

Developing Trauma-Informed and Domestic Abuse Policing in a Small Overseas Police Force: Implications for Police Education

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Abstract

The Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) were created in 1960 when Cyprus gained independence from the United Kingdom (UK). One of 14 United Kingdom Overseas Territories (UKOTs), the SBAs contain a mix of UK military personnel and resident Cypriots, administered through a complex mix of SBA Ordinances, European Union (EU) regulations and working arrangements with the UK and Cyprus. The SBAs can be considered 'liminal' spaces, and this unique liminality creates significant policing challenges. The Sovereign Base Areas Police (SBAP) is a small force with limited funding but requires officers to develop a wide range of skills. However, unlike in England and Wales, they do not benefit from police education based on higher education principles. It is within this context that the University of the West of England (UWE) developed continuing professional development (CPD) in partnership with the SBAP. This article provides a thematic analysis of the attending officers' response to the CPD and reflects on the findings for the SBAP and the future professional development of police forces across the UKOTs.

Keywords: *Domestic abuse, Trauma-informed, Police education, Sovereign Base Areas*

Introduction

Although the United Kingdom (UK) no longer has an Empire, vestiges of colonial rule remain and are manifested in the United Kingdom Overseas Territories (UKOTs). The UKOTs are small places, primarily islands, scattered across the globe. They include the Cayman Islands, the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, and the Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) in the Republic of Cyprus; the latter being the focus of this article. In general, the UKOTs have a significant amount of autonomy, with the UK holding overarching responsibility and a more specific role in areas such as defence and foreign affairs. Most have permanent, primarily British populations and self-sustaining political and economic systems. The SBAs are somewhat different, in that they were created in 1960 when Cyprus gained independence from the UK. These territories were retained primarily for military purposes, cushioned by areas under civilian UK authority. The total landmass is just under 100 square miles (approximately 3% of the island). Although there are around 6,000 UK service personnel and their families on the military bases, they are not permanently resident. The only permanent residents are Cypriots living in the civilian parts of the SBAs, and they total 12,000. Measures are in place to ensure that they are not cut off from Cyprus.

The UK and Cyprus maintain close cooperation on civilian matters within the SBAs. Cypriots enjoy free movement through the SBAs under the Treaty of Establishment from 1960 ([United Nations, 1960](#)), which prohibits customs posts or frontier barriers. The UK also commits to ensuring that Cypriots in the SBAs live under laws broadly equivalent to those of the Republic, shaping SBA Ordinances to align with Cypriot legislation. The Republic delivers a wide range of public services in the SBAs under the 2007 Delegation of Functions Ordinance, covering education, health, welfare, taxation, and other administrative functions. As a result, daily life for Cypriots in the SBAs largely mirrors life in the Republic. This arrangement was reinforced for years by joint European Union (EU) membership, but Brexit created tensions with the 1960 treaty. This was addressed via a specific SBA Protocol in the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement, keeping the SBAs within the EU customs territory and preserving EU-aligned governance for most civilian matters (Official Journal of the European Union, 2019). Therefore, the SBAs are 'liminal' spaces. In other words, "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial" ([Turner, 1969, p. 95](#)). Liminality in the SBAs is seen in three main respects: first, the direct role of the UK, Cyprus, and the EU; second, the dispute

between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots that affects the functioning of the SBAs; and third, the role of civilian and military authority. It is within this complicated scenario that the civilian Sovereign Base Areas Police (SBAP) operate.

The SBAP is the civilian law enforcement agency charged with policing the SBAs. Administered by the UK Ministry of Defence, it operates independently from the Ministry of Defence Police. Based in Episkopi, the force is led by a Chief Constable and comprises around 250 sworn officers and a small civilian workforce. While senior positions are typically held by British officers, most personnel are locally recruited from Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities, contributing to linguistic and cultural knowledge that supports day-to-day policing. The SBAP operates police stations in Episkopi, Dhekelia, and Ay Nicolaos, oversees Dhekelia Prison, and is supported by patrol vehicles, armed-response units, and police dogs. It holds full jurisdiction in the SBAs and works closely with Cypriot authorities under formal agreements to prevent and investigate crime and maintain public order. Nevertheless, the SBAs' liminal legal status presents ongoing policing challenges, particularly when suspects cross SBA boundaries into Cyprus. Though mechanisms exist to transfer offenders, jurisdictional ambiguities remain, compounded in Dhekelia by the presence of the United Nations (UN) buffer zone. These complexities, alongside limited resources and the MoD's prioritisation of military operations, require pragmatic and flexible policing. As a small force, officers are expected to maintain a broad skill set, but sustaining depth of expertise across all areas is challenging. It is within this context that police education was delivered in collaboration with the SBAP.

