

Exploring the Journey from Practice to Academia: The Police Pracademic's Transition Experience

Anne Eason & Paul Williamson

University of the West of England, United Kingdom

anne.eason@uwe.ac.uk

DOI:10.70386/ijcpe.v1i1.43

Abstract

As the four Police Constable Entry Routes (PCER) continue to exist, so too has the role of the police pracademic evolved. As with other professions, police pracademics bridge theory and practice, making them critical to the higher education routes in policing. This research captures the lived experiences of 112 police pracademics' transition from policing to academia from universities across England and Wales. Providing demographic insights and textual perspectives of the transition process, a thematic analysis of the surveyed results revealed three themes: othering, credibility in context, and value(able). While the study reaffirms their positive influence on practice-led learning, it also emphasises the need for stronger institutional support for successful transition and integration of pracademics into their academic careers.

Keywords: *Police pracademic, police education, professionalisation, policing pedagogy.*

Introduction

The shift in higher education institutions to more vocational courses has had a significant impact on the type of teaching and the teaching staff employed in recent years. The review of UK apprenticeships ([Richard, 2012](#)) was the springboard for widening participation to support greater numbers of young people into higher education through work-based learning and education that brought together industry and scholarship ([Dawson and Osbourne, 2019](#)). Apprenticeships are a lucrative aspect of university business, with the government funding of pathways at circa £2.5bn annually ([Funded Training Solutions, 2025](#)). Traditionally aimed at crafts such as those in the construction industry, engineering and architecture, there has been an influx of

other disciplines such as paramedics and nursing and since 2018, the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship (PCDA).

When first introduced in policing, some might argue that the professionalisation process instigated by the College of Policing was not welcomed by many police areas ([Eason and Starr, 2024, p4](#)). The pushback was framed as unnecessary education and prolonged abstraction when all that is required to be an effective police officer is “common sense”, rejecting the idea that introducing theoretical understanding of crime and criminality might enhance the officer’s performance and what Sir Andy Marsh, CEO (2021), referred to as “fresh perspectives”. The partnerships and collaborations between some police institutions and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have become strained, particularly since the introduction of the ‘fourth route’ in 2024 ([Eason and Starr, 2024](#)). Nevertheless, many police areas and their HEI collaborators have thrived. They have embraced the new training routes and have worked through the complexities of protected learning, abstraction and caseload management collaboratively with their chosen university providers. This created new opportunities for those in the police who recognise the benefits of higher education to recruits (and the profession more generally) to join higher education.

All degree apprenticeships employ those already ‘in the job’, or with the relevant operational experience, to undertake the practical elements of teaching, and these experts have been referred to as pracademics. According to [Hollweck, Netolicky and Campbell \(2022\)](#), the term ‘pracademic’ has no single definition. They suggest that the pracademic does not “operate within the confines of the academic or practice and policy domains on their own, but exercise influence and enjoy membership of more than one or all of them” (p. 18). In other words, the pracademic does not have a set position within one or the other organisation but rather has membership in both, and their expertise can translate research into a practical or operational policy drawing on their expertise that guides and influences practice. This paper acknowledges the struggle of defining the pracademic and how they cross the boundaries of professional expertise across academia and their practice. Indeed, we posit that many of the newly appointed lecturers who deliver on degree apprenticeships and have left the police service are pracademics. Although now employees in higher education, they bring the operational expertise of policing, which is required to deliver certain aspects of the programme, but are themselves engaging in academic activities such as postgraduate

study and the research that informs the evidence base. Certainly, within our own institution and discipline, there are a significant number of teaching staff who have transitioned from the police service and can transform the student from 'knowledgeable ' to knowledge-able' ([Wilson, 2015, p.19](#)) through practice-led education normally associated with the workplace.

Whilst higher education can have many regulatory bodies to adhere to depending on the course of study (The Engineering Council, British Psychological Society, or College of Policing, for example), its overall governance and overarching structure are administrative rather than regimented and promote a learning environment conducive to critical thinking and continuous self-development. Most regulatory bodies are similarly structured; however, the police service is very different. It is hierarchical, heavily regulated, and “rank matters” in its leadership and decision-making framework ([Davis, 2018](#)). This sets it apart from other organisations and makes the transition from the service to HEI more complex and culturally problematic, shifting from an authoritarian leadership environment with strict guidelines and a legislative framework to one of autonomy, innovation and empowerment. This research therefore brings a very different perspective to the pracademics' transition, different from those of other professions which are already accounted for and whose origin organisation has less public, media and political interest.

