



THE
POLICE
FOUNDATION
The UK's policing think tank

Building a police
workforce for the future

Police Policy Dinner
September 2019

Background

As demand grows ever more complex, technology fuels the rise of new crimes and budget pressures continue to bite, police forces need to have the right number of people, with the right skills, in the right place. Otherwise they risk failing the public they serve. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has vowed to increase police visibility and tackle the current surge in violent crime with a swift injection of 20,000 new officers. Done well, this will relieve huge pressure on the thin blue line. Yet three years is a tight deadline for forces that need, not only to find the right people, but to ensure they are given the resources and training they need to effectively combat crime.

Across the country, forces are struggling to hit their current recruitment targets. They are also having difficulties filling specialist roles and retaining experienced officers. Moreover they are decades away from achieving their diversity goals and there is no guarantee these new officers will be the ones needed to even the balance.

But these are only the problems of today. If police forces are going to thrive in the future they need to effectively plan for the challenges ahead. Developing a skilled, adaptable, agile and motivated workforce, aided with the right technology and equipment, will better enable them to face the demands of ten or 20 years' time.

At this Police Policy Dinner – the seventh in a series – the Police Foundation and KPMG brought together a group of senior police leaders, Police and Crime Commissioners, Human Resources professionals, academics and experts from across the public sector to discuss:

- What the police workforce for tomorrow needs to look like.
- How to recruit, develop and retain the right people.
- How different sectors can share learning to create a workforce able to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

With 20,000 new officers on course to join police forces in England and Wales, these questions are more pressing than ever.

This report provides a summary of the issues raised during the discussion. Individual contributions have not been attributed, however attendees are listed at the end of the report.

Image by K J Akomma on Pixabay

From workforce planning to workforce shaping

The discussion started with a high-level analysis of how the world of work will change in the next 15 to 20 years. The opening speaker introduced the idea that, by 2035, 95 per cent of jobs would be affected by automisation, however only a few would disappear completely. Instead most professions would see some tasks fully automated and the rest carried out by humans and machines working in tandem – for example workers could have brain implants to aid them in rapidly processing data.¹ The influence of deep technologies, those based on tangible engineering innovation or scientific advances and discoveries, is already beginning to be felt in the workplace. However it was claimed that these technologies had not yet brought the expected boost in productivity. In order to access these gains, there needed to be a major reorganisation of the workforce, in the form of a shift from *workforce planning* to *workforce shaping*. Instead of basing hiring policies on supply and demand, organisations should focus on actively shaping a workforce able to work in tandem with the technologies of tomorrow, such as artificial intelligence (AI). The analogy of building a Lego castle was used to describe how the challenge had changed. Previously workforce planning centred on recreating the picture on the box. Now companies have to build the castle without a picture to work from and with 30 per cent of the bricks replaced with a new type of brick, representing AI. Instead of employing new people to sustain the existing workplace, companies should paint a picture of what they want the future workplace to look like and work back from there – not forgetting to plan for worst case scenarios in the process.

There was a discussion about how ideas around workforce shaping should be used by recruiters in Human Resources (HR) where there is a need to move away from mapping people to jobs and towards mapping skills to tasks. This move is

beginning to happen as recruiters shift from simply hiring new people to replace old ones and instead determine what capability is needed in the future and work from there. It was posited that AI could be used in talent acquisition to easily identify poor applicants at an early stage of the recruitment process. The adverse consequence of a hiring policy which focuses too heavily on fitting title to job rather than skill to task were raised, with reference to the challenge of recruiting a Chief Constable for a UK police force. The pool of candidates for this senior role is small as potential applicants see the process as a case of ‘dead men’s shoes’, with Deputy and Assistant Constables expected to take over from their bosses – meaning few put themselves forward. In one particular case, attempts to widen the pool by gaining expressions of interest from international candidates, who would bring with them fresh ideas and expertise, were initially successful. However these international applicants did not have the requisite rank to meet rigid eligibility requirements, even though they possessed the requisite skill and expertise, meaning they were not considered for the position.