This research aimed to evaluate the delivery of continuous professional development (CPD) based on the best practice principles in higher education pedagogy, which forms the basis of policing education currently delivered to initial police recruits in England and Wales. The objective was to explore with the SBAP officers the value and impact on practice of such CPD and also their views on their overall relationship with policing in England and Wales. The findings revealed not only did officers want to engage in higher education CPD and that this delivery mode was significant in helping develop best practice, but also a stronger relationship with mainland policing was considered important.

Literature Review

Policing Education in the SBAs

As noted, the SBAP enforce a unique combination of British, Cypriot and SBA-specific laws. This is complex and requires a nuanced understanding of the historical context governing the current arrangements, as well as the ability to bridge cultural differences. Unlike their British counterparts, they do not have the opportunity to undertake a higher education programme in policing, which might assist them in navigating these complexities. In England and Wales, there has been a move to policing professionalisation and improved police education at higher education level. This manifested in developments such as the creation of the College of Policing and its Policing Educational Qualifications Framework ([College of Policing, 2020](#)), and established police-Higher Education Institution (HEI) partnerships – the University of the West of England (UWE) and Avon and Somerset Police being a successful example ([Eason, 2024](#)). Similar trends exist in Europe (Radojicic and Cvorovic, 2020). Even in countries where initial police education is not at a higher education level, higher qualifications are required for promotion, such as France ([Cour des competes, 2022](#)) and Greece ([Hellenic Police, 2025](#)). The SBAP's neighbouring institution, the Cyprus Police Academy, is recognised as an HEI, with police recruits studying for a Higher Diploma ([Cyprus Police, 2025](#)).

The SBAP are not alone in the fact that they do not receive an initial police education at a higher educational level. Most police forces in the UKOTs have complex funding arrangements and do not have access to the development funding required to benefit from the training and curricula offered by the College of Policing, as the costs and logistical challenges associated with distance often make participation prohibitively expensive. They often develop their own 'in-house' training ([Royal Gibraltar Police, 2025](#); [Royal Falkland Islands Police, 2025](#)) or deliver in conjunction with individual organisations or police forces with whom they have existing relationships ([HMICFRS, 2025](#)). Indeed, it was the SBAP's existing relationship with Avon and Somerset Police, and thus by extension UWE, that resulted in our project on domestic abuse.

Domestic Abuse in the SBAs

Whilst there is no data in the public domain relating specifically to domestic or family violence in the SBAs, it became apparent in the scoping discussions that this was an area of concern. Data from Cyprus, provided by the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family (APHVF), suggests patterns broadly similar to the UK, including comparable gender balance, widespread psychological abuse, and large under-reporting ([Levell et al., 2021](#); [Michael & Argyridou, 2019](#)).

The legal framework for tackling domestic abuse in the SBAs (and Cyprus) collectively refers to domestic abuse and child abuse as ‘violence in the family’. In the SBAs it is defined as:

Any act, conduct or omission by one family member which causes harm including sexual or mental harm to another family member and includes any act of violence carried out with intent to make sexual contact without the consent of the other family member and also includes the interference with, or the restraint of, the personal freedom of a family member without that person’s consent, by another family member ([Sovereign Base Area Ordinance 21/2003, Violence in the Family, amended by Ordinance 21/2006, 9/2016 and 12/2024](#)).

The definition is similar to that used by Cyprus:

Any act, omission or behaviour which causes physical, sexual or mental injury to any member of the family by another member of the family and includes violence used for the purpose of having sexual intercourse without the consent of the victim as well as of restricting its freedom ([Republic of Cyprus Violence in the Family \[Prevention and Protection of Victims\] Laws 2000 and 2004](#)).

The similarity reflects the close working relationship between the SBAs and Cyprus. Despite their different legislative frameworks and jurisdictions, they often work together and refer victims into shared support services.

By comparison, in England and Wales there is a range of legislation covering different forms of violence in the family. In this context, the most significant is the ‘[Domestic Abuse Act \(2021\)](#)’. Abuse is defined as taking place between individuals aged 16 or over who are “personally connected” (defined in S2 of the Act), described

in terms of those who are in, or have had, an intimate personal relationship, or who are relatives. Abuse is further defined as:

(a) physical or sexual abuse; (b) violent or threatening behaviour; (c) controlling or coercive behaviour; (d) economic abuse; (e) psychological, emotional or other abuse; and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct ([Domestic Abuse Act 2021, s.1\(2\) and \(3\) \(a-e\)](#)).

