. So, you can be different – you don't have to go down a life of crime". Such optimism was often accompanied by a desire for excitement. For instance, according to 23EA-M, "I wanted a job that had an element of excitement to it. [...] I wanted quite a practical job, because I didn't fancy sitting in an office for the rest of my life". Other typical responses were as follows:

I just found it'd be really, really interesting, challenging, diverse, and I felt there'd be something different every single day. I like to be challenged and I like to be busy and have variety, so I felt it'd be the perfect job for me (40EA-F).

I didn't want to be behind a desk for my entire life of working. I'd find that very boring, and, you know, there would be times, well, there will be a lot of paperwork, and there will be 'behind a desk', but primarily I wanted to be out and about helping people (51IR-M).

During Interview 1 there was a general sense that the respondents viewed the police favourably and that police 'values' were perceived as being aligned well with their own, a theme we shall return to in this report. While respondents acknowledged the need to continue improving the public image of the police through community engagement, most seemed to believe that the core values of the police were essentially positive. This is reflected in some of the reasons participants gave for being attracted to the ideology of the police.

I've just always wanted to join the police. Partly because of the values, and how I like imagine a police officer should be, and that's what I want to be like. So, like have an integrity and being brave, and protecting people, and that kind of appeals to me (14EA-F).

I've, at times, considered applying for the army. [...] [T]he army and the police were very much sort of aligned, in a sense. There were the divisions and the values, and the ethics were very sort of similar, albeit, the action they were involved in was, was quite different (59IR-M).

One respondent explained that her experiences with the police and other public services had been negative at times, and that her decision to join was influenced by the desire to contribute to positive change within the service.

[As a PCSO], I have had dealings with the police personally, and obviously I've dealt with police officers alongside my role. I would say that's both been positive and negative, and my reasons for joining is basically to try and change that negative perception that people have, and that negative interaction people have with the police (16EA-F).

Motivations for joining the 'Early Action' programme

As noted, the recruits included a unique intake in that respondents 1-40 were taken on specifically to work as 'Early Action' officers, dedicated to prevention and diversion operations. Many of these Early Action recruits reflected on their experience of the recruitment process and some were clearly enthusiastic about the role; for instance:

...after I'd passed my assessments and I came for a secondary interview, and from the answers I gave they said, "This would cater to your strengths - would this be something you'd be interested in?" [...] I kind of jumped two feet (01EA-M).

... when I first applied when I was 21, I didn't get it and I would have wanted the, the more action side of things: the blue lighting, the locking people up. But now after having my experience working with supporting the families, and through the, through education, the Early Action just seems fantastic and I feel

like we're really blessed to have this opportunity to, to go ahead with that (15EA-F).

Others were positive that Early Action provided an opportunity to use their pre-existing skills and experience:

I didn't get a choice, [...] which didn't bother me at all. It was just kind of I think they just looked at our skillsets and put us where they thought was best. And it - and which makes sense to me, because why would you waste somebody's skills that they've built-up over a number of years? (11EA-F)

I knew that they were looking for Early Action Officers, and that is - to be honest, that's just drew me to the, applying through Lancashire even more, because they were offering that. [...] I had experience of dealing with people with complex issues. So it did attract me to it. (13EA-F)

That said, not all those allocated Early Actions roles were as enthusiastic. They accepted the post as it was a way into the police but were keen to move onto more traditional response duties. Some were dissatisfied with how they were informed that they were to be Early Action officers. For instance,

...we never got to choose that role. [...] The police kind of mentioned on the first day - "thanks for choosing", but no one ever actually got to choose the role of Early Action, which I do think is a little bit of a flaw in the recruitment process of this role. But we'd obviously been selected for certain reasons, and obviously I'm having to go with it, but it would have been nice to have a say in it (05EA-M).

I applied to be an immediate response police officer, and I just got notification that I had been selected for the Early Action, so it wasn't a choice. [...] I think the disappointment is getting here and them not really knowing what Early Action is going to be all about. (36EA-F).

Despite this, among those recruited to Early Action roles, some were excited about the potential the role had to change policing culture (a theme we return to). According to 02EA-F:

...for me, it's about changing the face of policing as the older generation perhaps know it, and that's really where we come in with this Early Action. [...] [W]e have an opportunity to change the way people think, and that's a precious thing to be able to change that.

Work and life experience prior to joining the police

As noted, many of the Early Action recruits were keen to use their prior experiences in their policing. In Interview 1 most respondents were asked to comment specifically on their background before joining the police. Given the current policy climate with the development of the Policing Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF) (College of Policing, 2016) - and moves towards a requirement for recruits to have (or to acquire) degrees - it is interesting to note that this cohort included a mix with and without degrees. Three-quarters of the recruits (40/54) had previously worked for the police as a PCSO or volunteered as a special constable. Many had a positive experience working or volunteering for the police and wanted to take this forward. For instance, according to 28EA-F, "I absolutely loved it [as a PCSO]. We really had a close team, a very close team, really supportive – something different every day". Similarly, for 31EA-M:

[As a PCSO] I loved every minute of it. Erm, it had its challenges. [...] I've had my finger broken, I've had, you know, I've had all sorts of different scenarios, but loved every minute of it. I loved the fact that you come into work and not every day was the same, and that's why, you know, I want to do this as well, because not every day is going to be the same.

Not everyone was positive about prior experiences working or volunteering for the police, but they still saw the service as something they wanted to be part of. For instance:

...since being in the job as a PCSO, I've worked with plenty of good cops and plenty of bad cops, and sort of figuring out which attitudes to pay attention to, and which ones to ignore. You know, there's a lot of negativity, and it takes a while to sort of blank that out and see that the job is actually really good, it's just some people don't like the way we're headed (12EA-M).

I've seen bad policing as a Special, you were paired up with [...] whoever the sergeant, sergeant decided. And I have seen bad policing, and I've not seen anything criminal, but I've seen maybe talking to the, a person the wrong way, a bit of an attitude. Then I've seen really good - and, for me, [...] with female officers who were really good at speaking to people and I've kind of adopted that style, I'd like to think, and practice that in my PCSO role. (41IR-M).

Whilst the majority of recruits came from the wider police family, some came from related employment, including the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, ambulance service, work with vulnerable people including mental health work, work with the Troubled Families Programme, the National Probation Service, and work with children with behavioural problems. Others had more obliquely related experience, including school teaching, working for a church, or other voluntary roles. Some came straight from education including from having completed a masters degree, or following a gap year after graduation.

By the time of the second interview after six months training and practical experience on-the-job, some of those with prior experience of being a PCSO or special constable reflected on differences and challenges presented by their new role as Police Constable. The main difference was the greater powers at their disposal and the confidence to use them, as one former PCSO observed:

I think it's just like grabbing hold of people and stuff like, do you know? Because you - when you're a PCSO you, you, it's non-confrontational, and I think for the first five or six weeks it was a bit, my tutor was like, the first five weeks you didn't want to grab people, but then by the end he's like you just get to the stage where you can tell you've got more confidence, because you, you're happy to kind of, if you have to lock someone up, or grab someone and stop them running away you do it. Whereas when you're a PCSO you're a bit more like, 'oh, I don't know if I can, have I got the powers to?' Whereas, as long as you know your powers, you never have a problem, and you just, as long as you're not breaking the law, you'll always have a power to justify your actions (09EA-M).

Others reflected on the advantage of having had experience of being a PCSO, where a lack of powers meant they had to develop the talking skills needed to de-escalate situations. For instance, according to 21EA-M, "...as a PCSO you don't have any powers, well, you have, you have limited powers, er, but everything's pretty much the gift of the gab as a, as a PCSO, and I've learnt, I've learnt to bring that into, as a, as a PC". Others also found these softer people skills useful as a Police Constable:

...so the whole of the kind of ethos about PCSOs is it's how you speak to people, because we don't have the powers, we don't have, well, we didn't have the appliances that we do now like the handcuffs. [...] So my verbal communication - I rely heavily on that now, and, as a result of that, I'm able to kind of de-escalate situations before having to necessarily need to use the appliances or the powers I have now, which is good (01EA-M).

...despite all the training and, you know, the equipment you get as a police officer, you, you, you're biggest tool is still, it's still your, your interaction and your communication with people. And, having spent ten years as a PCSO, because that was basically our role, was a front-facing, you know, liaison between the community and, and the police (10EA-M).

One former PCSO compared his experience to that of a colleague who, according to him, was not so well equipped in simply talking to people:

There were two of us on my team, fresh from headquarters, started the same day, erm, there was me who'd been PCSO, and the other guy had been working in a college, I think, he, he'd, he'd been a Special for a brief time. When we sort of compared how we'd dealt with jobs and what we'd done, and our tutors were talking about how we'd dealt with things, it was very clear that I had the advantage, because I knew how to talk to people. I was reading danger signs, so I was reading people's body language and knew full well when they were about to fight with me. Where the other lad got a kicking a couple of times, because he just had no idea that it was going to blow up (12EA-M).