Position of the Authors

This research synchronises our position in the higher education sector and self-identity as pracademics, as important to highlight. Both from criminal justice practice, one from probation and the other from policing, our journeys across to higher education have been quite different. Whilst sharing some similarities, such as guest speaking in practice, our experiences of making the move into lecturing have been divergent. The police officer took the Associate Lecturer route, undertaking the Associate Fellowship HEA whilst still in practice and then transferring into a full-time role teaching policing, the area of practice in which he brings a wealth of knowledge and experience. The probation officer, on the other hand, transferred straight into a new career from probation into police teaching, undertaking her fellowship and doctorate studies within the space of higher education. She brought a different type of

expertise and knowledge, transferable and aligned with the overarching public protection agenda and is currently a leader of police education in the sector. The undertaking of this research has, therefore, been of great interest, developing insight into the journey of other pracademics, some of whom resonate closely with our own and others that have brought new perspectives to our understanding. We hope this paper provides a thematic picture of these transitions and some of the obstacles and highlights that can assist future police officers moving over to education.

Reviewing the Literature

The initial research for this article drew on literature that investigates the experiences of other pracademics, such as [Posner \(2009\)](#), [Andrew and Wilkie \(2007\)](#), [Willis \(2016\)](#), [Owens \(2017\)](#) and [Eason \(2024\)](#). All highlighted some of the obstacles in moving from practice environments into academia. These are described in terms of issues of acceptance by, or integration into, academia, where the pracademic is not seen as having the breadth of necessary literary knowledge ([Eason, 2024](#)), where there is the need to retain credibility in both professions ([Posner, 2002](#)), but also feelings of inadequacy. The latter is explored in some depth by [Bothello and Roulet \(2019\)](#), who discuss the concept of 'imposter syndrome' particularly within higher education management and the 'publish or perish' mantra that is the subscribed measure of academic success. They describe this as uncertainty linked to individual anxiety and concern that professional expertise loses value or does not translate into the scholarly university requirements.

This can be seen in nursing where, for example, the move of clinical staff into higher education as lecturing practitioners resulted in many giving up practice to meet the expectations of research and the need for theoretical knowledge ([Andrew and Wilkie, 2007](#)). Having to leave practice can mean losing operational currency and the time invested in scholarly activity in those early stages, not necessarily having any recognisable credibility within the academic circle ([Wilson, 2022](#)). Wilson suggests that the pracademic does not tend to follow the conventional academic pathway, being brought in to teach a specific subject because of their professional expertise. She goes on to say that pracademics are marginalised from the outset of their journey, having to join the university through the traditional induction process and not one designed to integrate someone from practice.

This uncertainty is further extended through the expectation, or perceived expectation, that to be a credible lecturer, you need to be published. In other words, output equals credibility in the sphere of academia. These concerns are reinforced by Willis (2016), who highlights how those in higher education who do not have a practice background do better in terms of publishing and external funding success, without which academic acceptance is not achievable. For pracademics, this can seem inaccessible and thus exclusionary from wider academia and indeed, as Eason (2024) suggests, places them even further on the periphery of acceptance by academia. These all contribute to the difficulties faced by the pracademic's transition.

It is also worth noting that there has been “a long-standing disconnect between policing and academia” (Watkinson-Miley, Cox and Deshpande, 2021, p. 124), which has led to feelings of suspicion and mistrust between the two organisations. Both appear indifferent to the operational needs and requirements of the other, resulting in the disconnect described as “key barriers for police-academic partnerships” (ibid). These include issues around police culture or canteen culture understood by academics as an informal and rudimentary method of problem-solving (Hesketh and Williams, 2017) and academic culture, perceived by the police as theoretical ideas not applicable to policing practice, researchers as spies and critics. Thus, for any officer who decides to move into academia, membership of the policing family dissolves, and they too may be viewed suspiciously by their former colleagues (Huey and Mitchell, 2006).

Methodology

The findings from this exploratory review of literature informed the qualitative questions of the self-completion questionnaire used in this research. Taking a mixed-methods approach and using the Qualtrics online survey tool, the quantitative data provided demographic information such as gender, length of service, qualifications before pracademic role and responses to the data gained from our literature review. Open questions inviting elaboration of their response were then requested, providing rich textual data that gathered personal opinions and perceptions of the participants' transition journey.