How technology makes work worse – and better

‘There was consensus that, while emerging technologies will play a crucial role in the future world of work, their introduction risks damaging the wellbeing of workers unless their integration into the workplace is managed carefully. The point was raised that too many organisations have embraced the idea of a ‘quantified workforce’, where data on everything from the amount of time workers spent typing to the frequency of toilet breaks is collected and analysed without considering the ethical consequences. In other words we risk “moving blind into a dangerous new world”. Reference was made to *Dying for A Paycheck* by Jeffrey Pfeffer of Stanford University, which describes ten factors in the modern world of work that are destroying the health of workers and contributing to their untimely

¹ Winkler, Rolf, ‘Elon Musk Launches Neuralink to Connect Brains with Computers’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 2017
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/elon-musk-launches-neuralink-to-connect-brains-with-computers-1490642652>

deaths.² Most of these factors, from long hours, to high job demands, to shift work, are present in the police service. Half of these common workplace stressors could be made worse by emerging technologies. The example was given of workplace analytics in Office 365, which enable employers to monitor employees' productivity – in effect pitting staff against each other so that only the most productive survive. The lack of awareness around the ethical implications of algorithmic bias was also alluded to. An algorithm being tested as a recruitment tool by Amazon had to be scrapped because the data used by the largely male programmers, who had unwittingly allowed their prejudices to influence the computer system they created, generated outputs that discriminated against female candidates.³

However, if done properly, this monitoring can be used to enhance rather than undermine employee wellbeing. There was consensus that the introduction of body worn video (BWV) to UK policing was a positive development. One might think that officers would perceive the cameras as undermining their discretion and preventing them from doing their job freely. Instead, they see BWV as a way of presenting evidence from their perspective and acting as a counterpoint to smartphone videos uploaded by the public onto social media. Having the camera as an independent arbiter also enhances trust in the police as it minimises the need for restrictive policies designed to protect against police corruption. An example was given of how BWV had not only led to a reduction in complaints to the Independent Office of Police Complaints (IOPC) but had also improved officer wellbeing and decision-making. A suggestion was made that broadening the range of 'wearable tech' given to officers would generate similar benefits. Devices such as smartwatches that are able to monitor health and fitness could be issued to officers, which would both benefit them and show them senior management cared about

their wellbeing. It was argued that the need to embrace technology was made more critical by the influx of young officers who were 'digital natives' and were frustrated that they could do more on their personal smartphones than on the gadgets supplied to them at work. The concern was raised that police leaders were 'analogue' and did not know how to best use the skills of this new workforce. As one participant put it, you are doing disservice to staff if you are not giving them the level of technology they are used to in their private lives.

The global workforce crisis in healthcare and what policing can learn from it

The assertion was made that it is no good equipping the public sector with pioneering technology if there is no one available to deploy it. For example, a government might promise to build state-of-the-art new hospitals but they are useless if there is no one available to staff them. Healthcare services globally are facing a shortage of 15 million people by 2030. Historically, healthcare was geared towards dealing with acute periods of serious illness from which people either recovered or died. However the ageing population means there are more people suffering from chronic health conditions who need care for longer and there are fewer people available to provide that care. This is the thorny problem at the centre of Dr Mark Britnell's book *Human: Solving the Global Workforce Crisis in Healthcare*, which postulates a number of measures that could narrow this shortfall.⁴ The author argues that flatter structures should replace strict hierarchies so that talent at all levels can be mobilised. All staff should feel valued and empowered to share their ideas so they are more invested in the organisation. Welfare should be improved. Technology should be used to enhance the experience of work, not make it worse. Partnership work needs to be encouraged. The skills of overlooked groups such as carers should be utilised. The book contends that doing all these things globally would shave 10 per cent

2 Pfeffer, Jeffrey. *Dying for a Paycheck: How Modern Management Harms Employee Health and Company Performance – and What We Can Do About It*, (New York: Harper Business, 2018)

3 'Amazon scrapped 'sexist AI' tool', *BBC*, 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-45809919>

4 Britnell, Mark (2019) *Human: Solving the global workforce crisis in healthcare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

off the global health worker shortage. It was raised during the discussion that the NHS is beginning to put these changes in place by releasing its first People Plan, which sets out a vision for how people working in the NHS will be supported to deliver care.⁵ The speaker made reference to nine key focus areas, from creating a 'digitally ready' workforce, to managing talent and supporting the current workforce, which local NHS leaders could use to understand their current position and define future properties.

The point was made that police reform could be achieved in a similar way through concentrating on these key focus areas, which read across to policing with only minor adaptations. But whereas the more centralised structure of the NHS facilitates the task of assessing capability and determining how best to distribute it now and in the future, the 43 force structure of policing makes this undertaking much more challenging. There are parallels between the global health worker shortage and the decline in British police numbers between 2010 and 2018, both of which led to shortages in key areas.⁶ A lack of 'boots on the ground' in those years meant that police officers were burdened with excessive overtime and increasing pressures. The need to prioritise the response function led to the erosion of neighbourhood policing and unmanageable workloads exacerbated the shortage of specialist officers such as detectives. The current poor police response to fraud was attributed to this shortfall. An example was given of a force where resources were so tight on a Saturday night that a special sergeant was required to singlehandedly police a town centre during closing time at three nightclubs.