Though seemingly different, there are similarities between the definitions used in Cyprus, the SBAs, and England and Wales. All three recognise that abuse goes beyond the physical, and the inclusion of “interference” with the “personal freedom of a family member” has parallels with the inclusion of coercive and controlling behaviour. When using the term ‘domestic abuse’, the authors of this article are referring to what might be more commonly referred to as ‘intimate partner violence’ (IPV). The UN defined this as: “A pattern of behaviour in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner” ([UN, 2025](#)). The term ‘domestic abuse’ is used regularly within the SBAs and Cyprus, interchangeably with IPV and family violence.

It is also useful to consider the relationship between the police forces of the SBAs, Cyprus, and England and Wales in the international context. The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (also referred to as ‘The Istanbul Convention’) was drafted in 2008 and formally adopted in 2011, to tackle gender-based violence. It requires signatories to develop laws, policies and support services to achieve the aims of ending gender-based violence ([Council of Europe, 2025](#)). The UK and Cyprus are both signatories. There is no specific mention of the SBAs.

The Group of Experts on Action Against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) has organised baseline evaluations on each country’s response to implementation of the Convention’s provisions. The baseline report for the UK focuses more on wider support for resourcing and data collection ([GREVIO, 2025](#)). The baseline evaluation for Cyprus notes many positive developments, such as the establishment of specialist domestic violence investigative units ([GREVIO, 2022](#)). Areas identified for improvement included better police use of the risk assessment tool

and increasing evidence-led prosecutions, both topics that were included as part of the CPD we delivered.

In the SBAs, evidence-led prosecutions (ELPs) are enshrined in the ‘Violence Within the Family Ordinance’, and hearsay evidence can be adduced to court under ‘Evidence Ordinance 2010’ (amended by ‘Evidence [Amendment] Ordinance 2024’). A similar situation applies in Cyprus. ELPs have a comparable standing throughout Europe, enshrined in Recommendation 19 made by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women ([CEDAW, 1992](#)), and later recommendations made by the Council of Europe (Hasselbacher, 2010). In the UK, ELPs are established practice although not always successfully conducted ([HMCPSI, 2025](#)).

These commonalities across data, legislation, policy, and practice enabled us to identify areas in which academic research and evidence-based approaches developed in England and Wales could be applied to CPD for the SBAP.

Domestic Abuse Champions

Until the delivery of the CPD, the SBAP did not have a network of DA Champions, unlike in England and Wales. The concept of ‘Champions’ originated in the business sector ([Howell & Higgins, 1990](#)) and was soon adopted by other fields. Within policing in England and Wales, the use of DA Champions appears to have gained traction in the last decade ([HMIC, 2014](#)). There is no single, universally accepted definition of a ‘Champion’. A useful description is someone “with up-to-date knowledge, practices, and attitudes ... who, through advocacy and action, promotes policies, practices, and programs” ([Dao et al., 2015, p. 41](#)). This definition aligns well with the role of DA Champions in the College of Policing’s flagship Domestic Abuse Matters change programme, which aims to drive cultural change and includes provisions for Champions, such as enhanced knowledge and supervisory guidance ([College of Policing, 2025a](#); [Safe Lives, 2025](#)). Early evaluations suggested that 75% of Champions felt better able to support colleagues ([Safe Lives, 2022](#)) and indicated advances in officers’ understanding and attitudes, although further research was recommended to assess the specific impact of DA Champions ([Brennan & Myhill, 2017](#)).

Risk Assessment

The SBAP shares some similarities with the UK and Cyprus in its approach to risk assessment. In Cyprus and in England and Wales, for example, the Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment (DASH) risk assessment form (Richards, 2009) remains the main structured risk assessment tool. Reviews of its implementation (e.g. [HMIC, 2014](#) and [Robinson et al., 2016](#)) found it was used inconsistently and with varying accuracy. The Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment (DARA) ([College of Policing, 2022a](#)) is replacing DASH in the UK ([CoP, 2022b](#)). The SBAP replaced DASH with DARA in November 2025. At the time of writing, Cyprus has not.

DARA was developed partly because of increasing recognition that coercive control is a major indicator of risk of homicide in domestic abuse ([Monckton-Smith, 2019](#); [Women's Aid, 2022](#)). DARA was designed to elicit better recognition of controlling and coercive behaviour (CCB). This was introduced as an offence in the UK through Section 76 of the *Serious Crime Act 2015* and amended by Section 68 of the *Domestic Abuse Act 2021* to include those not living together. While it does not exist as a discrete offence in the SBAs or Cyprus, the “interference” of the “personal freedoms” of a family member is not dissimilar. CCB is included in the National Policing Curriculum for recruits in England and Wales, while older-in-service officers receive Domestic Abuse Matters CPD, developed by the College of Policing in partnership with domestic abuse charity Safe Lives ([Safe Lives, 2025](#)). An evaluation of the effectiveness of DARA over DASH suggests DARA is slightly more effective at identifying patterns of CCB ([Wire & Myhill, 2018](#)) but that “officers having a good understanding of DA and coercive control in particular is crucial to the quality of first response, including primary assessment of risk of harm”, referred to as the ‘officer effect’ ([Myhill, Hohl & Johnson, 2023, p. 19](#)).