Following successful ethical approval via the University of the West of England Research Ethics process (UWE, 2022), the questionnaire was sent out internally via LinkedIn and to higher education teaching establishments involved in the PCER across the county. Using a purposive sampling strategy ([Robson and McCartan, 2016](#)) ensured we captured those who met the participant criteria: being a member of an HEI teaching team and having been or continuing to be a serving police officer. Altogether, we had 112 responses, of whom 72 (64%) identified as male, 27 (24%) as female, 1 as other, and the remainder not indicated. This is below the national average as reported by the [Home Office \(2025\)](#), which states that female officers make up 36.1% of the police officer population in England and Wales. This does not account for those who did not indicate their gender. Length of service was predominantly 20+ years at 64.65%, with 11-20 years at 22.22% and 13.13% below 10 years. This indicates that most participants changed occupation later in their policing career, with almost half, 47, pursuing teaching or training qualifications before the move (46.53%) and a similar number, 45, having engaged with teaching in HEI beforehand. While the survey responses suggest strong retention among those who participated, they also reflect a wide shift away from policing as a lifelong vocation towards “portfolio careers” ([Charman and Tyson, 2025, p. 767](#)). Increasing numbers of officers are now voluntarily exiting mid-career for alternative pathways, including roles in academia, well before the traditional 30-year retirement point ([Charman and Tyson, 2023](#); [Jones, Hesketh and Noble, 2025](#)).

For analysis of the textual data, we took a reflexive and thematic approach as outlined by [Braun and Clarke \(2006; 2013; 2022\)](#). This included data which was specifically focused on confirming (or not) the literature review findings, to expand our understanding of those obstacles and identify any other emerging themes. It was important throughout this process that we remained objective and did not allow our own preconceived ideas or assumptions to interfere with how the themes were framed ([Braun and Clarke, 2022](#)) and whether they accurately reflect the participants' narratives ([Naeem et al., 2023, p. 1](#)). Remaining objective in our interpretation of the written responses was therefore crucial, and this was achieved by repeating and cross-referencing the data coding; linking responses across codes to find supportive correlations rather than assuming our interpretations were accurate. We have summarised the most recurrent themes below, with some interesting results.

Findings

The survey explored the experiences of police officers transitioning from operational policing into higher education roles, examining how policing pracademics navigated their new academic identities, credibility, and value within university contexts. The findings confirm much of the existing pracademic literature while offering new perspectives on the lived experience of those engaged in the delivery of the PCDA. In line with [Braun and Clarke's \(2006; 2013\)](#) thematic analysis framework, three key themes emerged: othering, credibility in context, and value(able). Each provides a fresh insight into some of the stumbling blocks that impacted on a pracademic's journey into higher education. This time, from the former police officer perspective.

The first question relates to the literature findings to see whether they too had similar experiences. Of the 60 who responded 'yes' to having experienced imposter syndrome, self-doubt and legitimacy as a lecturer were the most frequent reasons, with 13.7% indicating they felt they were undeserving of the post. Legitimacy was explained in a variety of ways but particularly relating to academics:

"I do not consider myself an academic. In fact, I generally lead with the statement 'I'm not an academic' owing to the feeling of not fitting in with those that have worked for years in this industry"

Any academic seems to frown on the police programme and any non-academics!
(exclamation by participant) (Female Lecturer)

But also, the academy itself:

The HEI I am teaching at does not really want the police onsite...the VC department appears to want the income but wants our department hidden
(Female Programme Leader)

The policing dept at my uni sits within a school of [redacted to maintain anonymity]. I feel that we are viewed as an adjunct to the wider school, rather than more collegially being accepted as a serious academic discipline (Male Senior Lecturer).

These align with the experiences of others ([Eason, 2025](#)) that suggest acceptance by academics and higher education institutions is problematic, but perhaps more specifically with the fragmented relationship that appears to remain between the police service and HEIs ([Hesketh and Williams, 2017](#)). The established and deeply embedded ideas appeared to act as a barrier to the police pracademics transition, with some clearly feeling that they are somewhat supplementary to other disciplines, but their position as a pracademic is not truly valued or understood.

Othering

This mistrust between the organisations has inevitably spilt over to academic staff members, thus shaping their perceptions of the police pracademic. Closely tied to imposter syndrome was a strong sense of professional othering. Some respondents described feeling positioned as “deliverers” rather than the broader understanding of an academic scholar and were treated as outsiders by colleagues who had taken the traditional academic route:

Specialisms and expertise aren't recognised. Academic leaders just see you as a “deliverer”, and you aren't given an opportunity to utilise your knowledge and improve the courses (Male Senior Lecturer)

But this was not confined to academia. Interestingly, and conversely, there was also a sense of renunciation by one participant, a male with 11 – 20 years' service, by previous police colleagues once he had moved into a teaching role:

The immediate ‘othering’ I experienced by the police when I left, despite continuing to teach their officers from the other side of the coin i.e. as an HEI provider/outsider’...frustrated many attempts to collaborate and enhance the educational experience I was hoping to develop with them (Male Senior Lecturer)

Other responses were suggestive of a sense of othering or no longer ‘fitting’ in with the police service they had left. For example, one felt that resistant “attitudes within the senior management teams in force” (Male Senior Lecturer) were dismissive of his new role. Another felt that senior leaders and the College of policing were “undermining police education”, which filtered down the ranks, leading to a “wholly

toxic atmosphere created within the student body” (Male Lecturer). These responses are summed up by one male lecturer who suggests,

That the policing world is still not very accepting of academics or academic knowledge. I have learned more than I realised I would in HEO towards policing, and it's a shame the frontline can't embrace the learning the HEI can bring.