Whilst training and on-the-job experience would help in such situations, having previously been a PCSO was perceived to help with "recognising vulnerability and dealing with people, and talking to people" (23EA-M). One recruit who had

experience as a special constable and as a PCSO reflected that, "...doing the Special side of things you, you experience confrontation, and obviously what it's like to arrest people and going to a custody suite, which, obviously, doing that for the first time it is daunting [...] and then as a PCSO, you're more involved with communities and you're able to delve more into jobs" (58IR-F).

Those with prior policing experience clearly thought they had a head-start. Yet there are other skills and work experiences that recruits from outside the police brought with them. For instance, one respondent with customer service experience could see how this was useful as a Police Constable.

I think from, you know, from a, just, just general customer services, you know, even though it's the police you still, you're still giving a service to the public. Erm, polite to people and treat them with respect, erm, and people in different circumstances, and you don't know what, you know what's happened in their life to kind of [put them into] some of the positions they're in (19EA-M).

Another with teaching experience saw this as useful, "I was a high school teacher, PE. [...] [W]hen you're talking to kids you can relate to them more and you understand some of the issues they go through these days" (22EA-M). Even someone who had worked in the insurance industry could see how her experience was proving useful as a Police Constable:

I worked for an insurance company that was mainly - we had a lot of, as you can imagine, angry people calling up and things like that as well - not happy about things. So that was dealing with conflict. [...] [I]t wasn't face-to-face, but I wasn't sort of shocked the first time I had someone shouting and screaming at me because I've, it's something I've heard for quite a long time (34EA-F).

In order to get the best out of recruits it is clearly important that these experiences are not ignored.

Summary

Whilst a large proportion of recruits had prior experience with the police, there was a variety of previous occupations or educational experience. This breadth of experience included many whose non-policing experience prior to joining may have

given them skills and informed their attitudes and beliefs in ways that are useful for the service. Many had longstanding interest in joining the police and/or had family members within the service. Reasons for joining centred on a desire to help people, and to have a unique working environment. Whilst there was some concern regarding the allocation of roles – whether Early Action or immediate response – most recruits were enthusiastic to be working for the police, in whatever capacity.

3 Personal values and beliefs

In this section the recruits' personal values and beliefs are considered in order to gain insight into the character of the recruits, what they brought with them and whether there were any noticeable changes in perspectives after six months on the job. When they first joined, all respondents were asked to comment on their personal values and beliefs and whether these would have an impact on their approach to policing. They were asked the same after six months working for the police. Respondents were also asked during both interviews for their views on the place of empathy within policing. Due to their early-career status, and current/recent experience of police training, it was anticipated that the recruits would often express their personal values and beliefs using the language of the College of Policing Code of Ethics (College of Policing, 2014). The Code of Ethics emphasises nine principles of: accountability, fairness, honesty, integrity, leadership, objectivity, openness, respect and selflessness. In fact, during the first interview honesty and integrity were prominent in discussions. That said, respondents did more than merely repeat what they had been taught in training. For the second interview at six months respondents were also asked to say more on the place of ethics and integrity.

Personal values and beliefs

From a management perspective it is imperative that those recruited to the police possess the desired qualities for modern policing. From the responses given by the recruits, it was encouraging that they seemed to have more in common with the College of Policing Code of Ethics than the alternative 'Cop Culture Code of Ethics' (Reiner, 2010) as discussed previously in Section 2.

Personal values and beliefs – when first joined the police

When interviewed after they first joined the police, the recruits were in the early stages of their initial training. As noted, at this time the most popular responses when asked about personal values and beliefs related to the College of Policing Code of Ethics, in particular the 'policing principles' of honesty and integrity which were discussed by over 40% of respondents (25/60); as 13EA-F put it, "I think if you're a police officer, if you're dishonest then you, you shouldn't be in the job". Although this

was something that was being instilled during training, it was also something the recruits claimed was part of their personal values and beliefs anyway. For instance:

...there are a few things that are in the Code of Ethics that, you know, if I, when I've looked at it I've thought, yeah, I've, I've, I'm already, you know, I already think that way, or I already believe that. ...there are things in there that I'd never really thought of before, but I do... simple things like, like, you know, like honesty and integrity and those sorts of things. (51IR-M)

I'm a big believer in honesty. Er, I'm always honest no matter what. If I - if I mess something up, I'll hold my hand up and I'll say, 'Yeah, it was my fault,' because they mention it to us all the time in training: if you mess up and you try and lie about it, it's just going to get worse and worse (22EA-M)

If these are genuinely what the recruits believed, then it was encouraging that they were joining the police with the right sort of beliefs and values already in place. This was also illustrated by the response given by 53IR-M:

... some people are, are blaggers, if you like, and they will, or, you know, they try and bend the rules, or whatever, or they'll tell little white lies to get themselves ahead. And I just can't do that, it's not, it's not my, not my style at all.

Other aspects of the College of Policing Code of Ethics were reflected when respondents talked about fairness, which was emphasised by 8% (5/60). A further 13% (8/60) reflected the 'policing principle' of selflessness when they talked in terms of helping others, making a difference or having compassion. For instance, according to 16EA-F, "I like things to be fair and I will fight any corner if I think something's not fair, and something's unjust". Similarly, 06EA-M noted, "I'm all for, erm, being there for people in situations, erm, and helping those who are less fortunate". According to 43IR-F:

I'm not expecting to be like a super, superhero or anything like that, but I do want to help make a difference in people's lives, and I think that's what drives me.

The College of Policing's 'policing principles' of accountability, leadership, objectivity and openness did not feature among unprompted responses; however, the principle of respect was mentioned by just under a fifth (11/60). This was often in terms of the 'golden rule', a maxim that has existed across many religions and philosophies (Millie, 2016) and, for example, is expressed in the instruction to "do to others what you would have them do to you"¹. For these recruits, versions of the 'golden rule' were used to explain how they would approach difficult policing situations. For instance:

...you're not going to be dealing with the easiest of people, and I understand that. [...] But, at the end of the day, they still deserve respect, they're still a human being and you treat people how you would expect to be treated, er, regardless of what they've done. (36EA-F)

Be respectful to people [...] always treat people as you wish to be treated, or if you go to a job imagine that that's your family member that's, that, that's being dealt with, erm, because it's [...] at the end of the day, it's somebody's family member, isn't it? (16EA-F)

The reciprocity of respect was also expressed by 17EA-F; that, "You want to get treated with respect, [...] you've got to give and take, haven't you? You treat them with respect, and it's more likely to happen".

Three respondents emphasised the need for kindness, while six of the recruits expressed their values and beliefs in terms of family values. Other areas that were mentioned included doing the right thing, teamwork, leadership, relationships with others and personal presentation. Three emphasised the need to be professional or to have a work ethic. For one respondent it was important to see everyone as having a voice. This respondent, along with three others, also highlighted a need to be non-judgemental; as 34EA-F noted, "...so, as a person, I try not to be judgemental [...] which is lot easier said than done, because sometimes people annoy you. But I'm very much in the character that equal rights, equal opportunities for everybody". Similarly, three respondents talked of trusting or believing in people. For instance, according to 15EA-F:

¹ Matthew, 7:12, New International Version

Erm, I think everybody deserves a chance, and I don't think you can write somebody off. Erm, everybody deserves a chance, and a second chance [...] there is a limit, I suppose, and I think you've got to have some belief in people, and hope for people as well. Erm, it's pointless being cynical.

A further seven recruits emphasised the influence of religion on their personal beliefs and values - one in terms of general religious influence, five as Christians and one as a practicing Muslim. For instance:

I'm a Christian [...] Are there any values from that you think that, er, you'd bring with you, or? I think probably ... [being] non-judgemental and giving everybody a chance, having hope for people as well. Erm, you want the best for people, you want to see people fulfilling what they're capable of (15EA-F)

... from day one, whether it was my [Muslim] religion taught me that, or my family, or my employment, so, erm, a lot of it, you know, is, is how you'd want to be treated, or if I was a member of the public and this is how I'd want a police officer to treat me, with respect, dignity, be impartial, er, treat me as an individual. (52IR-M)

It was reassuring that many of the recruits brought with them the kind of beliefs and values that are required under the College of Policing Code of Ethics. For some this was influenced by religious belief, for others it was a moral code expressed in terms of the golden rule, or a general belief that people deserve a chance, they are worthy of respect, and ought to be treated fairly. Two respondents talked about empathy unprompted; yet when asked for more detail specifically on empathy, all agreed that it is important - a theme we return to. But first we consider the extent that respondents thought their personal values and beliefs influenced their approach to policing.