Trauma-Informed Practice

Trauma can be defined as a whole-body experience ([van der Kolk, 2014](#)) that affects physiological, psychological, and social functioning at the level of individuals, groups, communities, and professionals. Physical assault, verbal abuse, conflict, and cultural discrimination can all be traumatic, whether directly experienced or encountered vicariously. Trauma impacts both victims of crime and, in some cases, those who perpetrate it, with outcomes ranging from short-term distress to lifelong or

even fatal consequences. Regardless of duration or intensity, trauma is often life-defining, shaping cognition, behaviour, and responses to future perceived or actual threats. Trauma-informed practice can enhance police effectiveness when working with victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse, while also supporting officer and organisational resilience ([Eason, 2025](#)). Drawing on the six principles outlined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration ([SAMHSA, 2014](#)), fostering environments characterised by safety, trust, empowerment, collaboration, peer support, and cultural awareness helps officers recognise both their own trauma ([Edelman, 2023](#)) and that of colleagues. It also develops key professional skills, including empathy, compassion, active listening, and reflective practice. Trauma-informed approaches can reduce compassion fatigue ([Papazoglou et al., 2020](#)) and moral injury ([Litz & Kerig, 2019](#)), and support longer-term recovery. When applied in domestic abuse contexts, these skills underpin rapport-building, disclosure, robust risk assessment, and effective safeguarding, making trauma awareness integral to effective policing.

CPD Design

The content of the CPD was based upon identified gaps in training and knowledge during a scoping visit in March 2025 to the SBAP in Cyprus. The areas identified were the theoretical evidence base of domestic abuse, including perpetrator and victim behaviour (especially controlling and coercive behaviour), associated trauma, and risk assessment.

A timetable of activities was constructed against the backdrop of time constraints (considering abstraction from frontline duties), financial limitations (due to restricted research funding), and teaching facilities (a standard classroom environment). This was particularly pertinent during the second part of the delivery in January 2026, which adopted a hybrid approach reliant on the available technology. Delivery methods were varied, combining didactic and interactive sessions across four days initially, followed by three days for the second phase. Activities included case studies, Menti meters, small-group work, and scenario discussions. By employing a range of teaching methods, the researchers aimed to engage different learning styles and accommodate learning differences to maximise knowledge exchange ([Hirst, 2024](#)).

The second part of the CPD was delivered to the same participants who attended in June 2025. Its content was informed by the feedback received at that time, in which participants requested further information on the impact of trauma on victims, families, and offenders, and on how trauma-informed practice could help address the challenges this poses for safeguarding, the criminal justice process, and longer-term recovery. Risk assessment was also revisited, both to explore how trauma-informed approaches can enhance assessment and because the SBAP is transitioning from the DASH risk assessment tool to the DARA.

Methodology

Adopting a critical realist philosophy ([Bhaskar, 1986](#)), the evaluation used a qualitative approach to explore participants' reflections on CPD learning, its practical application, and views on delivery and content. Participants were those who attended and actively engaged in the CPD events, with only basic demographic data (gender and length of service) collected to preserve anonymity while providing sufficient contextual insight. This was important given the small sample size (n=16) and the participants' close professional relationships. Initial reflections were captured using Menti meter, enabling immediate, anonymous responses and helping to surface shared themes. These insights informed a series of focus groups, which explored perceived learning gains, relevance to domestic abuse practice, and views on developing a Domestic Abuse Champion network to support ongoing implementation. Focus groups were selected due to time constraints and their capacity to facilitate critical dialogue, though careful attention was paid to group dynamics and rank hierarchies ([Robson, 2024](#)). Menti meter outputs were used to structure discussion, and targeted prompts encouraged contributions from quieter participants, resulting in diverse engagement across ranks and genders.

Ethical approval was given on 14 February 2025 by the College of Health, Science, and Society Research Ethics Committee, UWE. As the CPD was delivered outside the UK with an external police force, risks associated with stakeholder engagement and sensitivity to political, legal, and cultural contexts were carefully assessed and mitigated. An agreement with the SBAP formed part of this process, and informed consent was obtained via participant information sheets and signed consent

forms. These were securely stored alongside field notes and focus group materials, while electronic data were held on a restricted-access SharePoint site. Given the sensitive nature of the research and possible impact, officers were provided with access to psychological support via the police service and the CPD itself, which was delivered using a trauma-informed approach. Data analysis followed [Braun and Clarke's \(2006\)](#) thematic analysis framework, informed by a critical realist emphasis on identifying underlying causal mechanisms shaping practice ([Fryer, 2022](#)). Using an iterative, non-linear process combining inductive and deductive coding, themes were refined to explain both learning outcomes and barriers to translating theory into operational policing contexts.