And thus, as a member of a university, this sets them apart from the policing family, ‘othered’ as part of the academy, as outlined by Huey and Mitchell (2016). This suggests that it is not academics that police officers mistrust or underlies organisational suspicion, but those who choose to be part of the higher education approach; a dual othering resulting in marginalisation from both policing and the academy. This led to a sense of alienation and a professional periphery. There is also the overarching relationship between public perceptions of the police and thus how academics view police more broadly:

I have found that a few academics, one, has found it difficult to accept me as a retired police officer mainly, I suspect, as they are anti police in their views (Male Lecturer)

Although there was no tangible evidence to suggest any negative perceptions about the police more generally, there was evidence that the police academics did not feel accepted by their academic colleagues because of their previous occupation:

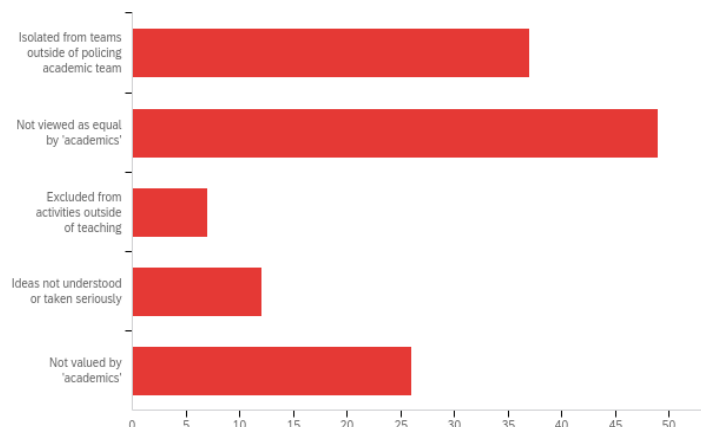
Many academics look down on ex cops. It's intellectual snobbery and elitism (Male Senior Lecturer)

Any academic seems to frown on the police programme and any non-academics

What is academic? I have an MA, PGCHPE, halfway through an MA Ed (Female Senior Lecturer)

The other part of this line of questioning was around team membership. With questions derived from findings in the literature review, they were asked if they ever experienced the same or similar as indicated in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Responses to question 14 – Team membership. Have you ever felt any of the following?



The table shows the participant responses to each of these literature findings, which were based on feelings and challenges of the transition process from practice to the academy. They were asked to ‘tick all that apply’, and the results showed that the most significant finding was that 49 participants felt they were ‘not viewed as equal’ by their academic colleagues. The data also revealed a high proportion ($n=37$) felt ‘isolation from teams outside of policing’. The table shows that less significant was not being valued ($n=26$), understood or taken seriously by academic colleagues ($n=12$) and the lowest category, excluded from activities outside of teaching ($n=7$). The true significance of what activities participants had in mind regarding the latter would need to be further explored.

In terms of isolation, 28 males, 8 females, and 1 other reported feeling isolated outside of their immediate policing teams, which is slightly higher proportionately than the overall gender split of the participant group (77%:23%), suggesting male participants are more likely to feel isolated from the wider academic faculty or school. As one participant commented:

Policing has its own language and processes... In academia, emails come from committees you don't understand, with no explanation of who does what. You often feel foolish asking basic questions (Male Senior Lecturer)

To support officer entering academia, lets have some navigation tools, who does what and why, drop the acronyms to even the playing field. For example, all of my study was conducted with the Open University, I hadn't set foot in a

university prior to joining, so what an earth is a faculty? What's the difference between a faculty and a school? What does the RIDO office do? I could go on. This may appear very obvious, but the language of universities is steeped in history and tradition, many outsiders have never encountered before. Let's start by having a clear explanation (Male Senior Lecturer).

