

A degree is not necessarily the answer: A comparative analysis of police professionalisation through Higher Education (or not) in Scotland, Sweden & Finland

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Justification for the study

- Despite expanding academisation of IPL's, evidence of benefits scant and inconclusive (Brown, 2020; Terpstra & Schaap, 2021).
- Hough & Stanko (2019,p.5) suspected that intro of the PEQF had been based more on professional judgement & experience than research.
- No empirical research why Scotland not following the trend.
- Answered calls by scholars such as Noordegraaf & Steijn (2013, p. 236) for cross-national comparative studies to develop more refined understandings of the reconfiguration of public services.

Principal research question

- “To what extent do the different social, cultural, and political contexts in Scotland, Sweden and Finland influence the perception of higher education’s role in police recruit learning?”

Supplementary research questions

1. How has initial police learning evolved in the case study countries?
2. What knowledge, skills and behaviours do 'policy network actors' within the case study countries perceive as desirable in a professional police officer?

3. To what extent are the current approaches to initial police learning perceived by ‘policy network actors’ within the case study countries as helping in the development of desirable professional attributes?
4. What factors explain the divergence between ‘policy network actors’ perceptions within the case study countries on the impact, or potential impact, of academic education on the professionalisation of police recruits and policing students?

Study design

- Multiple, cross-national, qualitative case study (Scotland, Sweden, Finland).
- 49 individual, in-person semi-structured in-person interviews – Chief Officers, senior officers, tutor constables, recruits, academics, oversight & governance, police unions.
- 6 in-person focus groups – 2 in each country – initial classroom phase & operational phase
- Transcription and Coding using Atlas ti.
- Thematic Analysis – Braun & Clarke (2006)

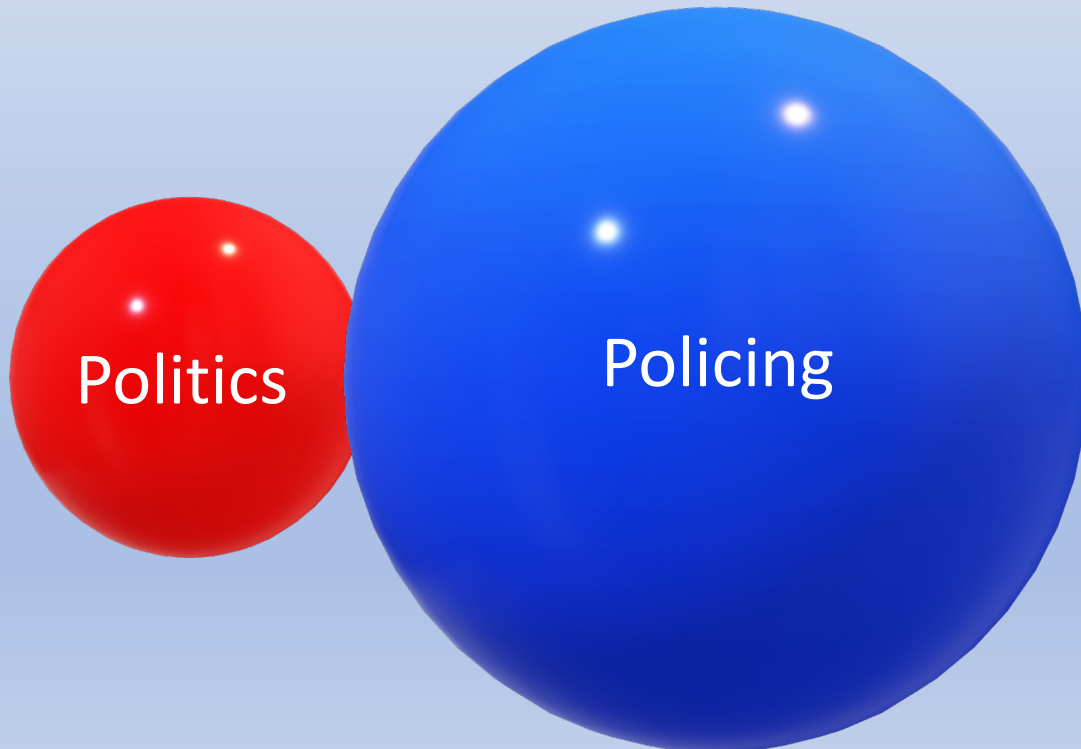
IPL Models - 2019

- Scotland: 12-weeks classroom Scottish Police College (traditional, semi-militaristic), 21-months 'on-the-job'
- Sweden: 2-years classroom (mainstream university), 6 months 'on-the-job'
- Finland: 18-months classroom (Police University College), 11-months 'on-the-job', 5 months classroom (Police University College)

