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**CRITICAL
STUDY SKILLS**

JANE BOTTOMLEY, STEVEN PRYJMACHUK AND DAVID WAUGH

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Jane Bottomley, Steven Prymachuk and Martin Wright

SAMPLE

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Introduction

Studying for your Policing Degree is the first book in the *Critical Study Skills for Policing* series. The *Critical Study Skills for Policing* series supports student police officers and other law enforcement students, eg those seeking to work within the National Crime Agency, as they embark on their undergraduate degree programme. It is aimed at all policing degree students, including those who have come to university straight from A levels, and those who have travelled a different route, perhaps returning to education after working or raising a family. The books will be of use both to students from the UK, and international students who are preparing to study in a new culture – and perhaps in a second language. The books also include guidance for students with specific learning difficulties.

Studying for your Policing Degree introduces you to university life and helps you to understand what you need to know and do to meet the requirements of your degree programme. It guides you through the systems and procedures which you will encounter, at the same time ‘demystifying’ some aspects of academic culture. It will help you acquire, develop and put into practice the knowledge, skills and strategies you need to succeed at university and in your professional practice. Throughout the book, there is an emphasis on particular aspects of learning which are highly valued in academic life and in the policing professions: **learner autonomy**, **critical thinking** and **reflective practice**.

Between them, the authors have many years’ experience of both policing practice and education, and academic study skills. All the information, text extracts and activities in the book have a clear policing focus and are often directly linked to the policies and guidelines produced by the **College of Policing**, the **National Police Chiefs’ Council** and the **Association of Police and Crime Commissioners**. There is also reference to relevant institutional bodies, books and journals throughout.

The many activities in the book include **reflections**, **case studies**, **top tips** and **tasks**. There are also advanced skills sections, which highlight particular knowledge and skills that you will need towards the end of your degree programme – or perhaps if you go on to postgraduate study. The activities often require you to work things out and discover things for yourself, a learning technique which is commonly used in universities. For many activities, there is no right or wrong answer – they might simply require you to reflect on your experience or situations you are likely to encounter at university; for tasks which require a particular response, there is an answer key at the back of the book.

These special features throughout the book are clearly signalled by icons to help you recognise them:



Learning outcomes;



Quick quiz or example exam questions/assessment tasks;



Reflection (a reflective task or activity);



Task (usually a more practical or written task);



Case studies;



Top tips;



Checklist;



Advanced skills information;



Answer provided at the back of the book.

Students with limited experience of academic life in the UK will find it helpful to work through the book systematically; more experienced students may wish to 'dip in and out' of the book. Whichever approach you adopt, handy **cross references** signalled in the margins will help you quickly find the information that you need to focus on or revisit.

We hope that this book will help you to develop as an aware, independent, critical and reflective learner and practitioner, and that it will guide you towards success in your chosen study path at university.

A note on terminology

In the context of this book, the term 'policing' should be taken to include 'the public police and allied law enforcement' professions, wherever this is not explicitly stated. There is an **Appendix** on the **language of higher education** at the back of the book which you can consult as you work through the text.

SAMPLE

Chapter 1

Studying policing in higher education

Learning outcomes



After reading this chapter you will:

- have gained knowledge of higher education and its place in the UK education system;
- understand some of the terminology and 'jargon' used in higher education;
- have gained knowledge of institutions which set standards for policing education;
- have gained knowledge of levels and qualifications in policing;
- understand the relevance and importance of lifelong learning and continuing professional development;
- understand the importance of student autonomy and independent learning in universities;
- have gained knowledge of how courses are structured and delivered.

This chapter will develop your knowledge and understanding of the study of policing in UK universities. It will outline the 'qualification frameworks' that are relevant to becoming, and developing as, a police officer, and discuss the role of important educational and professional bodies. In addition, you will be introduced to the types of teaching and learning that you will encounter as a policing student.

Before you read the chapter, test your knowledge with the Quick quiz below. You can revisit the quiz as you read, or come back to it after reading the whole chapter to see if your answers have changed. Key words in this chapter are highlighted in **bold** and can be found in the glossary in the Appendix.