Findings

The demographic data of the participants are shown below (Table 1) and indicate a much greater number of female participants in the group, although length of service is similar:

Table 1: Basic demographic data of CPD participants

Gender	Number of participants	Length of service (mean in years)
Male	4	7.7
Female	10	8.1
Prefer not to say	2	8

Although originally planned as four focus groups, only one project team member was available, resulting in two slightly larger group sessions than typical (Krueger and Casey, 2015). The Menti meter questions were restated, with elaboration based on initial responses. For example, the question “Has the CPD been at the right time in your career?” was expanded by the facilitator:

I noticed that a couple of people said no. I just wondered if that applies to anyone here – whether you'd be happy to explain a bit more about why you felt it wasn't the right time, or why you felt it was.

This approach allowed for deeper exploration of participants' reasoning behind closed-question responses, offering insights into what they found beneficial, what they would have liked included, and their preferred delivery styles. The emergent themes are outlined as follows:

Theme 1 – Being a Domestic Abuse Champion

The initial CPD in June 2025 included an opening session on DA Champions. Participants were invited to discuss their expectations, hopes, and fears around the role. Five key objectives emerged from this session:

1. Improving knowledge about domestic abuse
2. Achieving a better understanding of victim psychology
3. Identifying ways to encourage victims to disclose abuse
4. Improving investigation skills
5. Improving risk assessment skills

As part of the online evaluation post-delivery, these themes were revisited, and participants were asked about their levels of confidence in their future role as a DA Champion:

Very confident	Confident	Somewhat confident	Not at all confident
4	8	3	1

The design and implementation of a DA Champions Framework, which could be applied to domestic abuse cases the participants were managing in their role, was agreed as a practical way for the participants to be able to share knowledge and support colleagues. To this end, the June CPD included a session focused on the co-creation of a framework noted by [Loeffler and Bovaird \(2018\)](#) as often associated with

greater positive outcomes. However, participants expressed concerns about whether they would have enough time to “do things properly” (researcher’s field notes).

The focus groups held in January 2026 demonstrated that for some officers, time was indeed an issue. However, the main barriers appeared to be role-related. The majority of the participants felt that the template was only of value to officers in the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) who primarily investigate DA cases in the SBAP, with comments such as “it’s a matter of ... which department you are, what kind of cases you investigate” (FG1) being broadly representative. Another finding was that Response officers did not deal with DA regularly, with several participants stating they had not attended a DA-related incident between the CPD in June 2025 and January 2026. This corresponded to a drop in confidence over the same period; many participants felt that offering advice to Safeguarding Officers and CID was overstepping the bounds of their role – “They [CID] don’t have to hear me because they’re the people that are trained in this area” (FG2). While regular conversations were taking place between officers, this appeared to owe more to the small size of the workforce – “we’re a small force, we discuss everything” (FG2) – rather than the Network itself, and many participants commented that the wider workforce were not aware of the DA Champions Network: “there was nothing circulated to people that if something happens you can use us” (FG2). This may suggest that more work is needed to successfully embed the DA Champions Network and observe its longer-term impact, reflective of the findings of the impact of DA Champions in the UK (Brennan & Myhill, 2017).

Theme 2 – CPD Education

Under the theme of CPD education, several strands were identified that we either agreed before the CPD as areas to be explored, or which emerged from the participants’ answers as being significant. They included: timing in career, content, and delivery style or method (e.g. lecture or scenario-based learning). In the online survey, most participants felt that the CPD came at the right point in their careers. The focus groups provided an extra level of detail about this (see Table 2).

Table 2: Indicative qualitative responses to question – “Has the CPD come at the right time in your career?”

Has the CPD come at the right time of your career?
“Maybe it should have been beneficial to do that [the CPD] at the beginning of our careers” (FG1)
“At the beginning, not nearly at the end of my career” (FG1)
“It was better at this time in my career because I have more understanding of what is happening with the cases” (FG2)
“I believe that it’s good to know, to have a foundation. But throughout your career, it’s good for you to have more input on that” (FG2)

Participants who felt that the training had come at the right time referred to the fact that they felt able to apply the CPD learning to complement their operational experiences. Participants generally preferred an initial input followed by regular CPD, which built on their accumulating knowledge and experience. Participants who were based in neighbourhood units, a role that is typically taken up post-probation, commented that the CPD would have been particularly useful timed with entry to this role:

In the neighbourhood policing unit where you are working a lot more with the community, you are found to face these sorts of problems, and a bit more frequently ... so it would have been more valuable had we had it before joining the NPU [Neighbourhood Policing Unit], like, a prep phase (FG2).