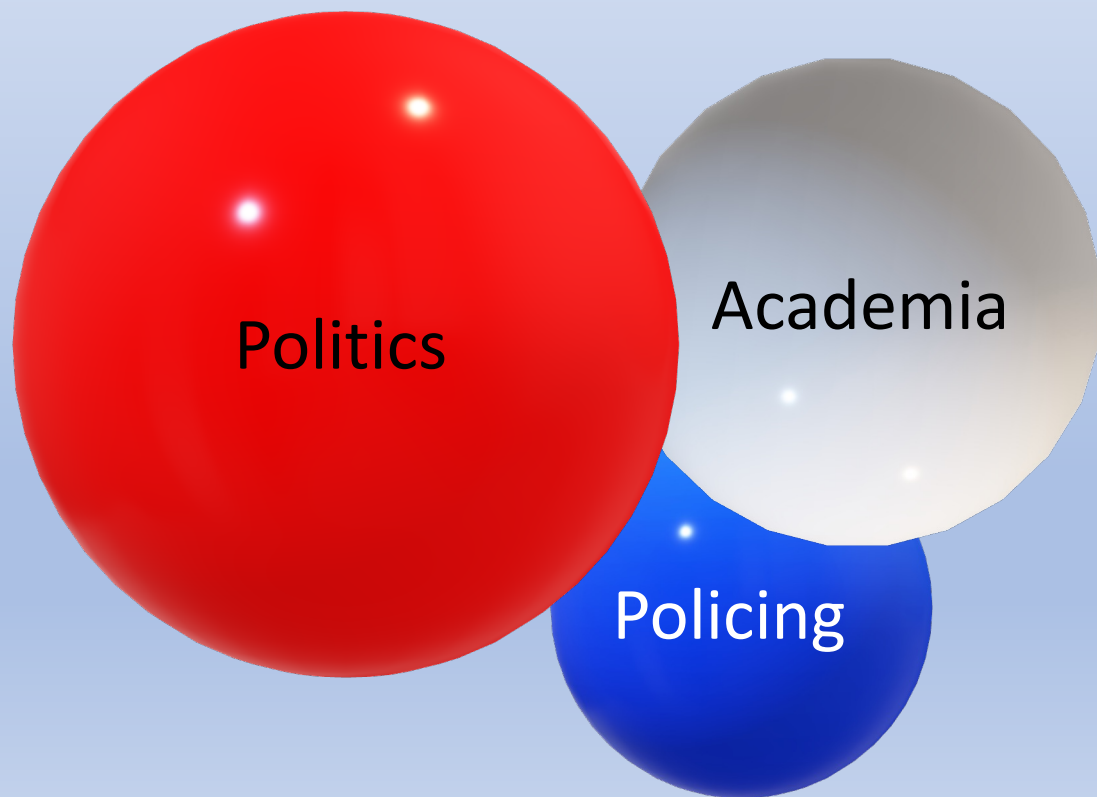
SRQ1:– how IPL has evolved

- Differently in each of the case study countries, in part of a result of:
- the relational power and extent of interaction between 3 ‘worlds’ of policing and academia (Hallenberg, 2012), and the ‘world’ of national politics during policy formulation,
- the contextualised meanings of profession, professionalism, and professionalisation,
- the operational and organisational contexts (rational/efficient –v- generalist).

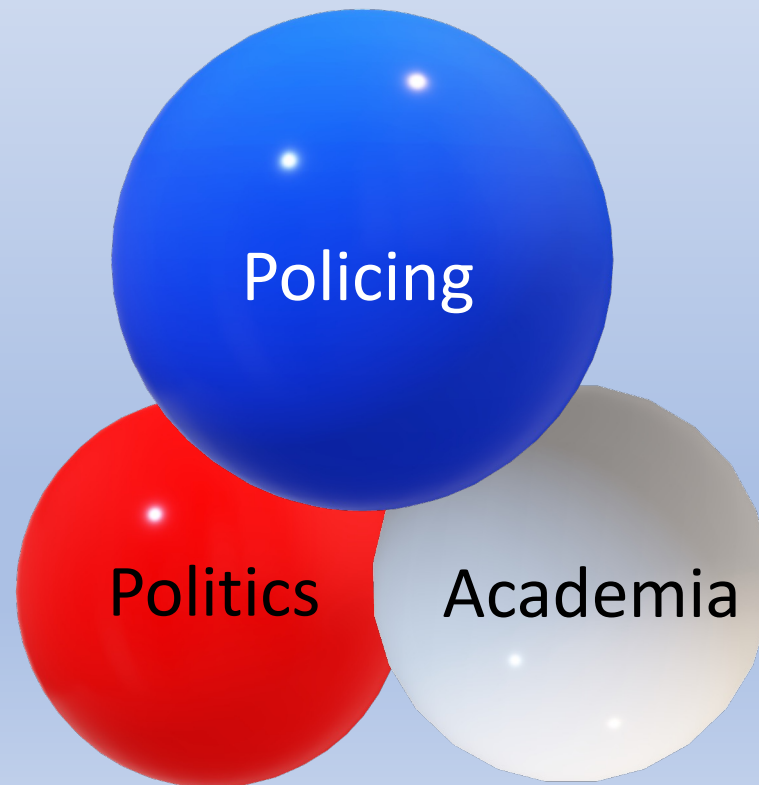
Scotland: homogenous, non-negotiated
approach to policy formulation



Sweden: heterogenous, negotiated BUT relational power principally with political & academic worlds



Finland: heterogenous, negotiated BUT relational power principally with policing world



Contextualised meanings of policing as a profession

- Police practitioners in EACH of the case study countries – it IS a profession because:
 - Vocation – a way of life
 - Values driven – especially ethical behaviour, standards, discipline
 - High degree of responsibility
 - Making a positive difference to society
- Academics in each country – not a profession unless graduate-entry only.
- On continuum of professions (Saks, 2012), policing generally perceived as being on a ‘par’ with nursing.