Perceptions of exclusion and/or having little or no understanding of the organisational structure or culture further compound isolation and the sense of othering, the construct of division between pracademic and academic; a 'guest' within the wider academic community. The induction process, or often lack of it, was mentioned where the participants felt it exacerbated the idea of othering by not properly integrating them into the organisation. One suggested having a "better Induction, meaningful induction [allowed] greater synergy with wider academic teams..." (Male Lecturer). Nevertheless, other support was highlighted, especially support from peers. Having a mentor was highlighted as good practice by 11% of respondents, some having benefited from one, "good support within the faculty, allocation of a mentor and honest feedback" (Male Lecturer and Course Lead). For the majority, however, it appeared less formal. The absence of a formal system of induction did, overall, appear to compound the perception of othering.

Credibility in context

Credibility in context emerged as a complex, situationally determined process. The participants consistently reported having a strong connection with the students due to their credentials and lived experience. They found that operational narratives were invaluable to these connections, providing genuine credence and empathic teaching approaches. This reinforces [Eason's \(2024\)](#) recognition that pracademics enhance authenticity and relevance to police education, and this is reflected in the response. For example,

Teaching concepts, legislation and practice can be difficult, but if you can provide an operational example, then I find that this assists the students. It also gives you credibility, and they are more inclined to listen to you and engage (Male Lecturer)

My credibility as a police officer makes teaching police officers easier, as they are less resistant to what I am teaching them (Male Lecturer)

Having operational experience also brings a (unspoken) level of professional credibility to our teaching (Male Programme Leader)

It is interesting, therefore, that despite feelings of exclusion by some academics and some higher education institutions, all recognised teaching skills as a necessity. In the same way, they viewed having policing experience as of value to their being able to operationalise theory into practice; having appropriate teaching skills and expertise via a recognised academic qualification was also considered necessary:

Those entering HEI must have substantial policing experience and at a minimum an undergraduate degree. Without substantial policing experience...and without an academic qualification undermines the credibility of a lecturer. For example, how can one supervise a dissertation student without having experience in that area (Male Senior Lecturer)

Already having a master's has helped. I also completed the fellowship of higher education which our HEI requires, and this provides consistency for all new staff (Female Programme Leader).

Teaching experience is a must. Officers often think training/teaching is easy and somewhat a natural transition (especially on retirement). To effectively educate requires specialist skills and ability that simply experience in policing doesn't provide, nor ensure credibility or legitimacy of practice in the eyes of student officers (Male Lecturer)

Others shared how they felt their career experience provided a range of transferable skills that could be translated into teaching and learning; for example, “a career seeking evidence, reporting on the evidence and communicating it” (Male Lecturer) was suggested as integral with both roles and provided an ‘excellent foundation’ upon which to base their new role.

Credibility in the context of academia was perceived as more conditional, not tied to operational expertise but to conventional academic measures including research and publication. This strongly resonated with one of the authors' experiences, where an academic questioned the legitimacy of their Professional Doctorate – not being of the same rigour or theoretical depth as a PhD. For many of the participants, succeeding in research and publication was seen as an impossible task, which

strengthened the divide of the 'them and us' mentality and the concept of publish or perish.

I worked within a great team and there were support mechanisms available. But in academia, unless a lecturer has a PhD and publications, previous professional experience does not count much and hence even former senior police officers and trainers, who in my experience did a great job teaching at university, have little credibility amongst the academics (Male Research sabbatical)

Some employees within HEI do seem pre-occupied with publications and self-development over improving HEI in general (Male Lecturer).

... [I am] researching for publication yet I'm not considered an academic by the academics. Us and them (Female Senior Lecturer)

This apparent dual economy of credibility in context was a defining feature of this theme - because the respondents felt that they were more credible as academics to the police students than they were to their academic peers. This credibility was contextualised within the realm of lived experience, insider knowledge, empathy and the ability to apply knowledge to real-life scenarios in ways their academic counterparts could not, giving context to the learning but also understanding the context of the learner. The measure of credibility in the context of academia was based on the quantity of research output. This reinforces the perception of publication as the only quantifiable characteristic of academic capital, perpetuating the publish-or-perish philosophy and dismissing the educational value of vocational teaching through the lens of practitioner expertise.

Value(able)

This last theme is a new concept. Value(able) describes how the policing pracademic not only brings valuable lived experience to the programme but enables the student to take that value and apply it in their own learning and practice, empowering students to be value(able), converting "law in the books [into] law in action" ([Pound, 2010, p.35](#)). For example:

The lived experience has proved invaluable [to teaching] (Male Lecturer)

The Director of my department was also a former police officer, and I had a colleague who was very supportive of me and valued my policing experience (Female Programme Leader).

The students value your ability to provide context and apply theory, so do not doubt the value of your experience. You bring fresh perspectives to colleagues too (Male Senior Lecturer).

