

# A Partnership for Problem-Solving?

## A Case Study of the Probationary Officer Development Programme in Northern Ireland

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# Overview

- Background to the partnership between the PSNI and UU
- Focus on the Probationary Officer Development Programme
- Highlight some research findings from the first cohort of graduates (focus groups and survey data)

# Historic Relationship between Police in Northern Ireland and UU

- In 1973 Ulster Polytechnic introduced a part-time Higher National Certificate in Police Studies for serving officers, validated by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)
- In 1997 the HNC was replaced by the University's Diploma in Police Studies
- In 2001 from the inception of the PSNI, over 2500 Student Officers successfully completed the Certificate in Police Studies (level 3)
- In 2008, PSNI and Ulster continued to collaborate on the Certificate of Higher Education (Cert HE) in Policing, a level 4 award
- 2014 revalidation saw the level 4 cert in policing being redesigned to the current Level 5 advanced Diploma in Policing

# Current Collaboration between PSNI and UU

- Advanced Diploma in Policing;
- Advanced Diploma in Intelligence Practice;
- Advanced Diploma in Professional Teaching;
- ‘Top up’ degree for serving or retired police officers - BSc (Hons) Criminology and Criminal Justice (Applied Practice);
- Masters in Professional Development (Public Services) beginning in late 2024
- Recognition of Prior Learning
- Evidence Based Policing Working Group
- RUCGC Bursary scheme for research support on innovations in policing
- **Graduate Certificate in Policing and Criminology;**
- **BSc (Hons) Policing and Criminology (Applied Practice).**

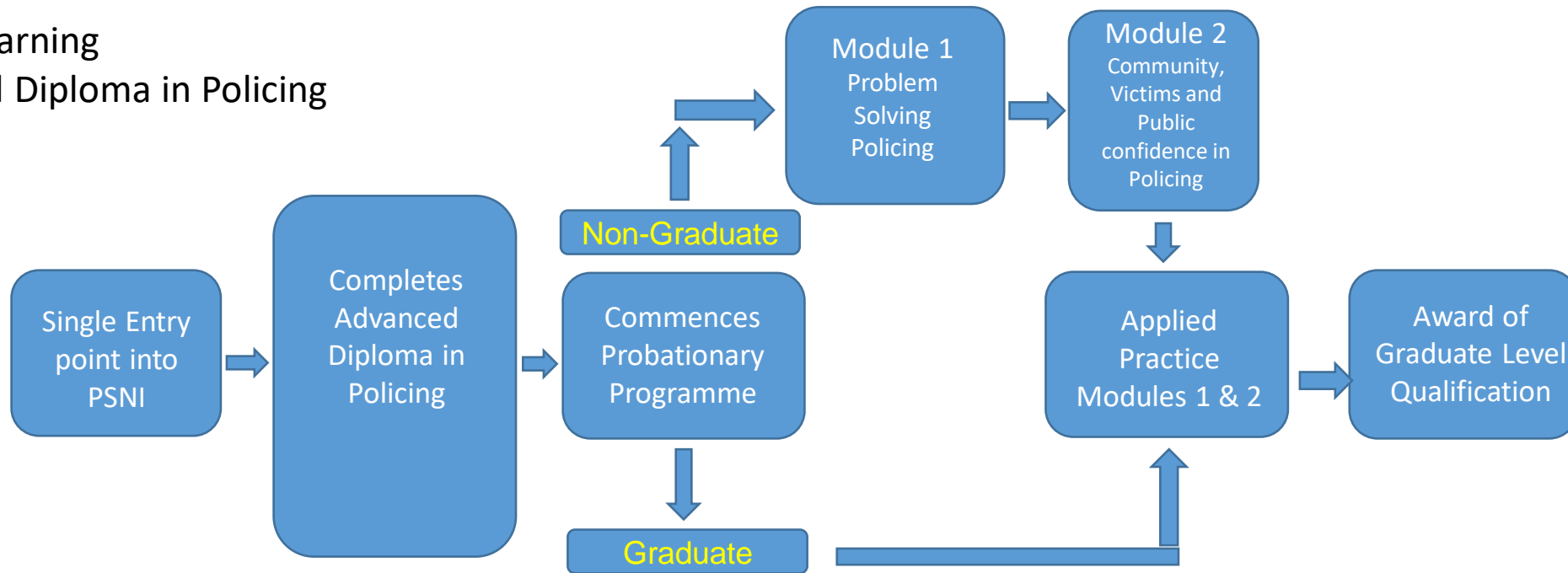
# Probationary Officer Development Programme (PODP)