In the online survey, 90% of participants agreed the CPD was delivered at an appropriate pace, although focus group discussions suggested that participants wanted more time for reflection and discussion.

All participants agreed that the topics included in the CPD were relevant to their role, although the perceived value of some topics changed between June 2025 and January 2026. For example, reflective practice was identified as the most relevant input in June 2025; however, by January 2026, feedback suggested that it was seldom used. Time appeared to be the main reason, though participants acknowledged that they were often applying reflection informally: “you think about it ... you don’t actually write anything” (FG1). Context appeared to influence use. Several participants said

they used reflective practice in their personal lives, consistent with early findings in June 2025, while one participant had found value in applying it to a particularly complex non-DA-related case. During the focus groups in January 2026, a participant described applying reflective practice to general professional conduct rather than specific cases, with broad agreement from the others in the group: “You start thinking maybe what you said and questioning why you said it. Was it because I was part of the group? Is it because I honestly believe it?” (FG2).

Unsurprisingly, participants found active learning opportunities to be more engaging than PowerPoint-led presentations. In-person delivery was favoured strongly over online delivery, with all participants agreeing online delivery “can work, but not for big periods of time” (FG1) because “you actually being physically there, it’s more engaging” (FG2).

Nearly all participants expressed a desire to have more immersive learning:

Where we saw the body-worn camera footage and visited the scene. That was a really nice example. And so, we can analyse it. If we have more of those, that would be great (FG2).

Peer discussion was particularly valued. This is consistent with an approach to pedagogy that has its roots in social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), where learning develops through discussion with others. One of the architects of the original PEQF, now the Police Constable Entry Routes (PCER) for England and Wales, defined the term “socially critical vocationalism” ([Peach, 2010, p. 450](#)), and intended policing education to blend traditional academic enquiry (e.g. critical thinking skills) with vocational application, emphasising discussion and reflective practice as part of this process.

The SBAP do not align with the PCER, but the preference for active learning methods grounded in a constructivist approach supports the argument for police education delivered according to higher education principles. This approach not only aids workforce upskilling, but also enhances engagement, as it reflects methods that are both desirable and valued by police officers themselves.

Theme 3 – Understanding Trauma Impact

Trauma featured significantly in the participant responses. Little previous education about trauma had been received by the participants. During the initial CPD in June 2025, where trauma was introduced as a concept, participants said they particularly wanted to better understand the effects of trauma and how it might influence the way a victim interacts with them or whether the victim supports police action.

I want more understanding of their mentality because sometimes I get frustrated when, for example, I ask them what happened – “I don't remember” ... And I couldn't understand, like why, until we mentioned how they have a lack of memory because of the things that happened to them ... (FG1).

In response, additional sessions on trauma and trauma-informed practice were included in the January 2026 CPD. The impact of trauma on domestic abuse victims and victim response was introduced ([van der Kolk, 2014](#)) alongside the six principles of trauma-informed practice as outlined in [SAMHSA \(2014\)](#). In the focus groups held after this, officers suggested that a trauma-informed approach might help them work more effectively with victims, to keep them motivated to continue or to at least understand their reluctance to engage:

When we might have been at a certain incident, and the perpetrator would say See, she's been hysterical. She's the issue here. And I would be like, hmm, maybe he's right because during that moment she was. But now I came to realise that she was responding to everything she has experienced, been through (FG1).

Following the June 2025 CPD, one participant noted that she had changed her mind about the best time to complete a DASH with a victim because of the classroom discussion with peers, describing how she had “spoken with one of the others who said something and I thought, okay, yes, this is the case. That's a very good practice and was justified” (FG2). Following the trauma-informed CPD in January 2026, this re-emerged. As one participant explained, “In the heat of the moment ... maybe they [victims] have very different reactions and very different feelings then. But doing it two days after that, maybe after the person digests the whole information, they may be giving different answers” (FG1).

Most significantly, the CPD appears to have increased empathy, a key skill in trauma informed approaches ([Edelman, 2023](#)). As one participant explained:

Even if you don't like the victim, they're a victim. Because sometimes, in the heat of the moment, when you go there, they are very hostile towards you and you're like, OK, hmm, whatever, but you need to show the same level of professionalism and empathy and understand that they're coming from a certain place (FG1).