CROSS REFERENCE

Appendix,
The language
of higher
education

Quick quiz



- 1) What does HE stand for?
- 2) How is HE different from FE?
- 3) What are the main qualifications offered by universities?
- 4) Which is the higher level qualification, a *degree* or a *diploma*?
- 5) What is the minimum academic qualification you need to become a police officer?

- 6) What mark (percentage) do you usually need to obtain a *first-class* degree?
- 7) What are 'credits' and how can you get them?
- 8) What do you think 'Recognition of Prior Experience and Learning' might be?
- 9) What is 'lifelong learning'?
- 10) What are the most common types of assessment in universities?

What is HE?

HE stands for '**higher education**', one of two options in UK **tertiary education**, ie education available to people of 16 years or above.

HE is mainly provided by universities, and principally awards **degrees** and

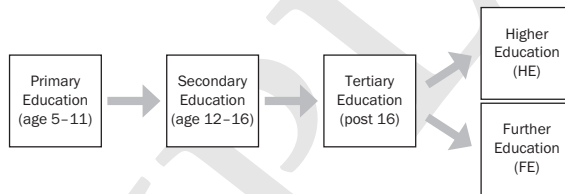


Figure 1.1: The UK education system

diplomas. In contrast, **further education (FE)** is provided by colleges, which deliver courses and award qualifications which are **vocational** in nature (NVQs; City & Guilds; BTEC), preparing people directly for the workplace. However, in recent years, there has been a blurring of the line between the two types of institution, with many FE colleges, sometimes in association with partner universities, also offering degrees. This is one way of making degrees accessible to a wider range of people, some of whom may find it convenient to attend classes in a local FE college or to study in the evenings. Recently introduced 'degree apprenticeships', which offer the potential to obtain a degree while learning on the job, also blur the boundaries between vocational and academic learning.

Your policing degree

Policing education in the UK is now moving towards becoming more integrated into HE, with the professional body the College of Policing (2017a) recognising pre-join degree entry as one route to becoming a constable. Although there is a large vocational component to these subjects, based on practical and professional policing skills, they also require highly developed intellectual skills, and universities are considered to be the best place for students to acquire and develop these. Policing is thus an academic subject, equivalent to any other, such as nursing, medicine, engineering or English literature, and therefore measured against the same standards.

Qualification frameworks

HE qualifications, sometimes called ‘academic awards’, are regulated across the UK via two frameworks: the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (QAA, 2008), and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in Scotland (QAA, 2014). These frameworks help institutions and employers judge the value of an individual’s education and help ensure equity between academic subjects. Table 1.1 shows the academic levels assigned by the QAA to each stage of HE, and provides information on how they relate to a study pathway in policing.

An undergraduate degree has four classifications. These are shown in Table 1.2, along with the marks usually required at each level.

Table 1.1: An overview of academic levels in relation to policing study in HE

UNDERGRADUATE STUDY			
England, Wales, Northern Ireland	Scotland	Award	
Level 4	Level 7	Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE), eg HE Certificate in Community Policing Practice	
Level 5	Level 8	Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE) Foundation Degree (FdD)	
Level 6	Level 9	Ordinary Bachelor’s Degree eg BSc Policing	
	Level 10	Bachelor’s Degree with Honours eg BSc (Hons) in Policing, BSc (Hons) Policing Studies	
POSTGRADUATE STUDY			
Level 7	Level 11	Master’s Degree eg MSc, MA, MPhil Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma (PGCert; PGDip)	

Table 1.1: (cont.)