There is an interesting link in the latter response, referring to their value of new ideas and more recent practical experience that they then brought to their new academic colleagues. The value of new fresh perspectives and more recent operational skills and knowledge, therefore, cannot be underestimated. As one respondent set out: *“don’t try to brag subjects you have little experience of - find someone who does know. And if it is a while since you have done something, do the prep”* (Male Lecturer), highlighting the importance of up-to-date practice knowledge being valuable but also to be value(able).

The aspect of monetary value was noted and has been previously articulated by one of the female participants who reported she felt the policing programme was viewed as only having financial value. She felt that the university almost set out to conceal its (policing department) existence as part of the faculty portfolio; *“the VC department appears to want the income but wants our department hidden”* (Female Lecturer). This perceived devaluation by the institution gives the impression that they are not invested in the idea of the police apprenticeship but rather the income it generates. This narrow sense of value, seemingly only identifying monetary value, not only undermines knowledge from lived experience but fails to recognise the benefit of how these academics encourage students to apply that value into their practice as well as the popularity and demand for apprenticeships from employers ([Apprenticeships vs University | UCAS](#))

The PCDA aims to produce graduates who continue into substantive police roles by thinking critically and solving complex crime problems, communicating effectively with offenders, victims and the public and serving their community, drawing upon the theoretical evidence base. As such, this is perceived by the authors as the most valuable aspect of the programme and indeed, aligns with many of the respondents:

Students learn a great deal by hearing examples of our operational policing experiences, which helps to provide valuable context to the taught concepts, theories and examples of how drawing from, and contributing to the evidence-base informs future policing strategies and practice.

I can use case studies, based (sometimes loosely) on investigations I have handled, in which students can see how the knowledge they acquire can assist in a practical context.

I am more confident speaking to groups of people than I would have been without operational experience. Having done the role that I am training others to do, I do feel confident that the students value my viewpoint.

The lived experience has proved invaluable

This type of value(able)ness is the most predominant throughout. The credibility in context, it is perhaps the most important of all the themes that have emerged, creating a sense of wealth and contribution in the field and, as a result, supporting the growth in the police officer's progress. Enabling value to the education process and learning, therefore, clearly underpins a meaningful transition for the pracademic.

Discussion

The overwhelming sentiment across the survey responses was that the participants understood the need for vocational learning to be applied and that their lived experience of policing enabled them to do this with relevance and context. They felt that their positioning as pracademics, with lived experience of 'the job', provided contextual credibility to their teaching and to the student experience. In the *credibility in context* theme, there was clear pleasure and pride in their belief that they brought life to the learning. The context of this credibility was linked not only to student connection but also situationally within operational policing learning. Although delivered in the classroom, the respondents described their perceived credibility as positioned within the context of law enforcement and firmly situated within the students' learning needs.

This theme was very strong in acceptance by the students as experts, though this was not reflected in their experience of approval by their academic peers. This was more conditional and, for many, completely absent. The sense of *othering* was

closely linked to exclusion and a comparatively vague, decentralised structure, quite different from the hierarchical, almost military ranking of the police. This left some disorientated and feeling further isolated, reflecting the broader findings of Wilson (2022), who suggests that pracademics are often marginalised in university settings where the conventional PhD-to-lecturer career trajectory is commonplace. Wilson also notes that induction and progression systems are typically designed around such conventional entry routes, reinforcing divisions and impeding early integration. The need for a more guided and inclusive induction process is reflected by the participants, asking for something more structured and meaningful to their journey. This is something that should be considered for all pracademics across all disciplines; an induction package tailored to their unique needs when transitioning into academia. For the policing pracademic, this is particularly important regarding organisational change and more fluid leadership.

The othering theme also feeds into the perception of them and us and the publish-or-perish mentality that many pracademics, including our participants, struggle to navigate ([Bothello and Roulet, 2019](#)). This leaves them feeling even less able to fit in; being an outsider or 'guest' within the wider academic institution without a PhD. Not being accepted by academic peers coupled with no integrative induction is thus a significant stumbling block in the transition period, and likely beyond for those who either do not have the capacity or desire to research and publish (particularly in what is often a second, or more, career).

The duality of othering from either organisation is also of significant importance. Feelings of isolation from the police service they worked in, some for 30+ years, present them with a 'no-man's land' that strikes between the two professions but offers membership of none. The police service is often referred to as a police family, but for many of our participants, no such membership appeared on offer from the academic community. Indeed, as [Huey and Mitchell \(2016\)](#) describe, the loss of membership from the police family and lack of induction into academia can be seen as a central tension for the police pracademic struggling to gain recognition within the university. This struggle is pronounced in the 42 responses, particularly around membership not feeling they were viewed as equal by their academic peers, despite many having post-graduate qualifications and/or having valuable tradecraft experience.

