

# Policing with science: a new evidence-based professionalism for policing?

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## Introduction

The advancement of policing by using scientific methods has been a central interest for CEPOL — the European College of Policing — for a number of years (CEPOL, 2006). Quite early in its life, CEPOL commissioned a group of European police officers and academics to explore the potential for a European approach to police science. This was an important initiative and reflected the fact that much of the scientific inquiry into policing that has achieved international prominence has been carried out in the United States or other Anglo-Saxon countries. An examination of the George Mason University 'Matrix' (Lum et al., 2011) listing of high-quality studies into policing will confirm that impression.

Yet, as those commissioning the CEPOL study well understood, applied science offers one of the most promising ways to improve policing (Weisburd and Neyroud, 2011). 50 years or more of detailed study of policing have produced a body of knowledge about how to police effectively, which is all too frequently unknown to the very practitioners who are best placed to use it. Yet, police forces across Europe are under huge pressure to deliver better performance with reduced resources. With these pressures in mind, Neyroud and Sherman (forthcoming) have argued that a more scientific approach to policing is central to building and sustaining police legitimacy in the future. They have suggested that 'police legitimacy may be established not just on the basis of effectiveness under the rule of

law, but on a demonstrated mastery of a complex body of knowledge generated by scientific methods of testing and analysis' (Neyroud and Sherman, forthcoming: 1).

However, as the 'Review of Police Training and Leadership' (in England and Wales) reported (Neyroud, 2011), police training, whether in the UK or more widely in Europe and elsewhere in the developed and developing world, does not yet, generally, embrace a model of scientific education which would enable the police to build a strong science base into the existing experience-based practice. As Hanak and Hofinger (2006) had already shown, few police forces around Europe had embedded scientific approaches in their decision-making or their education. The review recommended the development of an approach that links learning with practice along the lines of a teaching hospital where the clinical practitioners provide teaching and link what they teach with their own practice (Neyroud, 2011).

There is both the opportunity and the necessity for a radical change in the police relationship with science and the scientific, academic relationship with the police. This article will explore both why this is an opportune moment for such a change, how the police should seize the opportunity and what a more scientific approach might look like. It will conclude with some reflections on the implications for police education and for pan-European institutions such as CEPOL.

## A challenging time for policing?

First of all it is necessary to examine why this might be a particularly challenging time for police services and why the police might need to consider radical change to respond and rebuild their legitimacy. For many police chiefs in the developed world it seems strange and ironic that police forces have come under such scrutiny in the last few years. After years of rising crime through the 1970s and 1980s, crime has been falling in the Western democracies. At the beginning of 2013, London and New York published recorded homicide rates that were last seen in the 1970s when the populations were lower and the wider demands on the police from serious crime and terrorism were considerably fewer. As Police Chiefs and the Coalition government in the UK have recently asserted, crime is falling and the public's confidence in the police has been rising. Figures from across many jurisdictions in Europe and North America would be widely similar.

Despite this, most countries in those jurisdictions have embarked on major transformations of their police. In England and Wales, since the Conservative-Liberal Democratic Coalition came to power in 2010, there has been the 'most radical change programme' since Sir Robert Peel founded the modern police force in the 19th century. Police numbers have been cut, police pay and conditions and police budgets slashed and proposals to change the totemic single point of entry recruitment have been published. But England and Wales is not alone: in Scotland, a new National Police has been introduced; in Norway, the fallout from 22 July 2011 has seen not just the removal of the police commissioner but the emergence of a radical change programme; in Sweden, there has been a wide-ranging programme to create a new national force; the Netherlands has changed from a model based on local forces in favour of a national force; across the Atlantic, Canada has commissioned the Canadian Academy of Sciences to explore options for reform.

Part of this rapid shift to reform can be explained by the need to reduce the cost of policing at a time when governments have had to face unprecedented reductions in tax revenues and pressures to reduce to public spending. Fogelson and Gascon (2010) showed how United States' policing had effectively priced itself out of the market, presenting cash-strapped mayors

and states with little alternative but to cut police numbers and, in many cases, to challenge police pay and conditions.

However, another part of the reason appears to be that police have failed to convince the public and politicians of the link between policing and the decline in crime. Hence, with crime continuing to fall and tax revenues under pressure to sustain healthcare and education and to pay for the subsidies underpinning the failed financial sector, politicians have turned on the police and started questioning what the public are getting for their money. They have also, either at local level in the case of Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales or in Scotland, Sweden and the Netherlands, changed the shape of police accountability to a more direct, intrusive political oversight. This new 'calculative and contractual' oversight (Reiner, 2013) provides a major shift from the more indirect, *ex post facto* models of accounting for actions. Politicians, to draw a parallel with a police interview, have moved from a passive role observing behind the remote glass screens and have put themselves firmly at the table, directing the interview.

