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Police Oracle article

The graduate police officers of the future

I have read with interest the varying and polarised debates around the police 'professionalisation' agenda over the last few years. Whether a police officer actually needs a degree or not, at the University of Gloucestershire we are simply responding to the new market and have become the first provider in the South West region to offer the College of Policing approved pre join degree in professional policing. We launched this in September 2019 and are seeing a massive growth in interest for our course and have nearly 80 students studying the pre join degree, with our 2018 cohort being moved onto the second year of the program as our original content closely matched the College of Policing requirements.

Whenever Police Oracle runs a story about degrees in policing, I always see derogatory comments about the next generation of 'snowflake' graduate police officers whose degree will not help them in dealing with a violent situation. If those people are being honest, they know that is only a small proportion of the job anyway. I am always astonished by what an incredible group of people our students are, and if they choose to join the police after graduating, they would be a credit to society. These people are not only juggling life at university, working to help pay their fees but many are also engaged in volunteering in places such as homeless shelters and youth projects. This will bring them a great deal of 'life experience' that many people comment are lacking from graduate recruits.

Our 3-year course is run by experienced former police officers who were Chief Superintendents, Senior Investigating Officers and specialist football officers as well as a current Special Sergeant with British Transport Police. We therefore have a wealth of strategic, investigative and operational policing experience. The students are also taught by our excellent social sciences team, where they must consider how criminological and sociological theory relates to practical policing, as well as covering a range of contemporary issues such as cybercrime, domestic abuse, country lines and terrorism. This allows them to understand the broader concept of policing and be more able to tackle future complex issues that affect policing. Students are assessed in a variety of ways, from contemporary essay writing through to portfolios based on practical scenarios, with their course culminating in their own research project on a specific area of policing that interests them. They also have to do practical work such as conducting a suspect interview as part of a final module assessment.



We have fantastic facilities, including our bespoke 'crime house' on our Francis Close Hall campus in Cheltenham. This provides a broad range of practical experiences for students, as it is used for scenarios such as drugs searching, domestic violence, burglary and major crime investigation. We are not training students to be police officers, we are merely providing them with the opportunities to practice policing skills in a safe learning environment. They then have the opportunity to reflect on their performance using the National Decision Model and Competency and Values Framework for Policing, allowing us to embed the concept that policing is a reflective profession.



Throughout the course students have a vast range of opportunities to develop themselves. Our 'Student Community Patrol Scheme' allows students to sign up to patrol with PCSOs on student nights in Cheltenham town centre, dealing with a range of night time economy issues. The university runs a range of field trips, such as visiting a prison, attending a Police and Crime Panel meeting, taking part as the crowd during Thames Valley Police's public order training and our bespoke policing field trip to London where students visit community projects for a day. We encourage and support our students to join the Special Constabulary and have a number who are already Specials with their local police forces.



A pre join degree in professional policing is not just aimed at people who want to join the police, our students are seeking a range of careers from prison officers and police officers to crime analysts and civilian investigators. Those that have worked hard to earn a good degree and then choose to enter policing deserve to be treated with respect, and not subjected to a hostile environment simply because they are a new breed of graduate recruits. Policing is changing, it is no longer a 30-year career that is just about investigating crime and maintaining order. It is becoming far more complex, with a range of different challenges in a policing role that has increased in scope and reduced in budget over recent times. Society, and those within policing, need to adapt to these changes and welcome the next generation of police officers who will be more than capable of doing 'the job'.