Values and beliefs influencing policing

The recruits were asked to consider how their personal values and beliefs would influence their approach to policing. They were asked this question when they first joined and again after six months in post.

Values and beliefs influencing approach to policing - when first joined the police

When they first joined the police, a quarter of the recruits that provided an answer (12/48) suggested that their approach to policing would be characterised by honesty as this benefitted community relations and provided the kind of integrity that aids professional practice. For instance, according to 28EA-F, "I think that me being honest and transparent with people, erm, is really good because it builds up like a good rapport with the community". For 22EA-M it would be important to be honest, even if things went wrong:

...well, if, if something happens out in the street, when I'm out in division, if I do make a mistake I'll be the first person to go to my Sergeant and say, 'Look, listen, I've done this, I've made a mistake. How do you want me to correct it?

According to 53IR-M, "I think it'll just be a case of being [as] honest as possible with people, even if it's breaking bad news to them [or] doing something to them that they don't like, like being arrested". Relatedly, three respondents talked in terms of integrity, while just under a fifth (9/48) thought that being respectful would be an important quality for policing; as 12EA-M expressed it, "I want to treat everyone right, you know, regardless of what they've done, who they are, erm, everyone's a person". An example of where respect might be needed was given by 36EA-F when describing a possible confrontation. For this respondent, it would be important to recognise the person's dignity, even if they were being offensive to you:

... you can't be rude to them, you know, no matter whether they're shouting and screaming at you in the face, whether they're telling you to go away and not very politely, or anything else. You're a professional and you have to remain professional, [...] the fact that they might make you cross in what they're saying or doing, you still have to deal with them in the right way. [...] at the end of the day, you've got a job to do, and you have to do it within the law and the legislation that you've got, but that doesn't mean to say that you have to disregard their dignity, or, you know, disregard respect or anything else for them. You've still got to, to have that in place. (36EA-F)

Two respondents similarly talked in terms of the golden rule, for instance, "talking to people how you'd like to be spoken to" (41IR-M); and ten per cent (5/48) emphasised the related values of tolerance and empathy; as 19EA-M put it, "my aim is to always try and help people. [...] you've got to have empathy, rapport with people".

A further 13% (6/48) suggested that their personal values and beliefs would mean they would not stereotype or would not be prejudiced or judgemental. For instance, according to 34EA-F, “Well, I, I think definitely not judging people and making stereotypes, I think that's going to be the main thing that can help me [as a police officer]”.

Three respondents talked about a belief that people can change, and that this should be emphasised over the need for arrests. For instance, according to 03EA-F:

I don't want to come into this job thinking that I'm going to go to each job and arrest someone [...] and arresting someone is the answer. [...] if there's something we can do to help them change their life around so they're not offending, they're not [...] taking drugs and things like that, and just looking at, at it in, in a different perspective.

Other ways the respondents saw their personal values and beliefs influencing policing were in terms of not becoming cynical, not being lazy, and being positive. Two respondents noted how their religious views would be a positive influence their policing.

Personal values and beliefs influencing approach to policing – after six months in post

When the respondents were re-interviewed after six months they were again asked how their personal values and beliefs might influence their approach to policing. This time they were also asked to give examples from their experiences thus far. By this stage the recruits had received extensive training on the College of Policing Code of Ethics; yet, as 01EA-M noted, “it's hard to kind of detach your, your own morals, your own kind of, erm, principles”. As already noted, the recruits brought with them the kind of values and beliefs that were reflected in the Code of Ethics. Six months later it was a question of whether they still held onto these values and beliefs.

After six months the respondents' answers were more varied but still reflected the same territory as before. For instance, in the second round of interviews the value of respect was the most frequent answer for 15% of respondents (7/48). Drawing on her training and experience so far, 40EA-F emphasised the need for respect in all situations:

...we'd had a training [session], and a lot of it was around, we had to imagine that it may be the person's first experience with a police officer. And that's always in the back of my mind, that if I'm the first, you know, if that's the first time they've ever had to come in contact with the police, I want it to be as positive as it can be. You know, if somebody's been arrested and they're committing crime, of course, they may be spending a night in the cells, but they still deserve to be treated with respect, and as a human being, yeah. (40EA-F)

In a similar vein, three respondents talked of a need for an empathetic approach to policing, and three suggested that everyone deserves a chance or that there is hope for everyone. The continued recognition by some across both interviews that all deserve respect or empathy - irrespective of what they have done - has potential ramifications for approaches to policing and fits in with the service's current emphasis on 'early action'. It is certainly at odds with the assumed 'cop culture code of ethics' (Reiner, 2010). Another theme that persisted from the first round of interviews was the golden rule, suggested by four respondents during their second interview. For instance, according to 32EA-M, "...if I wasn't working and I, and I'd ring the police, how would I expect a police officer to come along and deal with me?"

Other respondents emphasised being non-judgmental or not prejudiced. Some noted the need to talk to people correctly, or listen to people, being fair, conscientious, or selfless. Others emphasised being friendly, patient and professional, and to try to understand people. Finally, a few talked about the need to be trustworthy, not to be cynical, to question practice and to do things right.

Empathetic policing

During the first interview the new recruits were asked for their views on the importance of empathy for policing. At this time the recruits were also asked about moral character more broadly, although most chose to focus on the need for empathy. Of those that did speak about broader moral character, the importance of police officers not having a "dodgy moral character" (06EA-M) was emphasised. One respondent talked about being, "of a good character, really, and you've, your moral compass is pointing the right direction" (11EA-F). According to 40EA-F, moral character is important because, "we are setting an example to communities". For

43IR-F, “If you don't have the empathy or the right morals [...] you're in the wrong job, personally”. The majority of respondents spoke of an empathetic approach to policing, which was seen as needed for interactions with victims, offenders and with others more generally. Six months later, all respondents were again asked for their views on empathy in policing and were asked to provide examples from their practical experience on the job.

Views on empathy – when first joined the police

When asked specifically about empathy, the majority of respondents saw it as an important part of policing, to try to see things from the others' perspective. One respondent recognised the risk of an empathetic approach is taking things home, that “I know they say, yeah [...] leave it at work when you come home [...] and I think I've, I've got to em-, I empathise with some of the things I do see, and I just, and I do take it home” (37EA-M). Yet, despite this, another respondent saw empathy as the human side of policing:

...you also need to show that you're a human behind the body armour. People call the police because they want help, and that's the only reason they call the police (43IR-F)

A fifth of respondents (12/57) noted a need to be empathetic towards victims. Examples included dealing with victims of road traffic accidents or domestic violence, or having to inform the family of a deceased. For instance, according to 25EA-F:

You know, you're, you're dealing with people at the most vulnerable time in their lives, really. If they've called the police, then something pretty bad has happened, er, domestics or, you know, someone's been burgled, or you're going and, and go into a sudden death, or giving a death message, [...] People are at their most vulnerable [...] so if you can't, if you haven't got empathy at that time, then you're in the wrong job.

For 16EA-F, empathy was needed when dealing with all victims, including those of what might initially appear comparatively minor crimes or anti-social behaviours.

... something that might not seem that bad for you, for somebody else it might be completely and utterly terrifying, or upsetting, or, like when you look at anti-social behaviour, and anti-social behaviour is dependent on the person,

isn't it [...] to how it affects them? So, when you think about - well, you might go there and think this kid is playing football, and it's no big deal. For that person it might have engulfed their life, and it might be something that's quite relevant to them, and it might have stopped them from doing something, because they're up all night, can't sleep because it's, it's bothering them to that extreme. So where it might not be prominent to you, I feel you have to show empathy to that person, to truly understand that how much it is bothering them, and why it's bothering them to the extent it's, that it is. (16EA-F)

The need for an empathetic approach to policing was summarised by 39EA-M who stated, "I think you've got to put yourself in the, er, position of anybody who is vulnerable and, and to try and, erm, assist somebody".

For 18% of respondents (10/57) empathy was also extended to offenders and broader callers for police service. For instance, according to 29EA-M, "a lot of the people that we are dealing with are vulnerable people, and they have had - for different reasons - which, for us sometimes it's none of our business what's happened to get them to where they are. Our job is to help them". Another respondent noted that such an approach would look towards longer-term solutions:

...you're looking at anti-social behaviour, or people that we're going out there and ringing us that, you know, have mental health issues or substance abuse problems. There's always a reason for why they're doing that, and we've been very much sort of a 'go out, deal with that incident and disappear', knowing that that issue is going to come back again the week after. Erm, so going down this approach of looking at trying to put that long-term solution in, I think will have an impact. (04EA-F)

One respondent saw empathy as an important aspect of an Early Action approach, and as a mechanism for resisting cynicism in policing. According to 27EA-F:

I think empathy is something that they could do better perhaps as a police service. My worry would be if you've been in the job for so long that things can grate on you, and you, you can lose that empathy, and you can just think, oh, it's just another. [...] You've got to challenge it, but, at the same time, you're trying to be a part of the team and you've got to also show empathy

with your colleagues as well. But I do think it is important, and I think we need to understand that, particularly with the Early Action, the people that I think we'll be working with, is that they're very vulnerable people, and they've got a lot of problems, and they need help. And that's what we need not to lose sight of.