Even the most well-rehearsed 'miracles' have not prevented critical inquiry. In January 2013, the New York Times published an article about the crime drop in New York (Tierney, 2013). Tierney documents how the scale and extent of New York's crime drop has generated a debate with much heat and little light between those who see the crime falls as a result of wider social factors and those who connect at least a major part of it to the actions of the police department. The debate is important because New York's crime drop has been both dramatic and the arguments about its causes highly influential in setting the terms of the debates about policing beyond New York. The continuing interest of the British Prime Minister David Cameron in the former Commissioner of New York, Bill Bratton, as a potential Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police (a major driver of the proposal to change the eligibility rules to allow 'foreign chiefs' (Home Office, 2013)) is undoubtedly connected with the perception that Bratton's brief two-year reign as Commissioner precipitated the crime drop.

However, in contrast to many such analyses, Tierney goes beyond the standard dialectic between critics and

supporters of the New York Police Department (NYPD). Instead, his main focus is on the work of scholars who have worked closely with police departments to test and refine strategies such as 'hot-spot' policing and targeted police stop and search. The article highlights a number of key points about this research, which has now been replicated and systematically reviewed; it was developed as a partnership between police leaders and university-based academics and has been shown to have a strong cost-benefit when applied as a tool for tackling priority crimes.

Tierney clearly illustrates why this is an important and opportune moment for the police to adopt a new approach to science. His argument, set out through the voices of those key scholars, is that police are in danger of losing an argument about their effectiveness by not engaging with the evidence about their own practice.

### An opportune moment for change?

After more than 50 years of research, the evidence about police practice has been transformed. Some of the early work set out to test the validity of the 1950s 'professional model' advanced by police chiefs like O.W. Wilson. Wilson (1950) had described a system of policing much influenced by scientific management and the idea of deterrence, in which the police should concentrate their efforts on general patrol strategies, responding rapidly to calls and investigating crimes and trying to bring as many offenders to court and punishment as possible. These arguments were substantially undermined by a series of studies that showed that general patrol strategies had very little impact on crime (Kelling et al., 1974 and Police Foundation, 1981), rapid response provided little preventative benefit and the police contribution to detecting crimes was marginal and subordinate to that of victims and witnesses (Greenwood et al., 1977). Yet Wilson's model of policing has remained highly influential, both with police leaders and politicians. The recent election literature from the Police and Crime Commissioner candidates in England and Wales and many of the elected Commissioners Police and Crime plans suggest that the old professional model, with its intuitive causal reasoning, is embraced by many PCCs — this is the old professional model, but new populist democracy.

In contrast, since those early studies, there is now a substantial body of work demonstrating how police can be more effective by deploying focused strategies, which have been thoroughly tested by experimental designs. Moreover, this body of work has now been systematically brought together and is available on websites such as the George Mason University's 'Matrix' site (Lum et al., 2011). The Campbell Crime and Justice Group, an international group of scholars who are linked through the Campbell Collaboration, has been publishing a series of systematic reviews of these studies, which have, in turn, been published in Europe by bodies such as the Swedish Crime Prevention Centre. Indeed, the Campbell Collaboration is hosted in Norway and supported by the Norwegian government. There is, alongside this, the emergence of what Cynthia Lum, who leads the work on the Matrix at George Mason, has called 'translational criminology' or a systematic and determined attempt to understand how to translate the lessons of more than a hundred key studies into real practice and real outcomes on the ground in policing.

### A new professional model?

A new professional model of policing based on the firmer ground of the evidence involves a very different approach to O.W. Wilson's model. David Weisburd, one of the key researchers has summarised the approach as follows:

- Police should focus efforts on high activity places and people. Such targeted strategies do not cause displacement, which is not inevitable at the micro- or meso- level when police focus their efforts.
- Police will increase their effectiveness with proactive problem solving (over simply focused approaches).
- Police should go beyond traditional approaches, like using law enforcement and arrest (Weisburd, 2012).

The most recent Campbell reviews (Gill et al., 2012) have also highlighted that whilst community-policing approaches, which are almost universally advocated by police chiefs and politicians alike, will not deliver crime reductions, they will improve confidence and enhance legitimacy.

The nature and style of policing that emerges from the evidence challenges many embedded practices in

policing and many views fondly held by the public and politicians. Moreover, the dissonance between historic practices and effective outcomes is such that it highlights the need for police to be much more systematic about testing their practice. As Weisburd and Neyroud (2011) have argued, such testing is neither routinely carried out, nor necessarily welcomed by police chiefs. There is not yet a scientific culture in policing to complement the strong emphasis on experiential learning and a tradition of socialisation and training in the organisation which is heavily orientated towards learning by doing and by copying inherited practices (Chan, 2003).