Meanings ascribed to notions of professionalism (SRQ2: Desirable knowledge, skills & behaviours)

- Police officers in Scotland foregrounded ‘craft’ knowledge developed through ‘on-the-job’ practice experience over ***theoretical*** knowledge.
- Police Officers in Sweden & Finland perceived both ‘craft’ knowledge developed through ‘on-the-job’ practice experience AND ***relevant academic theoretical*** knowledge as foundational to the development of professional expertise.
- In each country, values-driven, ethical decision-making which aimed to ‘do-the-right-thing’ and achieve a ‘good outcome’, particularly with regards the vulnerable in society, was foregrounded as a desirable professional skill (***practical wisdom***). Doing the right thing....Scotland cf Finland.

Practical Wisdom (Phronesis)

- The combining of academic theoretical knowledge, technical knowledge, and practical experience in Sweden and Finland encapsulates the Aristotelian concept of ‘practical wisdom’ (phronesis) – combining the ‘art’, ‘craft’ and ‘science’ of policing (Wood et al. .2018) to make deliberative, ethically sound decisions which are likely to result in a desirable outcome.

Meaning ascribed to professionalisation (SRQ3:– Existing IPL models meeting needs?)

- Despite **Scotland & Finland** being at opposing ends of the academisation spectrum, each country generally considered their respective approaches to be meeting their needs.
- **Sweden** revealed a complexity of cultural synergies and dissonances within and between:
 - the ‘3-worlds’ of politics, academia, and policing,
 - political parties (left –v–right),
 - ‘management cops’ and policing students,
 - policing students and academia

- The outcome in **Sweden**, it is argued, is an initial police learning model which:
- police officers generally perceived as foregrounding political ideology and the accreditation needs of academia, over the vocational needs of policing,
- academics generally perceived as aiding individual and organisational professionalisation but should be a 3-year degree,
- Politicians either perceived should be a degree (left leaning parties) or should be more craft focused (right leaning parties).

Meaning ascribed to professionalisation (SRQ4:- Role of academic education in IPL models

- **Scotland** – no role in probationer learning – ‘routine’ role within rational/efficient, low adhocracy model) BUT relevant for specialist and senior roles (e.g., Cyber Crime)
- **Sweden & Finland** – *relevant* academic theoretical knowledge, development of critical thinking, lifelong learning & reflective practice by HE generally valued as a foundation for professional expertise, particularly within Finland’s generalist, lean, high adhocracy model.
- **Degree entry only?** Scotland strongly resistant, Sweden mixed perceptions; Finland generally supportive BUT a nice to have. Not a driver. Student’s decision to join not influenced by degree.

Why isn't Scotland following the academisation trend?

- Community representativeness: traditionally working-class recruits
- Limited 'routine' role of junior, front-line constables
- Politically unacceptable – seen as elitist - Scottish exceptionalism? (Brangan, 2019).
- Culturally unacceptable within Police Scotland (quote from Chief Officer)
- 'Hot' post-reform policing climate (Murray & Harkin, 2017)
- Post entry – focus on quickly developing deployable resource and on developing experiential knowledge (the 'art' and 'craft').

Key contributions to knowledge

- Provides new, ***empirically based understandings*** of police professionalisation and how they relate to IPL.
- Discloses that ***police professionalisation has different meanings*** in different social, cultural and political contexts. Helps to explain different approaches to IPL.
- Helps to ***understand why there is no consensus*** about how policing should be professionalised.

Key contributions to knowledge

- ***Different approaches to IPL are appropriate*** if attuned to the different social, cultural, and political contexts in which they are situated.
- Provides new ***empirical evidence that policing is not a trait-based ‘classic’ profession, but at best ‘hybrid’*** combining “professional and managerial principles such as autonomy and control, or quality and efficiency” (Noordegraaf, 2015, pp. 187-188).
- That ***different levels of hybridity might*** exist within different social, cultural, and political contexts.

Key contributions to knowledge

- Relational power and extent of interaction and cultural alignments & schisms between ‘3-worlds’ of politics, academia & policing are important. Social, cultural and political policy streams (Kingdon, 1995) need to coalesce to provide windows of opportunity for change.
- The extent to which academic theoretical knowledge, ‘craft’ knowledge, and experiential knowledge are foregrounded as privileged forms of knowledge and sources of cultural capital within policing vary within different social, cultural, and political contexts.

Future Research?

- What, if any, influence the academisation of initial police learning has on policing's representativeness and ability to build and maintain effective, trusting relationships with the communities they serve.

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