Rebuilding the police workforce

There was consensus that the Prime Minister's announcement of the recruitment of 20,000 new officers in England and Wales could be the partial answer to that shortfall. One attendee identified that meeting this commitment was a challenge that no post-war government had faced before,

especially as between 40,000 to 45,000 new recruits would be needed to replace staff lost to retirement and resignation in that period. However this promise was "baked into the government's financial commitments" and he was confident it would succeed. Another attendee shared the view that the uplift challenge would be met. He said a public request for expressions of interest sent out in one of the UK's smallest forces had elicited 3,500 responses within a month. He added that this shows a "huge appetite to join the police. There is genuine excitement about the uplift and the hope for the future; it is uplifting to know that".

However the majority were concerned that, instead of a more measured approach, this sudden shift from "famine to feast" in terms of staff numbers may bring with it further problems. They recognised a tension between the need to recruit at pace and the need to create a viable, modern workforce. The pressure to recruit at speed would limit the time available for understanding future gaps in capability and seeking the right people to fill them. While forces may get 'bums on seats', the rush to recruit could mean the calibre of applicants may be lower and thus less able to adapt to changing demands. In an ideal world the uplift would be carried out over five to seven years, in partnership with other parts of the public sector, but it was generally accepted that the government's pledge meant that this would not happen.

The discussion moved onto how the uplift could be used to address another huge issue in the police: its lack of diversity. The disproportionately low numbers of black and minority ethnic (BAME) officers nationally mean that most police forces do not actually represent the communities they serve. It was agreed that the next three years in policing were crucial to the next 40. If minority officers were not proportionately represented among the new recruits, the service would become even more detached from key communities. However the argument was raised that the speed of the uplift would also hinder the creation of a representative workforce. The point was also made that there were systemic issues that needed to be resolved as part of the uplift, otherwise change would take

5 'Interim NHS People Plan', NHS, 2019 <https://improvement.nhs.uk/resources/interim-nhs-people-plan/>

6 Full Fact, (2018) *Police officer numbers in England and Wales*, <https://fullfact.org/crime/police-numbers/>

many decades. Reference was made to recent racist incidents at police stations that served as a stark reminder of the harmful attitudes that can fester in a largely homogeneous organisation. One measure proposed to enhance diversity in the workplace was positive discrimination, as practiced in Northern Ireland to ensure the right balance of Catholic and Protestant officers in the service. The point was made that recruiting as few as 20 BAME officers in some forces would make a massive difference.

How (not) to get the best out of your workforce

The Police Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF) and new entry routes were posited as a way of ensuring police forces attracted the right candidates with the right capabilities. There was a discussion about whether the fact the PEQF was graded 'level six', which is degree level, would deter candidates who were not academically gifted but would otherwise make excellent officers. It was suggested that, to avoid any deterrent effect, the PEQF should be graded at a lower level and a degree-level qualification would be something to aim for rather than a requirement at the end of three years. But another speaker disagreed, stating that this grade was chosen because research had concluded the level of study required to train as a police officer warranted degree status.

However, there was agreement that in order to truly build the workforce for the future, a different conversation needed to be had about investing in *current* officers, rather than just focusing on recruiting new ones. Simply hiring new people to replace old staff is not enough. Instead the focus should be on "turning off the tap", in other words addressing the reasons why people leave before reaching retirement age, such as lack of engagement and the feeling of being under-skilled, overlooked and overworked. If leaders do not understand the problems of the current workforce, they risk building a future workforce that closely resembles the old and that carries with it the same problems and limitations. The rigid hierarchies in the NHS and police, which were described as "fat bottomed triangles", were

said to contribute to the slow progress of change and to worker dissatisfaction. Strict hierarchies in the police mean either new constables with bright ideas leave because their talents go unrecognised or else they have to wait years to be senior enough to be in a position to make a difference, by which time they had already fallen victim to the "sausage factory" and resemble everyone else. Reference was made to the wastefulness of having a lot of bright people in the police at lower ranks who are never asked for their opinions. An example was given of one officer who had taken a three-year sabbatical to do a PhD in counter terrorism. When he returned to active duty, his force decided that the best place to put him was back in uniform as a sergeant on the beat: "No wonder there is low motivation" the speaker added. Comparisons were made with the NHS where three quarters of the time doctors and nurses feel overqualified for the work they are doing.⁷ This was described as 'sub-optimal' as it led to workers feeling frustration and reduced motivation. It was suggested that the failure to properly mobilise the skills of the police workforce was down to the myth that one can be a good police officer just by obeying the rules. Police officers have discretion and they should be allowed to use it, except during public order situations where the rules need to be followed. There was agreement that police officers inevitably make mistakes, and the IOPC should not bring down the full weight of the law on them for forgetting a piece of policy or trying a new innovation that did not quite succeed. As one participant put it, in order to upskill staff, they should be given not only the tools to make an improvement, but the permission to do so.