### The emergence of a new professional education

However, there is substantial evidence that change is taking place. In December 2012, the UK government set up the College of Policing in response to the recommendations of the Neyroud Review of Police Leadership and Training (2011). In contrast to previous 'colleges' of policing, the new one is intended to be a professional body, rather than a training body, charged with registering practitioners, setting the qualification structure, accrediting programmes and developing the knowledge base of policing through research. The college is committed to building a new partnership relationship with higher education.

A new relationship between police training and higher education is also very evident across a number of jurisdictions both in Europe and outside. National police colleges in a number of countries have changed from training establishments to universities, with several maturing to full university status and the award of Doctorates. Equally, some police forces, such as New South Wales in Australia, have externalised their initial training to universities — in their case Charles Sturt University. In Scotland, through the Scottish Institute for Policing Research, the Scottish police and Scottish universities have built a partnership for advancing knowledge about policing. A similar partnership — the Centre for Excellence in Policing (CEPS) — has developed in Australia.

There are some emerging features of this new landscape of police education that give some encouragement that, in the midst of largely top-down

reforms of structure, pay and budgets, driven by austerity, real change is beginning to happen to the 'profession' of policing:

- the educational qualifications and pre-qualification requirements for joining the police service are changing and becoming more stretching and more formalised at around Level 4 or the first level of higher education;
- the traditional basis of the training around knowledge of the law and some practical skills is being challenged by a new requirement for police officers to understand and be able to interpret the research relevant to their practice (Neyroud, 2011);
- police training is shifting to one of two models: a partnership with higher education; a transformation of existing infrastructure into a higher education institution.

There are a number of issues that this change throws up. Operational credibility is critical to policing. It is, as Neyroud (2011) suggested, important to the legitimacy of senior people in leading their subordinates. There is also widespread cultural resistance to the substitution of higher education-based knowledge for craft and experience-based knowledge. This resistance is not confined to the police service. In the UK, there have been similar strains felt in the nursing profession after the introduction of a mandatory degree-level qualification for nursing practice. There have been regular stories in the British media about nurses being too educated to care. The stories prompted the Royal College of Nursing to commission a review of the approach. The subsequent report of the Willis Commission (2012) comprehensively rebutted the criticisms of the higher education approach and reaffirmed that nurses could only be effective in their practice if their caring skills were supported by scientific knowledge. The Neyroud Review made a similar case for policing.

### Creating the new profession?

It is not easy to change policing. Although it is a relatively new occupation in its modern form — no more than 200 years old, it has developed a strong culture and traditions, within the framework of national or local governance. Many studies of police have concluded that little fundamental change has resulted from the many attempts at reform over the

last 25 years. Peter Manning observed, '... reforms have had little operational or structural impact in spite of the widespread publicity and funding that they have generated' (Manning, 2012: xvii). He included reforms such as community policing and Compstat amongst those he analysed. He suggested that the reason for failure to make lasting change is that the reforms were not systematic and were largely top-down. Their impact on the frontline and the real work of policing was, therefore, in his view, necessarily limited.

However, there are a number of new ingredients to the reforms of police currently being pushed forward. The financial crisis is driving a much more systematic approach. Whether it is the Coalition's approach in England and Wales, the new Scottish force, the new Dutch National force or the new Swedish force, the political drive has been to make policing both more financially sustainable and more effective. This has pushed structural change to make a more efficient structure in almost all jurisdictions apart from England and Wales and closer democratic oversight.

But there has been a debate about the professionalisation of the police service, which has provided an opportunity to reconsider recruitment, education, training and promotion systems. In England and Wales, this has produced an opportunity, following the Neyroud Review, to test the development of a full-blown professional model — qualification, accreditation, registration and continuous professional

development — not just for the senior ranks, but for all those working in policing. Whether this will produce a template for others to draw from remains to be seen. It is early days because the College of Policing is in its infancy. The first steps are, however, promising. The first Chair of the Board of the new body is a distinguished academic and educator, a Vice Chancellor of a major higher education institution. The first Chief Executive is a chief constable with an established reputation for sponsoring experimental research. Its membership has already been agreed to span not just a small group of senior officers at the top but the whole workforce, which is, itself, a major change for a police service that has traditionally been split into frontline, middle management and chief officer groupings. In order to engender real reform, the new professionalism in policing has to be a professionalism of the whole workforce. Only through such a wholesale commitment will this wave of police reform overcome the weaknesses that Manning has identified in every previous attempt.

Finally, for CEPOL, this emerging new professionalism offers an opportunity to migrate from a network of training colleges to a catalyst for translation of research and new approaches to training and education across Europe. A mission centred on encouraging the testing of practice, sharing the best evidence and ensuring access to the best tools for supporting police officers would make CEPOL a key driver of change in European policing.

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