- Northern Ireland sits outside PEQF – PSNI values providing additional support in line with other forces.
- Since 2020, the **Graduate Certificate** and **BSc (Hons) Degree in Policing and Criminology (Applied Practice)** have been co-designed and co-delivered by the PSNI PODP team in the Police College and UU.
- The programme is operationally aligned with the aim of supporting front line officers as they deal with more complex issues and calls for service, focusing on problem solving, vulnerability, ethical practice and public confidence.
- Strong ethos on real case studies and reflective practice.
- The programme accredits the 2 year probationary period. Moving away from tasked-based training towards a problem solving and critical thinking approach.

# Course Structure

All entrants:

- Level 4 learning
- Advanced Diploma in Policing



Probationary pathways:

- BSc (Hons) Policing and Criminology (Applied Practice) - for non-Graduates
- Graduate Certificate in Policing and Criminology (Applied Practice) - for Graduates

# Graduate Certificate in Policing and Criminology (Applied Practice)

Two work-based online modules taught and assessed by PSNI trainers who are Recognised University Tutors.

Themes covered in **PUP 551** include:

- Digital Policing;
- Procedural Justice;
- Vulnerability/Mental Health;
- Victim/Witness/Offender Needs;
- Community Safety; and
- Ethical Practice.

Themes covered in **PUP 552** include:

- Criminological Theories;
- Personal Attitudes and Stereotyping;
- Safeguarding Children and Young People;
- Missing Persons;
- Evidencing Non-Judicial Outcomes; and
- Complete Procedural Approach.

Assessments – evidence operational examples.

Short written reflective pieces, video blogs and audio visual presentations.

# BSc (Hons) Policing and Criminology (Applied Practice)

- Officers complete two Ulster University led modules, Problem-Solving Policing and Community, Victims and Public Confidence in Policing **and** the two Graduate Certificate applied practice modules.
- For the two UU led modules, they are taught in person, three full-day sessions per module on campus.
- Focused on reflective practice, group-based discussion and officer experience to inform lessons (and links to theory) and assessment.
- Support provided, for example Protected Learning Days for assessments.



# Impact?

- Four focus groups with Cohort One students conducted in September 2023 (n=33)

*“Going to university wasn’t really an option for me after leaving school; to be here today with my proud family, graduating with an honour’s degree feels absolutely amazing! I’ve really achieved something and it makes me think differently now, reflecting more on my actions.”*

*“It’s been significantly beneficial to me as a police officer – I’ve been able to grow I believe from the theories that I’ve learned and been able to apply these in my operational policing career so far over the first two years.”*

*“It feels great to have achieved something and learned something as well. It’s nice to do whilst working; applied practice. Whilst doing our assessments the course makes you think a lot more about what you actually have done and makes you more aware.”*