This desire to learn more about the impact of trauma was not reserved for the immediate victim, with participants interested in the impact on other family members, particularly children: "the family around may not be the direct receiver of the abuse but will also experience this traumatic change" (FG1). How trauma shapes perpetrator behaviour was also a recurring interest: "during an interview of a suspect, you can understand better what happened in the past and how his or her actions now is because of whatever they have been through all these previous years" (FG1).

An interesting finding during the January 2026 focus groups was that participants recognised the wider relevance of trauma-informed practice, with participants making comments such as it "feels like it's the root of everything" (FG1) and "this does not apply to only domestic violence incidents ... everyone has trauma" (FG2).

The positive findings of how trauma-informed practice could help officers engage with victims did not seem to be reflected in officers' perception of the wider criminal justice system, however. Participants described feeling frustrated that even when a case successfully went to court, often their efforts resulted in what they implied were unfair or inequitable sentences: "Let's go for a drink and drive. They will be convicted for a year imprisonment, let's say. For assault? Three months suspended sentence" (FG1).

One officer from Focus Group 1 commented that "... people are thinking that its [lenient sentencing] our fault", raising questions about how procedural justice (Thibaut and Walker, 1975) is perceived by the public, and feeding into a growing body of evidence that officers' own perception of procedural justice has implications for how they engage with the public ([Yesberg et al., 2024](#)).

Theme 4 – Valuing Professional Judgement

Throughout the CPD, classroom discussion was encouraged to build participants' confidence in their own professional judgment. From the researchers' perspective, a key objective was to prompt participants to think more critically, applying their new knowledge reflectively to their professional experiences. The sessions on risk assessment illustrated this. They contained group exercises designed to encourage professional curiosity at DA-related incidents to explore how this can enhance risk assessment tools such as DASH and DARA, particularly recognising controlling and coercive behaviour and the victim's lived experience.

Participants found this useful. As one participant in focus group 1 commented "sometimes we were responding to incidents, and we didn't recognise some of the behaviours". This was explored further in group exercises. For example, in the June CPD participants were divided into groups and asked to complete a DASH based on contextual information provided by a hypothetical victim. Each group produced a different risk rating despite being given the same information. This prompted a lively classroom discussion, in which participants identified themselves that hearing 'yes' or 'no' from a victim often resulted in them filling in the form without really listening to what the victim was saying: "We're asking the question. Just get a reply, put it down. But now [we] actually listen more" (FG1).

Due to the SBAP's transition from DASH to DARA in November 2025, the January 2026 CPD included an exercise designed to contrast DASH with DARA. Again, contextual information was provided, which participants used to provide a risk assessment rating, this time further enhanced with their additional knowledge about trauma responses. Again, participants arrived at different risk ratings, depending on which tool they used and which group they were in.

In both CPD deliveries, group-based discussion appears to have been particularly beneficial in helping officers consider how to apply professional judgment:

We had a discussion with our group with the scenario when the DASH ended up being a standard, but the officer could not see, but now with our experience, I can justify better why a case can get medium or high risk because we perceive things differently (FG1).

Participants were asked if their approach to risk assessment had changed in the months between June 2025 and January 2026. There was almost universal recognition that DASH (and now DARA) was vital to effective risk assessment – “it’s one of the most important things when we attend a domestic” (FG1) – as was the need to ask more questions to obtain further detail. Officers expressed some frustration that the forms did not include sufficient room to add the additional detail they obtained or to include their professional judgment.

Overall, the findings reflect the wider debate about the value of structured risk assessments, professional expertise, and the relationship between the two; in short whether structured risk assessments help or hinder the utilising of professional judgment (Gillingham, 2011). The findings from this small study are consistent with Myhill, Hohl and Johnson’s (2023) ‘officer effect’ analysis, suggesting that recognition of CCB and an ability to engage with the victim are significant factors. Further consideration could also be given to whether the visual layout of structured risk assessment forms encourage application of professional judgment.

Theme 5 – Relationship with the UK

As stated in the Introduction, the SBAs are an Overseas Territory of the UK, with a strong link to the MoD. In addition, the SBAP has good bilateral relations with several UK police forces, so we were interested in the participant perspective on their relationship with policing in the UK.

In June 2025 participants said that they felt somewhat ignorant about how domestic abuse was tackled in England and Wales, particularly in comparison to Cyprus:

We don’t know in full how our colleagues from Cyprus work, but we do have cooperation, so they know how we do things, that we know how they do their things. But personally, in the UK, other than those colleagues who have trainings in the UK, I’m not exactly sure how things are done in the UK, even though we are under the MoD (FG2).

I believe that all those 43 [police forces] there [in England and Wales] have a different approach to DA. I don’t know if the protocols are the same. I believe that things have been done differently (FG2).