Others saw the need to have an empathetic approach to people generally; as 53IR-M expressed it, "it's really important to, to put yourselves in other people's shoes and understand, because people are going to have issues". Three respondents saw empathy as important in trying to build trust.

Views on empathy – after six months in post

After having been in post for six months, the respondents were again asked for their views on empathy within policing. According to 26EA-M, his view after six months was that "it's not one of the things they ask you for at, at interview, but I think it's, it's one of the most valuable things you can have as a police officer". After six months, many respondents maintained their belief that empathy is important for policing. That said, in line with the comments made by 27EA-F in the first interview (see above), around 10% (5/46) also saw empathy as an important break on cynicism. For instance, according to 05EA-M, he had observed more senior colleagues losing the ability to empathise:

I'm thinking it does, empathy does eventually leave your system, and that's something I'm quite worried about myself in happening, because I don't want to lose that empathy. But I do feel that, from experience, experience from more of the, erm, experienced policemen that they, they have lost a lot of empathy, and I, and maybe it's toughened them up, the jobs, and that's the way it goes maybe. But, for me, personally, I think it's a massive role in policing.

By the time of the second interview a few of the recruits acknowledged that they might already have become 'battle-worn' and in some situations found it quite difficult to empathise, or thought it only possible to empathise with some people. For instance, 21EA-M gave the example of drink driving and simply stated, "I don't have empathy for, for drink-drivers", who "basically put other people's lives at risk". According to 18EA-M:

I think I answered that [question on empathy] quite strongly last time [...] I think it's lessened since then though, because in my mind now it's, you can almost spend too long sort of sitting talking to someone and trying to work out how things are for them, when in the back of your mind you realise what your contingencies, powers and options are.

For 17EA-F, "You get the same stories so many times". Similarly, for 44IR-M empathy was difficult when dealing with situations "time and time again":

...with some incidents that you go to, time and time again, erm, I think domestics being one of them, especially if they're the same couple that ring up every single day, or every single week, it's sometimes quite hard then to empathise with them. Because you, you keep telling them and giving them all this advice, and they're not following it, erm, sort of thing. But then there's some incidents where you really do feel for people, and sometimes it's quite hard to kind of not get too involved with that. (44IR-M)

Despite such difficulties, the majority still saw empathy as important. For those that struggled with it, some thought they still had to try. For instance, 24EA-M gave a similar example of domestic violence to 44IR-M above:

...they've been arrested 20 times for beating you black and blue? They've, erm, got rape allegations against them, and [...] you've let them back in. And sometimes it can be really difficult to, to empathise with that, erm, because I've not been that situation. Erm, but, equally, you've just got to try.

For some empathy is important as it enables the officer to see both sides in any situation. For others it is reflected in the way you talk to others, or in how you listen. For one respondent an empathetic approach is better than going in "all guns blazing" (29EA-M). In short, whilst most recruits after six months maintained that an empathetic approach to policing is important, even "one of the most valuable things you can have as a police officer" (26EA-M), some were starting to struggle with it, especially after exposure to repeat calls for service. That said, empathy was also recognised as an important break on cynicism, and that officers still had to try.

Ethics and integrity

During the second interview after six months respondents were asked for their views on police ethics and integrity. They were also asked to give practical examples. Of the respondents that commented on ethics and integrity, the most common answer, given by 38% (15/40), was that everyone in the police has high standards, the recruits had not seen any bad practice so far, or they had observed the same ethics and integrity on division as within police training. For instance, according to 40EA-F, “they're a massive part of training, erm, you know, ethics and integrity, are so much, you know, they're so important with what we're doing. And I think it's exactly the same in division”. Similarly, 12EA-M observed that “the team I was on had very high standards”. According to 23EA-M:

I'd say that, you know, I, I'm proud to be part of Lancashire Police, to be honest with you, and I think that it's a, a good place to work. And I think that people that I've seen act with integrity and act ethically, and, you know, people do what they should be doing.

Nonetheless, 18% (7/40) were of the view that not all colleagues have consistently good practice, they are sometimes lax, push boundaries or tell occasionally inappropriate jokes. For instance, according to 18EA-M: “I see some people get, perhaps get a bit lax with certain things that they thought of using and choose to express [but] I've never come across anyone that's behaved in a, an unethical or, er, a way that's sort of lacking integrity”. A specific example was provided by 21EA-M:

...there's been a few things that I've seen during my ten weeks [on immediate response] where I just thought I felt something was right, or wasn't right, so I've had to question it. [...] Like I went to a job once where a police officer was speaking to the mother of an offender, because we were trying to find this offender, but he was speaking to the mother like she was the offender; and speaking to her with, with a bit of, er, disrespect. Er, and I just had to question that, and I said, 'She's not done anything wrong, she's just concerned about her son,' [...] I just think, yeah, I won't be taking that approach. Er, and that's just because of my, my integrity and my morals I'd say.

Some thought the jokes and banter of police officers sometimes came close to the line, but were ways of coping with difficult situations and were more acceptable in the 'real world' of division than at training school. According to 50IR-M:

Someone made a joke about me making the tea, and, and at training that's, well, that's bullying, you know, someone telling you, because you're the new recruit making the tea. Or someone's making a joke that I don't think is bullying at all, but training school you can't. You see, so I think there is a bit of a...I guess there's things that people could open into interpretation, whereas when you're at training it's very down the line, which is how it should be.

For four of the respondents, life on division was more relaxed or adaptable than at training school. According to 54IR-F, "I'm not saying people don't still act, you know, with ethics, [...] at the, the forefront of their mind, of course they do. But it's far more relaxed". For 24EA-M the realities of life on division mean the strict culture of the training school is not appropriate for everyday policing:

... people out there call it [the training centre at police Headquarters] Disneyland because what you see here isn't necessarily what you're going to see out there [...] and that's, unfortunately, just the way of the world and sometimes people don't respond the exact way you expect them to. (24EA-M)

This does not mean lines of ethics and integrity are routinely crossed, but that officers are not reminded every day. In fact, for 13% of the respondents (5/40) the strong emphasis on ethics and integrity during training may not be necessary, as 12EA-M noted:

I think we just hire good people that want to do the right thing. I don't really think it needs to be drilled home quite as heavily, and 'you've got to do this because it's right'. Yeah, we know that, that's why we're here [...] You know, we've chosen this path because we want to help.

Summary

Many of the recruits claimed that they came to the job already having values and beliefs that aligned with the College of Policing Code of Ethics. For some this was influenced by religious belief, for others it was in terms of the golden rule, or a belief

that everyone is worthy of respect, should be treated fairly and deserve a chance. Empathy was seen as an essential element of policing – a sort of ‘empathetic policing’; yet after six months on the job, some recruits were finding it increasingly difficult to empathise in all situations. Police training often refers to the need to consider police ethics and integrity. The recruits saw evidence of this within the service, although on division it was more relaxed than in police training – a concern when considering the influence of ‘police culture’, something we return to later in this report.

4 Experience of policing

In this section the views of new recruits are examined in relation to their impressions of the police and what it is like working for the service. The recruits were asked to state what they enjoy and do not enjoy about policing, and what - if anything - they would change about the police. Reassuringly, a number said they would not change a thing. However, some issues were identified that deserve some consideration.

Impressions of the police

During the first interview the recruits were asked to recall what their general impressions of the police were before they joined. It is acknowledged that there is a risk with such a question that recollections would be influenced by their current thinking. Clearly, asking someone to recollect is not as good as asking them at the time, but was the best option available and it was thought might identify some useful broad themes. In fact, the respondents identified both positive and negative impressions that they had before joining by drawing on their own experiences, media influence and common perceptions of policing. During the first interview the respondents were also asked for their impressions of the police that they held now that they had joined the service.

Impressions of the police - before joining

Broadly speaking, two-thirds (37/55) of the recruits recalled positive impressions, whilst the remaining third (18/55) recalled having negative impressions of the police. Included within those with positive impressions were 27% of all recruits (15/55) who thought that they had respect for the police. For some this was a general impression, as noted by 17EA-F, “when you see them on the streets, I think anyone kind of ducks their head, don't they, automatically, but I was always quite respectful towards them, and, I don't know, I always trusted them”. For others this was based on personal experience. For instance, 52IR-M recalled his own experience previously working for a local authority and dealing with the police:

... so I've always had the utmost respect, even whilst working in the council I'd always be dealing with police officers, dealing with like domestic cases...or if they ever needed information from the council, or who was living where. So, yeah, there's always been that mutual respect between us.

