


The professionals?

'If you ask me if the police service is a profession then I would have to say it is not. It is close, but no cigar,' says Richard Winterton, chief executive of Skills for Justice, the organisation that sets the standards for the police service.

 Skills for Justice, formerly the Police Skills and Standards Organisation, may not be on the tip of every officer's tongue, but this Sheffield-based outfit has already had a considerable impact on the way officers perform their roles.

Appraisals, the national competency framework and the national occupational standards all owe their introduction to Skills for Justice and reflect the continuous drive to professionalise the police service. But, as Mr Winterton explains, there is still a considerable way to go before officers cease to refer to 'The Job' and start talking about 'The Profession'.

'Our main achievement has been to devise the national occupational standards and the competency framework. Officers should now all have received an appraisal or Personal Development Review conducted against the national competency framework.

Recruitment overhaul

'We have provided the bedrock and now we have to develop a more sophisticated approach to the whole issue of training, appraisal and recruitment. We need to adopt a more profession-

al approach to the whole skills issue,' he says.

The starting point to professionalising the police service is to overhaul the recruitment process which needs to be more flexible, more inclusive and be more willing to recognise that people who apply to join the service are not a 'blank canvas', but bring a wealth of experience and knowledge to the service.

'We need to be a lot more sophisticated in the way we recruit. People turn up to the police service holding a whole raft of skills they already have before they joined. The recruitment process needs to be more specific so it takes account of the skills they already have.

'The next step is to work more effectively to prepare people to join the police service so it is not just a case of pitching up and joining. Any sensible profession has a number of routes in,' he says.

Policing by degrees

Skills for Justice, along with the other stakeholders, have already initiated the move away from the 'one size fits all' approach to recruitment. Pilots are currently running in Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire and Leicestershire



Richard Winterton: 'Officers should cease to talk about the jobs and start talking about the profession'

where students are completing a foundation degree in policing to prepare them for life as an officer of the law.

Pilot studies are also taking place in West Yorkshire and Kent where people take a foundation degree as part of their probation. They learn the theory at college

and then put that into practice on the streets. At Broxtowe college in Nottinghamshire, students take their degree and as part of that they must become Specials.

'When they finish we then have to make sure they do not repeat elements of the probationer course they have done as part



The police service needs to be more 'sophisticated' in the way it recruits, says Richard Winterton

of the college course,' says Mr Winterton.

This approach benefits both the potential applicant and the service, he adds.

'It's a win, win, win situation. People can do their preparation in their home town where they will be able to gain an understanding of policing that is beyond the TV representation of the service and so make an informed decision about whether the police is really for them before they join. This, in turn, means the service should see a corresponding reduction in the drop out rate.'

But what happens once the person has joined the service? How officers are deployed within the job also needs to be more sophisticated, argues Mr Winterton.

'Currently officers complete their probation and then they specialise in the area of policing that interests them with little thought as to whether it matches their skills or abilities.

'People go through the police and go into beat policing until they find something better to do. It is a rather haphazard approach. The skills we are looking for in an investigator are different to those we need in a community police officer.

Omnicompetence never lived

'What we require are core skills as

every police officer needs certain skills, but we can't have all officers trained in all specialisms. That is nonsense. Omni-competence never lived,' says Mr Winterton.

Skills for Justice is currently looking at 'career pathways' that will allow officers to specialise in a particular area of policing instead of moving from department to department every couple of years. The challenge is to ensure that all areas of policing roles merit the same respect and offer the same well-defined career route.

'Beat policing is the poor relation in terms of policing, but the time is up for that. Beat policing is part of a much larger specialism called community policing. We can be more sophisticated in the way we tackle policing community, starting with constables, then sergeants and inspectors, so we are more pro-active in planning what goes into community policing, crime reduction and intelligence-led policing.'

One possible downside of encouraging officers to remain in one area to become specialists in that role is that senior officers will then be reluctant to allow them to gain experience in other areas of policing because of the cost of re-training. Mr Winterton says that each situation should be judged on its merits.

'They [officers] can transfer, but you have to be mindful of two things. When you transfer from a specialism there has to be a deal between the cost and the expense and what the individual wants. You have to balance those two things.

'If you are coming up to retirement and you want to transfer to another specialism, then the answer is not likely to be yes.'

The changes to recruitment practices and on-going training for officers are part of a larger picture that will in time allow the service to view itself as a profession, says Mr Winterton.

Providing professionals?

He says the service needs to introduce an overall Integrated People Management System which would bring together all the work that is occurring across the service. In its simplest form this would mean proper management of individual careers as well as providing a better service to the public by a more professional police service. It could also mean that every officer who had achieved the required level of competency in their role would be registered on a professional register and would then be licensed to practice.

'We need to put an Integrated People Management System in place without going

mad or broke. This is an area the police service must look at and Skills for Justice will support.'

Mr Winterton hopes to introduce such a system within four years, but he says officers should be able to consider themselves professionals in less than two years.

'Within two years, every police officer should be able to feel that they belong to a profession that is equal to other professions in the country.'



Integrated People Management System: What it means

- National Occupational Standards:** These set out what skills, knowledge and understanding an individual needs to be considered competent in their job.
- The Police Professional Register:** Officers who achieved a competent level against the National Occupational Standards would be entered on to a register, which licenses them to practice. In order to remain on the register, officer would have to ensure their skills are maintained.
- Integrated Competency Framework:** This focuses on the behaviours and activities required of an officer. It also underpins staff appraisals.
- Personal Development Review:** Staff appraisals, which are used to steer and guide an individual's development.
- Nationally Recognised Qualifications:** Policing skills that would be accredited by the Police Licensing and Accreditation Board.
- National Centre for Policing Excellence:** The organisation charged with developing best practice in policing.
- The Police Training and Development Board:** The organisation with the strategic responsibility for bringing about improvements in police training and development.