Following the June 2025 CPD, participants agreed that it had helped them feel more connected with British policing practice. However, in January 2026, it was apparent that participants still felt distinct, as expressed by one participant in FG2: “The culture is not the same, geographical position is not the same, the political situation is not the same”.

Indeed, the words “not the same” were spoken by multiple participants in both groups. Nonetheless, during both June 2025 and January 2026, without exception all participants expressed a strong interest in learning more about British policing and practice. Wanting to go on attachment to the UK was a recurring theme, while others spoke about using case studies from Britain to learn more about how to tackle domestic abuse, best summed up by one participant’s response in June 2025 which was reiterated in January 2026:

I think if we had the chance to, and time to, be presented with cases. Different cases that colleagues in the UK have dealt with ... And then from the information received, how they dealt with the information, who they informed, who attended the scene, what did they see, how they dealt with the scene. Who do they call, how they dealt with the victim, how they dealt with the suspect. What agencies, how they dealt with the suspect during custody. What’s their procedure? ... What do they try to find as soon as possible and to secure forensic points. Then the investigation and the judicial part. So, if we have an overall view of how things are done, I think we would have a better understanding of what’s going on (FG2).

It is difficult to generalise the findings from the small number of participants included in this research, but the experiences of those present suggested that the DASH risk assessment used by the Cyprus police is primarily carried out by officers based at the specialist Domestic Violence Investigative Units (consistent with the country’s [GRIEVO \(2022\)](#) report) rather than by officers at the point of initial attendance, incurring a delay before engaging with the victim for risk assessment purposes. This misses the opportunity to factor in officer observations from initial attendance to professional judgment. This differs from practice in England and Wales ([College of Policing, 2025b](#)) and practice in the SBAs. This places the SBAP in an interesting liminal position, where working processes contrast even when both share

support services. However, it also provides an opportunity for the SBAP to share its evidence-based best practice with peers in Cyprus, supported through a relationship with the UK.

Evidence-led prosecutions (ELPs) may also provide ground for further connection between the police of the three areas. Participants in the focus groups commented that ELPs were difficult to progress within the SBAs. There are parallels with England and Wales, where some research suggests that as many as 64% of domestic abuse-related crimes are dropped at an early stage ([McPhee et al., 2021](#)). Caution is therefore needed about modelling 'best practice' on the UK approach. However, after our CPD, 84% of participants felt their investigation skills had improved, and they were better able to gather usable evidence for an ELP.

While this research cannot comment directly on Cyprus, GREVIO's report suggests similar ELP challenges, again creating scope for SBAP to share learning. SBAP officers already attend the Cyprus Police Academy for specialist training; more joint CPD could foster greater reciprocal knowledge exchange. Supporting SBAP through links with policing and education in England and Wales aligns with the UK's objective to strengthen support for its Overseas Territories ([FCDO, 2025](#)).

Conclusions

This article has explored the distinctive policing context of the SBAs and the role of the SBAP within it. The SBAs represent a liminal space – “betwixt and between” established legal and political frameworks – where British sovereignty intersects with Cypriot jurisdiction and military authority. This status shapes the operational environment for the SBAP, requiring officers to navigate overlapping laws, cultural differences, and diplomatic sensitivities while maintaining public safety. Our research focused on the delivery and evaluation of CPD on domestic abuse, identifying five key themes. First, the concept of Domestic Abuse Champions emerged as a valued mechanism for knowledge sharing and cultural change, though concerns remain about workload and sustainability. Second, CPD highlighted the importance of timing, active learning, and reflective practice, reinforcing arguments for embedding higher-education principles in police training. Third, participants expressed a need to understand trauma impact, both on victims and officers themselves, underscoring the

relevance of trauma-informed approaches. Fourth, the theme of valuing professional judgment showed how immersive and discussion-based learning can enhance risk assessment beyond a 'tick-box' culture, particularly in recognising coercive control. Finally, the relationship with the UK revealed a desire for closer alignment with British policing practices and reciprocal knowledge exchange, positioning SBAP as a potential conduit for best practice between the UK and Cyprus.

The SBAP's liminal position – operating within a hybrid legal and cultural framework – creates both challenges and opportunities. While resource constraints and jurisdictional complexity persist, the CPD illustrates how collaborative, evidence-informed education can strengthen capability and confidence. It also suggests a more structured partnership between mainland policing higher education and the UKOT police forces can provide a much-needed link with the mainland and provide greater access to the College of Policing's curricula and educational resources. Future work should build on these findings to support sustained professional development and foster deeper integration of trauma-informed and reflective practices across this unique policing landscape. Extension to other UKOT police forces is also something that should be considered.

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