Five recruits had thought of the police as “a professional organisation, there to help people” (20EA-M). Four thought that the police was just there for emergencies, or for “you know, cops and robbers stuff” (37EA-M). Some were influenced by knowing family or friends in the police, or just did not hold any negative views simply through lack of contact with the police service. Of those that had negative impressions, 9 (16% of the total) recalled previous bad experiences. These experiences ranged from contact with a community Bobbie in school who “was quite arrogant [...] very rude and, and he didn't like kids” (09EA-M), though to more serious personal experiences being dealt with as a victim or as alleged perpetrator. For instance, 36EA-F recalled an incident when she was babysitting when she was 14, “and someone was trying to break in the house and had called the police, and they never bothered turning up”. For 13EA-F her previous impression of the police was influenced by “the service delivered by a police officer” following a road traffic accident:

...my daughter got run down and, obviously, I had to ring the police, erm, and an elderly lady had driven through a red light. But when the police officer came, he was quite unprofessional, erm, and ended up making the situation a lot worse than what it should have been, by the way he dealt with me. To the point that I had to put a complaint in against the way I was treated, and it just made the whole process absolutely awful. And if he'd have just listened and treated me in a different way, it wouldn't have got to that.

She used this experience as motivation to do a better job as an officer. According to 49IR-M, he had previously had a few negative interactions with the police “as a kid”:

I was a little bit of a, a tearaway, [...] I got in trouble a couple of times, nothing too serious at all, nothing that obviously affected any vetting. Erm, but just my prior experiences and conceptions of the police just weren't, weren't good and I thought they were all - as everybody does - you know, I thought they were out to get you for no reason. Whereas, obviously, they're not and they're there to do a job, just like anybody else.

Other negative impressions were that the police were “a bit of a boys' club” (18EA-M) or that “some officers I've met would have like a bit of a chip on their shoulder and come across a bit sarcastic” (60IR-M). For two recruits, previous negative impressions had been informed by learning at university, including one who had completed a dissertation on the Hillsborough Disaster.

Impressions of the police - when first joined the police

Fewer recruits spoke specifically about their impressions after having joined the police, but these were mostly positive in that the service was seen as supportive and as a big family; as 17EA-F noted, “...people say it's a big family, and it's only when you join you see that that is exactly what it is”. Yet, according to 16EA-F, “...don't get me wrong, there is always the level of professionalism throughout, erm, but they're, they're not very organised at all [...] So everything seems to be done at the last minute”. That said, according to 13EA-F “...this constabulary is a lot more professional than the one that I've come from”. One recruit commented on the hierarchical nature of policing, whilst others described the police as hardworking and caring. The training was complimented, although it was seen as lot to cover in a short space of time.

What it is like working for the police

During their first interview as new recruits respondents were asked what it is like to work for the police. For two recruits it was simply a relief to start after a long process. For 17% (9/52) the classroom environment of police training could be a challenge, noting the amount that needed to be learnt. It was particularly testing for those that had been out of education for some time:

I've not seen a classroom for 20 years, so teaching myself to learn again is sometimes quite difficult. Erm, but it's a good class, it's good tutors, er, good trainers that are very patient, erm, and everyone helps everyone get through.
(46IR-M)

Whilst the studying may be difficult, most recruits were broadly positive about the class. One respondent was struck by the age range of the recruits and their varying experience. Given the College of Policing's promotion of degree entry and degree apprenticeships through the PEQF, this might be one of the last intakes to have such diversity. The PEQF might result in a younger cohort of recruits, which, according to

those interviewed, would overlook the range of experience that a diverse recruitment strategy can produce:

Ah, it's a little bit of an eye-opener, actually, erm, the class I'm in, is, is a broad spectrum aged from 23 to 53. Everybody - and we've got people from civilian walks of life, people who've been Specials, people have been PCSOs and all the sort of bringing, er, a lot of stuff, er, into the classroom. And, er, of course, with the age range like that a lot of us are parents and have got family backgrounds, and suchlike, and worked in a variety of roles, so it's really, really interesting. Erm, the main thing I can see is, I can see why we're all here, why people have been picked for this job, because everybody has great communication skills, er, great use of empathy, great listening skills, which is also good. And it's, there's, there's a nice little buzz in the class, it's, it's all very positive. (26EA-M)

A common theme that recurred in answer to a number of questions - and was repeated here - was that working for the police was like being part of a family, "...you have to, you kind of have to stick together and work as a team" (07EA-M). One respondent (22EA-M) thought he had friends for life within the classroom. Most were enjoying their training; as 60IR-M observed, "I love it. I wake up every morning and I actually - for the first time ever I think I've enjoyed actually coming to work".

Yet, a few recruits were starting to identify issues. As already discussed, some were not keen on being part of an 'Early Action' intake, preferring to be immediate response officers. Confusion regarding the direction of Early Action was also noted. One recruit talked about some disorganisation, whilst others mentioned problems maintaining a work-life balance, a theme we return to.

What recruits enjoy and don't enjoy

After six months on the job, including a ten-week placement on immediate response, the recruits are interviewed a second time. As part of this interview they were asked to consider what they enjoyed and did not enjoy about the job. There were some key themes that emerged.

In terms of what they said they enjoyed about the job, the most common response given by nearly half (22/43) related to the variety of the job; as 10EA-M put it, "...in terms of like variety and, and, you know, turning out to different jobs, it's great. You

just don't know what's going to come in next". For 21EA-M, his time on immediate response was exciting, "every job is different". According to 07EA-M, "I've joined a job which changes every two minutes, so that's what I like, that's why I joined as well". Another respondent liked the excitement, but noted in her experience she did start to get a lot of repeat calls from the same addresses:

I think it's quite fast-paced, so it's, you know, the shifts go really fast and you're always busy, erm, you don't ever really know what you're going to be going to, you know, until you get there. So it's quite exciting, in that sense, erm, but you do tend to go to the same sort of incidents repeatedly, the same sort of...people, the same victim, the same addresses, and it gets a bit repetitive. (13EA-F)

The potential excitement of the job was certainly a draw for some. Others emphasised that they enjoyed being able to help people.

In terms of what the recruits did not enjoy, a complaint made by six respondents related to the police's computer system, in particular the Connect system. For instance, according to 26EA-M, "I'm not too fond of the computer systems, the IT is a bit of a nightmare. Er, I used to work in IT and I know what good IT is, and a lot of the systems aren't it". Some expressed frustration with Early Action (as previously noted), whilst others stated that they did not enjoy dealing with 'time wasters', the kind of repeat callers for service that can be a drain on resources.

Stress was also an issue for a few, a situation not helped by the short notice of changes that are sometimes given as operational priorities change. This may be unavoidable, but ought to be minimised as it can have a detrimental impact if it results in geographical changes of operation; as 10EA-M noted, "...the only thing that did concern me, really, was just the, er, just the, the short notice, really, of, changing areas, you know, on a, er, on a quick basis that threw up a few problems outside of work". For some this had an impact on the time needed to travel to work. According to 23EA-M, "...travel sucks, I'm not going to lie, [...] it's 100-mile round trip for me to get to Preston, so, you know, three hours driving a day on top of 11-hour shifts can be difficult". Some talked about difficulties adjusting to shift patterns or not getting time off.

Some respondents claimed that there was nothing about the job they did not enjoy; as 23EA-M observed, “I've absolutely loved it, it's like, it sounds a bit cliché, but it is my dream job”. However, one respondent felt that some police colleagues had been undermining him because he looks very young:

I've got quite a baby face, ...sometimes with colleagues who don't know you, who make comments, and, you know, about how young you are and sometimes it's quite, erm, undermining, [...] they speak down to you and, obviously, they, they know you're new anyway, but, erm, they don't know who I am or where I'm from, and what my background is. Sometimes that, that's been quite frustrating and challenging, because I feel like I have to work a little bit harder to prove myself, [...] it's like not in my team and I've had nothing from my team, and they're absolutely brilliant. Yeah, they'll make a joke, but they know me. [...] sometimes supervisors when they don't know you, you know, they look at you and lack of experience, and stuff like that.
(44IR-M)

This may be dismissed as banter, but can also have a detrimental effect on recruit morale. It is typical of the ‘canteen culture’ (Waddington, 1999) so often assumed of the police. Reassuringly, this kind of experience was not common.

What recruits would change

After six months on the job the recruits were asked if they would change anything. No single issue dominated, but a range of possible concerns included poor communication and organisation, clarity of roles, the Connect system (again), and issues of workload and paperwork. For 58IR-F it was frustrating doing jobs that she perceived ought to be done by other agencies:

...we get called to a lot of stuff that we shouldn't be called to, they're either other agencies should be dealing with, or our contact management should be turning around and saying, erm, it's not, it's not a police matter, or we're not responding to that. And that takes up a lot of our time sometimes, because once you're there, you have to deal with it. And it might just be literally us putting in, say, a vulnerable person report and that gets shared with relevant agencies.