The theme of othering, not belonging, and isolation from the wider university that has been drawn out in the research contributes directly to identity struggles and arguably undermines the integration of policing pracademics into the university setting. The idea that the respondents felt they did not fit in, and could not, regardless of their experience, qualifications or their desire, is generally dampened, suggesting, perhaps, that a better understanding of apprenticeship needs in terms of input and facilitation should be advertised and discussed internally. This may help to support the connectivity of the policing pracademic to the broader programme academics.

The final theme of *value(able)* really refers to the value provided by the pracademic that enables the apprentices not just to connect theory to practice but to add valuable insight into how, why and when this can be done. As Huey and Mitchell (2016) set out, the policing pracademic does not necessarily simplify the application of knowledge but often demonstrates its complexities. Enabling value supports new ideas, new modes of evaluation and subjective analysis; as the participant responses establish, lived experience is not only valuable to the student learning process but gives them the ability to operationalise that value, using it to enable their practice in ways that increase and improve their performance. This sense of value and enablement aligns with credibility in context and draws upon the central tenet of policing experience that is core to why many of the policing pracademics migrate into higher education. This appears to be a significant and positive contribution to the transition process, endorsing their move.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Taken together, the findings confirm the literature's consensus that pracademics play a vital role in bridging the gap between academic theory and the reality of practice. They also confirm that the transitional process is complex, vague and often absent in academic policy and processes. Pracademics need to be integrated in a much more unique and collaborative way than their academic counterparts who have progressed through traditional academic pathways. Open discussion, broader understanding of programme needs and university mechanisms, and a realisation that the academy is changing, diversifying to incorporate more vocational trades and practice-based/practice-led learning. This could help bridge the gap between academic and

pracademic, benefiting all from combining the two skill sets to enhance the transition process, which currently faces challenges of perceived legitimacy and exclusion. Exclusion not just from academic peers, but in one case, the institution itself – being perceived as an opportunity for financial gain rather than professional or strategic benefit, encouraging a sense of denigration. This is particularly concerning given the continued poor embrace of the PCDA in some police areas and could easily provide more ammunition to its resisters, damaging the good practice established in others.

To support a healthier and successful transition for police pracademics and based upon our findings, we would suggest the following as a process of “meaningful induction”:

- A structured induction process that provides not just information about the university but an introduction and integration process into the disciplines that fall around and underpin policing.
- Each transition is unique to the individual and so exploring this through the supervision process and acknowledging potential challenges, particularly in the first 12 months, would be beneficial.
- A mentoring or buddy system that facilitates a reciprocal sharing of knowledge and skills to gain a better understanding across programmes and academic personnel. Also considering the potential benefits of having dual mentoring (an academic and pracademic mentor) in this process.
- Create forums for the academic community that celebrate different skills and knowledge bases that not only promote research and publication but practice-led knowledge exchange, shifting the emphasis of publication as the central tenet to academic success to a wider remit of employability skills and competences.
- Promote the needs of vocational programmes as higher education areas of study that support a particular type of profession rather than a pathway that sits outside of the traditional.
- Consider gendered differences in the transition experience and how these can be better supported through mentoring and the wider academic community.