*“How does having a uni degree benefit me as a police officer?”*

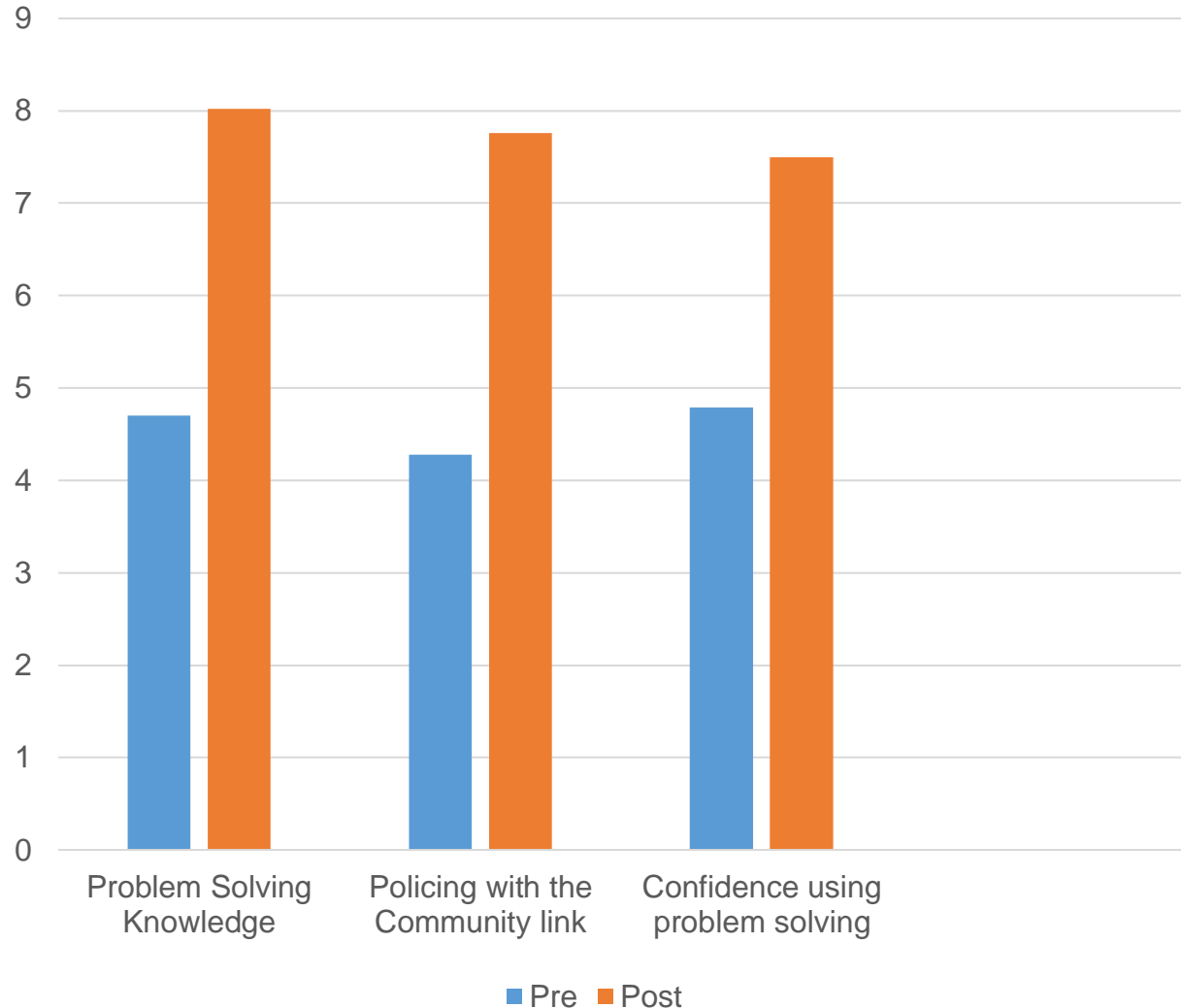
# Survey

## Problem-Solving Policing

- **Anonymous survey completed by participants of module PUP 549 Problem-Solving Policing (n=128)** from the degree course in 2022/23
- **Survey was to build upon the work of Sidebottom et al. (2020)** who surveyed more than 2,000 police officers in England and Wales on their attitudes to and experiences of problem-solving policing
- Survey consisted of 44 questions organised into four sections (which closely followed the style and content of the Sidebottom et al. survey for the purposes of consistency and comparability)
- Rather than pre and post surveys, **one survey asking students to reflect on before and after** was completed immediately after the third and final session of the module - philosophical approach of Austrian phenomenologist Alfred Schutz (1967) with regards to meaning lying in the *reflection upon* an experience (and not in the experience itself).

# Survey Results

- Average score of self-assessed **knowledge on problem-solving** rose from **4.70 pre-module** to **8.02 after** completing the module (on a Likert scale of 1-10)
- Officers increased their knowledge of problem-solving and the **link with Policing with the Community** from **4.28 pre-module** to **7.76 after** completing the module.
- The overall average **confidence** rating rose from **4.79 pre-module** to **7.50 after**.



# Survey Results

- **97.7%** of student officers stated they were **confident that they understood what problem-solving involves after the module.**
- Current operational pressures led to **89.8%** of respondents suggesting it was **difficult to fully implement in a response role.**
- However, **71.9%** of all respondents **'routinely' or 'sometimes' practice problem solving** when dealing with crime and disorder issues.

# Conclusion

- Constantly evolving and adapting programme – ongoing longitudinal research
- Practice to theory and vice versa (assessments based on operational experience)
- Partnership and co-design crucial
- Recognition and Reward – PSNI funded
- Changing attitudes across programmes – takes time to develop

# Conclusion

- **About changing perceptions**, not only internally **within policing** (PSNI) but also **within society** that you don't need a degree to be an effective police officer.
- There is a role for academia working with police colleges for the betterment of policing, police officers and wider society.