Issues of communication centred on changes in deployment from Early Action to immediate response. As noted, these may be unavoidable, but it is key to keep people informed as much as is practicable. According to 14EA-F redeployment has been difficult:

...it's a bit late notice just a week before being like, 'Right, you're back on IR'. And I know - I know you're right in saying you have to be flexible, but [...] we're not just numbers, we're actually people and we do have lives, and we have plans in place.

The recruits were asked to comment on the impact the job was having on their private life. The response most often given related to the impact of shift patterns. A negative impact was most often cited; as 07EA-M noted, "...there's an impact, yeah, definitely, yeah. I don't see my wife as much as I'd like to". Yet for a few, the shifts had a positive effect on their family. According to 57IR-F:

I quite enjoy the shifts, well, the shift work and like you get some daytime and that kind of thing. So when I've got like [a] young family, I'm getting to spend some time with them in the daytime and that kind of thing.

A number of recruits found adjusting to shifts difficult, but recognised this went with the territory. One respondent commented that his "girlfriend is a lot more concerned nowadays, especially with the, the terror attacks that have been going on" (24EA-M). Some said the intensity of training and the job was having an impact on family life. For one recruit the result was, "me and my wife have been bickering a lot more" (12EA-M). Another recruit suggested that joining the police had led to her splitting with her partner, but that was their choice and not the fault of the police: "...I chose the job over, erm, my partner, but that was, that was my choice. Erm, it was a career I wanted to pursue, and he didn't want me to, so, erm, there was no, no leeway" (36EA-F).

Whilst some recruits experienced severe impacts on their private lives, others said there was no impact at all; as 43IR-F noted, "not really, no, because I've, I've worked shifts since I was 17".

Summary

The diverse nature of the intake of policing recruits was noted, something that may become less common following the introduction of the College of Policing PEQF. Some of the recruits that had been out of education for some time found the class-based learning a challenge, yet they brought with them a wealth of experience that benefitted the rest of the class. There were some concerns, in particular concerning computer systems, levels of stress, and poor communication. And one respondent felt undermined by colleagues. There was also a negative impact on family life, especially the result of shift patterns (although paradoxically, for some the shifts benefitted family life by providing some time with children during the day). That said, most respondents were enjoying the training and the more practical work out on division - as 60IR-M stated, "...for the first time ever I think I've enjoyed actually coming to work".

5 Perceptions of police roles and culture

In this section, perceptions of the role of the police are considered, along with features of 'police culture', if such a culture is seen to exist. The aim is to determine the extent to which new recruits held pre-existing conceptions of policing and if their views of police culture corresponded with positive or negative associations.

Perceptions of the roles of the police

Respondents were asked to recall their views on the role of the police that they had prior to joining as well as once they had started their police training. They were also asked the same after six months in post. It is possible that some were not able to accurately recall pre-existing perceptions; yet some common themes emerged informed by experience, popular opinion and media representation of the police. And there were notable changes in perceptions with more practical experience of policing, with many broadening their initial views on the role of the police.

Perceptions of police roles – held prior to joining the police

Before joining, many recruits had the opinion that the police were crime fighters, there to make arrests, to protect and serve the community and react to crime. For instance, according to 06EA-M, the police's role "was to help people and stop crime". Reiner's (2010) notion of 'police indispensability' is reflected in the view of 26EA-M, that the police:

...look after people, basically. I know it's an American phrase, but 'to protect and to serve', I think it's one of the things the Americans have actually got right, I always think that's a very good phrase. And that's what I've always seen as the role of the police.

Others linked the general protection of the community to more specific objectives, such as the protection of vulnerable people. For instance, 40EA-F stated that she thought the police exist "to protect communities, especially the most vulnerable". Perceptions of police function held before joining were often associated with reactionary crime control, with making arrests - as 59IR-M jokingly exclaimed that he

originally thought the police existed “to arrest bad guys”. Similarly, 01EA-M had thought that police’s roles, “was going around in blue lights arresting people, taking people to court, things like that”. According to 11EA-F:

Before I had anything to do with the police I would have said [the police role] was tackling crime - catching bad guys, catching burglars - the usual, what members of the public do think. You know, catching rapists, murderers and [...] I kind of thought that was the role. I didn't realise how intricate it was. I just would have kind of thought they turned up and went and tackled crime, really.

Eight respondents included crime prevention within their understanding of the police’s role. Here, there was some recognition that the police serve more than a reactionary function. For instance, 36EA-F stated that she had thought the police role, “was about preventing crime and making the communities a better place for people to live in”. Nine respondents focused on the relationship between the police and the law in “uphold[ing] the law” (33EA-M and 34EA-F) and “maintain[ing] law and order” (40EA-F). Whilst many admitted stereotypical views of police function, this often changed fundamentally once they joined and started training.

Perceptions of police roles – held after joining

Respondents were asked what they thought the role of the police was at the time of the first interview. For some this was influenced by experiences as PCSOs or special constables. Yet for the majority - including those with no prior experience of the police - once they joined their understanding of police function expanded. It included crime fighting, but also social service and keeping the peace. The change in opinion was informed by their training, and their exposure at this early stage to the realities of everyday policing. Six respondents described the police as social workers; as 09EA-M stated, the police are “everything [...] from doctors to social workers, to a paramedic, to a bereavement counsellor at times”. The police’s peace keeping function was recognised by 53IR-M who stated that:

...there’s a hell of a lot more to [policing], really. You’re like glue in a community sometimes, keeping it together and finding balance between being involved in a community, but letting them run it themselves as well.

Of nine respondents that commented on whether this move toward more generalised support was a positive development, most indicated that it was, though there was acknowledgement that fiscal cuts in other sectors would add strain on the police and contribute to a possible degradation in the services provided. According to some respondents, police services were increasingly adopting functions that had previously been covered by other agencies or third sector organisations. This is something that has been observed by Millie (2013), who identified growth of police functions at a time of falls in recorded crime. Austerity cuts across the public sector from 2010 onwards had further influence leading to cuts in support services, with the police often filling gaps - despite the police also suffering substantial cuts themselves. This was recognised by 50IR-M when considering the potential impact of specialist Early Action officers:

[M]y fear with the Early Action lot is, is, is it's okay saying we're going to have an approach that's, that's multiagency, but there's so few people in those other agencies. [...] And my fear is that's what will happen [...] - I'm not pessimistic about it, I think it'll work - but my fear is that police will be put on more than other agencies within that.

Respondents still recognised crime control as a core function of the police, but this was only one element to policework: "Crime is probably at the bottom of the list" (11EA-F). This respondent continued:

...there's just [a] lack of services and funding in other places, and the police kind of pick up everyone else's jobs, really. It's about vulnerable people and I think it's about more prevention now than reacting to things, which is good, really good.

Perceptions of police roles – held after 6 months in post

While there were some notable changes in respondents' views about the roles of the police after they had been in post for six months, some responses remained consistent with views prior to joining and during initial training. For instance, twelve respondents suggested that a core function of the police remained protecting people. Only three mentioned arrests explicitly, though this was an obvious function of the job, and eight mentioned their role as 'support' for the community. Four respondents likened their duties to those of 'social workers', which remained consistent with

responses six months earlier. According to 47IR-F the notion that the police were 'everything' was as true six months into the post as it had been during training:

...you're not just a police officer, you're a social worker, you're a counsellor almost - you're everything. [...] I think there's less solving crime now, and more working with people, helping them and offering them support, and trying to solve problems with them than just solving and fighting crime, which is obviously what I think people initially think that's what police do. So, you're more than that, I think you're - I think a big role is social work, and you are there to [...] help vulnerable people.

According to 37EA-M the policing role can be compared to that of a 'counsellor', stating, "I'm amazed how much sort of less conflicts you have [...] in terms of, you know, [what] you see [on] the TV. [...] You're a marriage counsellor. You're trying to solve a dispute".

At the time of interview 1 during their initial training respondents tended to be positive about this wider support function. For some respondents, six months into the job there was a degree of disappointment. In a few instances, participants suggested that the police were not as well positioned to respond to certain needs and that members of the public might benefit from other specialist expertise; as 09EA-M explained:

I have a [...] degree and I've trained as a police officer, and I've had very limited inputs on mental health. I mean, we've had it, but not to the extent [...] in terms of when people [are] going to kill themselves and things like that. Obviously, we have the powers to go in or whatever to save life and limb. But we're not trained [...] social workers and things like that to go and deal with it. [...] I don't understand why a paramedic can't section someone. [...] I don't understand why a police officer should turn up to sections, and then sit with [patients]. [...] I just think it's - it's not very well thought through. [...] When it's just chaos and it's kicking off and you're losing staff just to sit with people in hospital, I think it's just a waste of money and a waste of resources.