References

- Andrew, N. and Wilkie, G. (2007), Integrated scholarship in nursing: an individual responsibility or collective undertaking [online]. *Nurse Education Today*, 27(1), pp. 1-4. [Accessed 25 February 2024].
- Bothello, J. and Roulet, T. J. (2019) The Imposter Syndrome, or the Mis-Representation of Self in Academic Life. *Journal of Management Studies* [online] 56 (4), pp. 854–861. [Accessed 16 March 2025].
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology* [online] 3 (2), pp. 77–101. [Accessed 12 September 2025].
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2013) *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners* [online]. SAGE. [Accessed 12 September 2025].
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2022) Conceptual and design thinking for thematic analysis. *Qualitative Psychology* [online]. 9(1), pp. 3 – 26. [Accessed 30 June 2026].
- Charman, S. and Tyson, J. (2023) Over and out: the damaged and conflicting identities of officers voluntarily resigning from the police service. *Policing & Society* [online] 33 (7), pp. 767–783. [Accessed 29 November 2025].
- Davis, C. (2018). Rank Matters: police leadership and the authority of rank. *Policing and Society*, 30(4), pp. 446–461. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2018.1555250>
- Dawson, S., and Osborne, A. (2020) Re-shaping Built Environment Higher Education: The Impact of Degree Apprenticeships in England, *International Journal of Construction Owen Education and Research*, 16:2, 102-116, DOI: [10.1080/15578771.2019.1668888](https://doi.org/10.1080/15578771.2019.1668888)
- Eason, A. (2024). Operationalising theory; the role of the pracademic in the pedagogy of student police officers. In D. Turgoose, V. Knight, & D. Woodward (Eds.), *Pracademics in Criminal Justice*. Routledge.
- Eason, A. and Starr, R. (2024) “‘Rolling with Resistance’ The Challenges of HEI in Police Education’, in Anne Eason & Rob Starr (eds.) *The University Beat*. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 3–14.
- Funded Training Solutions (2025) *How Much Money Does The Government Put Into Apprenticeships*. Available from: <https://fundedtrainingsolutions.co.uk/blog/how-much-money-does-the-government-put-into-apprenticeships/> [Accessed 12 September 2025].
- Hesketh, I. and Williams, E. (2017) A New Canteen Culture: The Potential to Use Social Media as Evidence in Policing. *Policing: A journal of policy and practice* [online] 11 (3), pp. 346–355. [Accessed 15 September 2025].
- Hollweck, T., Netolicky, D. M., and Campbell, P. (2022). Defining and exploring pracademia: identity, community, and engagement. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community* [online]. 7(1), pp. 6–25. [Accessed 22 September 2025].
- Home Office (2025) Police workforce, England and Wales: 31 March 2025 (second edition). Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-workforce-england-and->

[wales-31-march-2025/police-workforce-england-and-wales-31-march-2025](#) [Accessed 30 June 2026].

Huey, L. and Mitchell, R. J. (2016) Unearthing Hidden Keys: Why Pracademics Are an Invaluable (If Underutilized) Resource in Policing Research. *Policing: a journal of policy and practice* [online]. 10 (3), pp. 300–307. [Accessed 15 September 2025].

Jones, C.R., Hesketh, I. and Noble, S. (2025). Vocational transition and employment experiences among police leavers: a National Survey Study (online). *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice* [online]. 19. [Accessed 29 November 2025].

Marsh, A. (2021) *New training an opportunity for culture change in policing*, *College of Policing*. Available from: <https://www.college.police.uk/article/new-training-opportunity-culture-change> [Accessed 12 August 2022].

Naeem, M., Ozuem, W., Howell, K., and Ranfagni, S. (2023) A Step-by-Step Process of Thematic Analysis to Develop a Conceptual Model in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22, pp.1-18. [Accessed 10 September 2024].

Owens, L.W. (2017) Reflections of a Pracademic: A Journey from Social Work Practitioner to Academic, *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping*, [online], 22(11), pp. 37 – 43. Available from: <https://reflections narratives of professional helping.org/index.php/Reflections/article/view/1410> [Accessed 25 February 2025].

Posner, P. L. (2009) The Pracademic: An Agenda for Re-Engaging Practitioners and Academics. *Public budgeting & finance* [online] 29 (1), pp. 12–26. [Accessed 23 February 2024].

Pound, R. (2010) Law in Books and Law in Action. *American Law Review* [online]. 44, pp.12-36.

Richard, D. (2012) *Richard review of apprenticeships*. London, UK: Department for Business, Innovation & Skills. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-richard-review-of-apprenticeships> [Accessed 25 February 2024].

Robson, C. and McCartan, K. (2016) *Real world research: a resource for users of social research methods in applied settings* [online]. 4th edition. Hoboken: Wiley. [Accessed 12 March 2024].

UWE Bristol (2022) Handbook of Research Ethics [online]. Available from: <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/research/policies-and-standards/research-ethics> [Accessed 15 February 2023].

Watkinson-Miley, C., Cox, C. and Deshpande, M. (2022) A New Generation of Police Officers: Experiences of Student Officers Undertaking the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship in One UK Police Force, *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice* [online]. 16 (1), pp. 122–134. [Accessed 24 September 2025].

Willis, J. J. (2016) The Romance of Police Pracademics. *Policing: a journal of policy and practice* [online] 10 (3), pp. 315–321. [Accessed 15 September 2025].

Wilson, M. D. (2015) Pracademia: The Future of the Lifelong Learner. *About campus*. [online] 20 (2), pp. 28–31. [Accessed 25 February 2023].

Wilson, L. (2022) *Becoming University Academics from Professional Practice: Finding, Learning, Playing* [online]. PhD, Coventry University. Available from: https://pure.coventry.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/57391896/2022_L.Wilson_PhD.pdf [Accessed 22 September 2025].