Conclusion – A vision of the future

There is no question that the society in which police forces operate is changing in radical ways. Technology is moving at pace, social attitudes are evolving and more of our lives are lived online.

7 Kamineni, S. (2019) '5 ways to bridge the global health worker shortage', *World Economic Forum*. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/07/5-ways-to-bridge-the-global-health-worker-shortage/>

The police, like other public services, have been accused of being left behind. To stay ahead of that change and effectively plan for the future, police forces need to hire people with the right technological capability and ensure that they are well-looked after and properly engaged in the work they do.

A vision of policing in 2052, when the current crop of recruits is nearing retirement, was shared. This police service of the future would issue officers with interactive screens that scan their eye movement and keep them updated on past, present and future performance and problems; driverless cars would be used to dispatch emergency response officers; police would wear devices that monitor wellbeing, performance and skills and set their pay accordingly; prevention would be prioritised. Most importantly the internet would be properly policed by covert and overt officers. There would still be challenges, but police officers would have the tools they needed to face them. However failing to move from workforce planning to workforce shaping could put the possibility of a prosperous future for policing at risk. The concern was raised that senior police leaders and partners were not

actually thinking of the future and how to plan for the best and avoid the worst. Instead they were too wrapped up in the here and now and under so much pressure that they had very little space to think ahead.

The question is – how does policing create that space? All of the participants at the dinner agreed that the influx of 20,000 additional officers over the next three years made answering that question even more important. It is vital that this new workforce should be diverse, agile and able to adapt to whatever changes the next decades may bring. However the existing workforce should not be neglected. Crucially, police officers should be deployed so that their skills matched the tasks they were asked to perform. Doing all this would ensure police forces have the right number of people, with the right skills, in the right place. However, a 2022 deadline does not leave a lot of time for the careful planning needed to create such a workforce. The challenge facing policing is how to recruit now at pace while also keeping an eye on the future.

Ruth Halkon, Research Officer
The Police Foundation

Attendees

Dr Rick Muir (chair)	Director, The Police Foundation
Robert Bolton	Partner, Global People and Change Centre of Excellence, KPMG
Dr Ed Fitzgerald	Clinical Lead for Care System Redesign, KPMG
Blair Gibbs	Special Advisor for Policing at 10 Downing Street
Paul Griffiths	Chair, Police Superintendents' Association
Marc Jones	Police and Crime Commissioner for Lincolnshire
Andy Lea	Justice and Security, KPMG
Tola Munro	Chair, National Black Police Association
Peter Spreadbury	Head of Police Workforce and Professionalism Unit, Home Office
Rachel Tuffin	Director of Knowledge and Innovation, College of Policing
Ally Weeks	HR Consultant, CIPD
Dr Emma Williams	Director, Canterbury Centre for Policing Research
Ruth Halkon (notes)	Research Officer, The Police Foundation

About the Police Foundation

The Police Foundation was founded in 1979 and is the only independent charity focused entirely on influencing policing policy and practice (and related issues) through research, policy analysis and training/consultancy. Its core aim is to challenge the police service and government to improve policing for the benefit of the public. Since its inception, the Police Foundation has become an influential think tank on a wide range of police-related issues, working closely with external funders and other third sector organisations.

About KPMG

KPMG's policing team offers practical advice and experience to help enable clients design, deliver and implement real change. It has worked with over 30 police forces in the UK on their most strategic challenges, from the design and implementation of new operating models and implementation of new technologies, to the creation of platforms for sharing information. Its knowledgeable team uses data to prioritise improvements. They bring well-established techniques to improve frontline performance, enhance customer centricity and increase efficiency. Most importantly, its team help police forces develop these skills so that its work is not a one-off, but helps empower its clients to continue to adapt and improve outcomes. It offers insight from, and access to, its global network to give a different perspective on how other countries and sectors are managing similar complex challenges.

Reports from previous Police Foundation/KPMG policy dinners can be found at <http://www.police-foundation.org.uk/events/police-policy-dinners/>