Early Action was presented as a way of helping to bridge the gap between 'traditional' police roles and the roles police were increasingly expected to adopt. Six respondents explained that Early Action strategies would contribute to a widening

understanding and acceptance of transforming police roles. However, 06EA-M noted that Early Action should not be viewed as a solution to the gaps in coverage elsewhere:

...there's no resources for anyone, and the country is suffering, and also because mental health's a lot more in the public awareness now, I think we're dealing with it. [...] [W]e're kind of becoming all things to all people, and I know that's what Early Action is kind of trying to tackle in that it's all multi-agency stuff, but it's like a drop in the ocean, and until everyone is on board with that kind of mindset - the Early Action mindset, [...] this [is] going to require a huge culture shift, not just in the police, but in [...] the health services, mental health services, education services, social services.

Perceptions of 'police culture'

Recruits' views on police culture prior to joining the police were mixed, with some not having given it much thought, others having stereotypical views as influenced by the media, whilst others reflecting Reiner's (2010) cop culture code of ethics. As noted, many respondents had previous experience working or volunteering within the police as PCSOs or special constables so they were expected to access memories of their perceptions of the police prior to joining, which may be many years ago. That said, most were still able to recall something of these earlier perceptions. Respondents were then asked to reflect on these views at the training stage and then six months into post to determine the extent to which these perceptions held true once they had more experience within the job.

Perceptions of 'police culture' – held prior to joining

When responding to a question about perceptions of a 'police culture' prior to joining the police, participants generally confirmed that they had believed a 'culture' existed – although not all had given this any thought prior to joining. In some instances, views were based on popular representations as expressed through the media, such as in popular television programmes. A dominant theme was the view that the police community was close and tightly knit. As 17EA-F described, "I think I've always seen the police as being that unified band of brothers". Similarly, 18EA-M suggested that prior to joining he perceived the police as "being a bit of a boys' club". According to 41IR-M: "Before I started applying, [...] I had a perception of [a] job for the boys". Ten Other respondents reflected the common observation of the police as a family. For

instance, according to 15EA-F, “I thought it’d be like a close-knit team where you look after each other, support each other”. Similarly, according to 22EA-M, prior to joining he thought:

...they're a close family, aren't they? They always say people who are in the police, their friends tend to be ones who are in the police, because you're working with them all the time and you're always with each other. And, and I think you grow fond of one another, so you do become good friends, which is good (22M).

Some respondents suggested that before joining they believed that police culture was defined by a degree of cynicism and ‘dark humour’, which was linked to the nature of the work and the extremity of some of the experiences colleagues witnessed collectively; for instance:

...quite stereotypical as well - tarring everyone with the same brush sort of thing, because they've just been around for so long that that's kind of what they do. (18EA-M)

...they have quite dark humour - a way of coping - rather than taking everything home, they have to find some sort of way to deal with things that they see, because some of the things that they see are disturbing. (29EA-M)

While a minority view, three respondents described their initial perceptions of the police as an organisation that was somewhat authoritarian. Alternatively, 48IR-F described her view of the police culture prior to joining as “all good and all rosy” However, this position had shifted upon joining, as 48IR-F continued, “...but now, I would say [the police are] close sort of communities” and “not always for the better”.

Perceptions of ‘police culture’ – held after joining

When describing the qualities of police culture after joining the police and whilst in the midst of training, many recruits explained that they had not had enough experience in their specific role to be able to comment on any differences between early perceptions of police culture and the realities on the job. Initial observations included the fact that any concerns about a boys’ club or a pervasive ‘lad culture’ appeared to be unfounded. As 14EA-F stated:

...there's a lot of like humour and banter, but in a good way. [...] It doesn't go as far as bullying or anything like that. [...] I've not had any bad experiences and I hopefully won't come across any as well.

Recruits also noted a sense of camaraderie and solidarity as a result of engaging in team-based exercises. Collaborative working was viewed as a way of strengthening links between colleagues and developing a supportive environment. As 29EA-M noted, "I think it's different from what I expected [...]. Everyone's willing to help everyone. Like, we got told straightaway 'no question is a silly question'".

The concept of the 'police family' recurred at this stage as well. To an extent, recruits had their early perceptions confirmed upon joining and beginning their training. Thirteen respondents referred to the police as a 'family' in which colleagues were supportive and willing to assist in responsibilities. However, three respondents acknowledged that perceptions of police cynicism were not unfounded. One recruit explained that their role as an Early Action officer had been met with scepticism: "...a lot of cynicism about our role, for example. [...] but people are always going to be a bit resistant to change and I think there's that fear of change" (08EA-F).

Perceptions of police culture – held after 6 months in post

Respondents' understandings of police culture varied significantly upon revisiting the theme during their second interview after six months on the job. While familiar views existed, such as the notion of the police 'family', respondents were more specific in their responses and balanced their descriptions of positive elements of police culture with the recognition that there was scope for further development. On the whole, however, respondents viewed their experiences favourably and stated that they felt supported in their roles and that they enjoyed the friendly and, at times, entertaining interactions they maintained with colleagues. The solidarity identified in previous responses was again evident. A quarter of respondents expressed that they felt well supported by colleagues and that their working environment was one in which others were willing to help. This contributed to the sense that they were not working in isolation. Nine respondents suggested that the police were like a family; the relationships and levels of support found in this new family contributed to a sense of solidarity. However, in isolated instances, this closeness was sometimes seen as problematic as it could contribute to an intrusiveness into personal matters. For instance, 06EA-M explained that "there's a gossip culture in the police, and everyone

knows everyone's business, which is both good and bad". This respondent continued, stating:

Because we work so tightly together and we go through stuff [...] that a lot of other people who don't experience that can't really comprehend, then you are a lot closer than other work colleagues, and so, you know, personal things get brought up quite quickly (06EA-M).

Camaraderie amongst some colleagues did not necessarily translate into inclusion for others. This was particularly true for two recruits who noted that they felt they had to overcome a degree of stigma attached to being Early Action officers. For instance, 04EA-F described the experience as an Early Action officer as "quite isolating" at times and perceived some immediate response officers as "very sort of cliquy". This made it "hard to sort of come into and try and get into that team when you're new and Early Action". Furthermore, 12EA-M explained that he had to overcome initial perceptions that, as an Early Action officer, he was 'soft':

...the lads were lads and they liked going to the gym together, and going out drinking beer at night. And, at first, it felt - because I was going up to Early Action - almost like they were thinking, 'oh, [12EA-M] is a bit soft', you know, 'he's going to a pink and fluffy team'. So, it almost felt like I had to earn my place on the team, which I wasn't expecting. [...] Then [...] when I had a nasty job, the whole team just rallied together and supported me, and it was like a really good team, but quite hard to crack.

Another Early Action officer (55IR-M) acknowledged that their newness in the role may have contributed to a 'frosty' reception from colleagues, but suggested that it had not resulted in poor relations with others.

The perception that police culture is marked by negativity and cynicism was not widespread, but nine respondents suggested that these qualities still existed to varying degrees. One respondent was concerned that such negativity may have an impact on attitudes to certain jobs:

I think probably the longer people have been in, there's sort of a negativity around when a job comes in and, say it's like a domestic or something, you do get the 'oh, here we go again, it's the same old,' you know, and sort of the

perception of what they're going to get when they get there. Which, sometimes, can be quite dangerous, because you never know what's really going on until you get there. So, I think the longer you've been in, you sort of become a bit more sort of relaxed and think, 'oh, I know what this is going to be', when you don't - you don't always know until you get there. So, what comes in on the radio is never what's happening (13EA-F).

In other instances, low morale contributed to negative experiences. For 25EA-F, high workloads and low staff numbers were detracting from the fundamental purpose of their work, which was to "help people". "That's not always possible", they continued, "because you're trying to juggle too many things at one time". According to 27EA-F "competitive" team working had resulted in "not a very friendly environment".

Yet, despite these occasional reports of poor working experiences, most respondents generally felt well-supported in their roles. The 'boys' club' attitudes some respondents described as initial perceptions of police culture were largely absent from their descriptions of experiences in the job. For instance, 34EA-F explained that while she was one of very few females working in her area, she felt that her gender had not impacted her experiences with colleagues. She noted an instance in which she was carrying heavy items and was offered help. When she declined, colleagues "didn't try and force it off me and be like, 'oh, come on, let me take that, because, you know, you can't carry it". Furthermore, 53IR-M was "really impressed with the amount of emphasis" placed on the welfare of staff. After describing a few emotionally draining incidents, 53IR-M explained that he felt well supported:

...any preconceptions I've had of people being a little bit unhelpful and probably joking towards student officers [...] I've had no issues with that.

Summary

Recruits generally came to the service with positive impressions of the police. When their impressions were negative, this was often due to poor interactions with individual officers. It was clear that individual officers play an important role in forming people's opinion of the police more generally. That said, for some, such negative experience was a motivation for not being the same kind of officer once they had joined the service.

Before joining, many recruits thought the police were crime fighters, there to make arrests, to protect and serve the community and react to crime. Once they joined, the recruits' perspectives on the role of the police expanded to include various social service and peace keeping functions, with particular emphases on work involving mental health issues and vulnerable people. Consideration is needed regarding the suitability of roles and specific skills required for such work.

The recruits' views on the roles of the police and their perceptions of 'police culture' appear to challenge dominant narratives of police working environments. In Loftus's (2010) study of police occupational culture within an English constabulary, she found that "classic characteristics of police culture" (2010:1) continued to persist, particularly with regard to the maintenance of masculine identity, demonstrations of dominance and the persistent de-emphasis of community policing. While some respondents in the current study confirmed these findings, such as the identification of cynicism amongst older officers and the cliquey qualities of some colleagues - especially towards the Early Action recruits - these views were tempered by the fact that recruits generally felt well-supported and observed colleagues acting professionally. Female officers, for instance, did not report feelings of isolation or discrimination on the basis of gender.

6 Conclusions

The study was able to draw on a unique dataset of 109 qualitative interviews with recruits focusing in particular on their attitudes, values and beliefs. In terms of their experience before joining the police, three-quarters of the recruits had previously worked for the police as Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) or volunteered as special constables. Many had positive experiences working or volunteering for the police and wanted to take this forward. The rest of the recruits had a variety of previous occupations, including work with vulnerable people, mental health work, work with the Troubled Families Programme, teaching, work for the ambulance service or the National Probation Service. This breadth of experience included many whose work may have given them specific skills and informed their attitudes and beliefs in ways that are useful for the service. This variety of experience was reflected in the age of the recruits, which ranged from those in their 20s to some in their 50s, and there was a mix with and without degree education.

Given the introduction of the Police Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF) by January 2020, and the push for graduate entry or degree apprenticeships, this diversity of experience may become less possible in the future and is something that police managers will need to watch. In terms of gender, 60% of recruits were male and 40% female, which compared to the 2011 Census figure for Lancashire of 49% male and 51% female. On the whole, the recruits matched the 2011 Census ethnic profile for the county, which was 90% White British.

Many recruits had longstanding interest in joining the police and/or had family members within the service. Reasons for joining centred on a desire to help people, and to have a unique working environment. Whilst there was some concern regarding the allocation of roles - whether Early Action or immediate response - most recruits were enthusiastic to be working for the police, in whatever capacity.

Many of the recruits came to the job already claiming to have values and beliefs that aligned with the College of Policing Code of Ethics. In particular, many emphasised the importance of having honesty and integrity; as a female recruit to Early Action put

it, "I think if you're a police officer, if you're dishonest then you, you shouldn't be in the job" (13EA-F). For some recruits their values were influenced by religious belief, for others it was a belief that everyone is worthy of respect, often expressed in terms of the golden rule - a maxim that exists across many religions and philosophies, that one should "always treat people as you wish to be treated" (16EA-F).

Many could see how their personal values and beliefs would influence the way they policed. Empathy was seen as an essential element of policing - a sort of 'empathetic policing' where officers try to see things from the others' perspective, be they victim, accused, or someone else. As one recruit put it, "it's really important to, to put yourselves in other people's shoes and understand, because people are going to have issues" (53IR-M). After six months on the job empathy was still seen as important, yet some recruits were finding it increasingly difficult to empathise in all situations, especially in situations of repeat calls for service.

A few recruits were of the view that some more senior colleague were losing their ability to empathise, that "empathy does eventually leave your system" (05EA-M); and they were worried that they would end up the same. Police training often refers to the need to consider police ethics and integrity. Despite the possibility that some senior colleagues may be less empathetic, the recruits saw evidence of police ethics and integrity in action - although on division one recruit observed, "I'm not saying people don't still act, you know, with ethics, [...] of course they do. But it's far more relaxed". (54IR-F)

The diverse nature of the intake of police recruits has already been noted. Some of the older recruits that had been out of education for some time found the class-based learning a challenge, yet they brought with them a wealth of experience that benefitted the rest of the class. There were some concerns among the recruits, in particular regarding poor communication. For instance, some felt that the details of what it meant to be an Early Action officer remained imprecise. Furthermore, whilst it was appreciated that the service may need to redeploy officers, some felt that this could be "a bit late notice". (14EA-F).

For a few recruits, operational changes could contribute to stress levels. Change may be unavoidable, but it is a question of how it is handled and communicated. The recruits recognised that the job could have a negative impact on family life, especially the result of shift patterns - although paradoxically, for some the shifts benefitted

family life by providing time with children during the day. Some had concerns regarding computer systems, and one recruit had a specific problem feeling undermined by colleagues. That said, most recruits enjoyed the training as well as the more practical work on division - as one recruit stated, "...for the first time ever I think I've enjoyed actually coming to work" (60IR-M).

Recruits generally came to the service with positive impressions of the police. When their impressions were negative, this was often due to poor interactions with individual officers. It was clear that individual officers play an important role in forming people's opinion of the police more generally. That said, for some, such negative experience was a motivation for not being the same kind of officer once they had joined the service.

Before joining, many recruits thought the police were crime fighters, there to make arrests, to protect and serve the community and react to crime. Once they joined, the recruits' perspectives on the role of the police expanded to include various social service and peace keeping functions, with particular emphases on work involving mental health issues and vulnerable people. For instance, one recruit recognised a "...lack of services and funding in other places, and the police kind of pick up everyone else's jobs, really. It's about vulnerable people and I think it's about more prevention now than reacting to things". (11EA-F). Consideration is needed regarding the suitability of roles and specific skills required for such work.

The recruits' views on 'police culture' appeared to challenge dominant narratives of police working environments. While some recruits in the current study identified cynicism amongst older officers and some more established colleagues formed into cliques - seemingly excluding the Early Action recruits - these views were tempered by the fact that recruits generally felt part of a police 'family' where they were well-supported, and observed colleagues acting professionally. Female officers, for instance, did not report feelings of isolation or discrimination on the basis of gender. For some, an empathetic approach to policing was seen as a brake on cynicism.

It is possible that these findings are limited to Lancashire Constabulary, with recruits to other services having different experiences. Furthermore, it would be interesting to repeat the research in a more ethnically diverse police service. Non-white recruits did not highlight specific racially- or culturally-motivated issues, yet numbers were small so it would be difficult to generalise. The nature of the questions and the interview

environment (on site within a constabulary) may have limited respondents' openness about these subjects; yet, their transparency regarding other problematic experiences, like overcoming the stigma of Early Action and dealing with competitive colleagues, suggests that the conditions of the interview environment did not preclude critical observation.

The key findings of this research can be summarised as follows:

1. The recruits in this study brought with them a breadth of experience in terms of age, education and prior work experience - including former PCSOs, special constables, and recruits from other occupations - that gave them specific skills and informed their attitudes and beliefs in ways that are useful for the service. Following the introduction of the Police Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF) by January 2020, such diversity of experience may become less possible and is something that police managers will need to watch.
2. Many recruits claimed that they came to the job already having values and beliefs that aligned with the College of Policing Code of Ethics. In particular, many emphasised the importance of honesty and integrity. The recruits saw evidence of police ethics and integrity in action, both in training and on division - although on division things were "more relaxed".
3. Empathy was seen as a vital element of policing - a sort of 'empathetic policing' that could be promoted across the service - where officers try to see things from the others' perspective, be they victim, accused, or someone else. After six months on the job, some found it difficult to empathise with repeat calls for service and a few thought some senior colleagues were losing their ability to empathise; yet most saw empathy as essential.
4. Most enjoyed the training and the practical work on division. Recruits had been taken on as either Early Action or immediate response officers. However, due to unforeseen deployment issues, many Early Action recruits were redeployed to immediate response. For some recruits, poor or late communication of redeployment was an issue, and a few felt the details of what it meant to be an Early Action officer remained imprecise. It was

recognised that change may be unavoidable - but it is a question of how this is handled and communicated.

5. Before joining, many recruits thought the police were crime fighters. After they joined, views on police roles expanded to include various social service and peace keeping functions, with particular emphases on mental health issues and vulnerable people. Consideration is needed regarding the suitability of roles and specific skills required for such work.

6. A few recruits identified cynicism and the cliquey qualities of some colleagues, especially towards the Early Action recruits. Empathy was seen as a brake on cynicism. That said, in general, the recruits' perceptions of 'police culture' appeared to challenge dominant narratives as they felt they were part of a police 'family', they were well-supported and observed colleagues acting professionally.

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