Level 8	Level 12	Research Doctorate (PhD) Professional Doctorate eg Doctor of Policing, Security and Criminal Justice	The College of Policing have yet to formally align academic levels to roles/ ranks within the police. For example, there is an aspiration that strategic level officers will have level 8 qualifications but this is yet to be formalised.
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Courses and credits

Table 1.2: Bachelor’s degree classifications and typical required marks

CLASSIFICATION	MARKS REQUIRED
1st	Above 70%
2:1	60–69%
2:2	50–59%
3rd	40–49%
Fail	Below 40%

Unlike other public sector professions, eg nursing, teaching, etc, you do not have to have an undergraduate degree to become a police constable or work in many other areas of law enforcement. However, a number of reports have recommended this as a pre-join requirement. If you do undertake a policing degree, usually at a higher education institution, it will entail three years of full-time study to obtain an honours degree (or four years in Scotland). However, universities recognise that this timescale is not possible or ideal for many people, so they have flexible learning systems which allow students to fit study into their lives in a practical way. This can involve:

CROSS
REFERENCE

Chapter 6,
Assessment

- **distance learning**, where the student mainly studies from home via correspondence, using web-based resources – perhaps occasionally attending university workshops etc;
- **blended learning**, which combines traditional classroom study and web-based learning;
- **part-time study** (including the new degree apprenticeships mentioned earlier).

Flexible learning is facilitated by the **credit** points system which underpins HE education. Each course **module** that you study has a number of credit points attached to it. Each credit is equal to 10 hours of study, either in class, or through self-study (QAA, 2008, 2014). These credit points build up to eventually form your degree, whether over three years' full-time study, or over a longer period if you study part time. Table 1.3 shows that a student has to earn 360 credit points in order to be awarded an honours degree.

Table 1.3: HE qualifications in relation to credit points

ACADEMIC QUALIFICATION	CREDIT POINTS REQUIRED
CertHE	120 at Level 4 (Scotland Level 7)
DipHE	120 at Level 4 (Scotland Level 7) + 120 at Level 5 (Scotland Level 8)
Degree with Honours (Ordinary Degree in Scotland)	120 at Level 4 (Scotland Level 7) + 120 at Level 5 (Scotland Level 8) + 120 at Level 6 (Scotland Level 9)

Look at the QAA frameworks (2008, 2014) online to see descriptors detailing exactly what is expected of a student at each level. Note that not all universities offer the CertHE. Some universities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland may offer an ordinary degree without honours to students who have obtained a certain number of credits at Level 6. A four-year Scottish Honours Degree requires an additional 120 credits at Level 9/10.

Universities provide students with information on each module with regard to its academic level and the number of credit points it carries. Many modules, often called 'core modules', will be obligatory; some modules will be optional. All modules are organised around the following:

- a set of **learning outcomes** which identify what you will be able to do or understand by the end of the course;
- a process of **teaching and learning** which will help you achieve the learning outcomes;
- **assessment** which will measure your achievement and provide evidence of it.

Top tips



Thinking about ‘the big picture’

Learning outcomes, teaching and learning, and assessment will be aligned, so you should think about ‘the big picture’ and consider them together. When preparing for assessments, for example, look again at the learning outcomes to check what you will be expected to demonstrate. In class, think about how the classroom activities are partly preparing you for assessment, and ask if you are not sure.

CROSS REFERENCE

Chapter 3, Becoming a member of your academic and professional community, Reflective practice

Recognition of Prior Experience and Learning (RPEL)

Credit points can sometimes be assigned for prior learning or experience, through a process known as Recognition of Prior Experience and Learning (RPEL). There are two branches of RPEL:

- 1) Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) allows you to transfer any credit points you already hold from one institution to another.
- 2) Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) allows you to acquire credit points for your practical or professional experience, provided that it meets the academic standards demanded by the university involved. To support an application for APEL, a university will often require a **portfolio** of evidence, ie a reflective account (usually written) of your learning experiences.

While this transfer system allows for flexibility in HE, note that it can often be a very complicated process, with institutions sometimes disagreeing on the transfer values of particular modules.

CROSS REFERENCE

Chapter 6, Assessment, Portfolios

Reflection



- List examples of your own practical or professional experience which you think would be valid in terms of RPEL, along with examples of evidence you could provide as support. (An example is provided.)

EXPERIENCE	SUPPORT
volunteering within a police station enquiry office	written reflection outlining the interpersonal management skills I have demonstrated; feedback from colleagues, including those to whom I am responsible and those with whom I work; analysis of particular strength and areas for further development

Lifelong learning and continuous professional development

The flexible approach to study outlined above is underpinned by the much-valued educational principle of **lifelong learning**. Lifelong learning, by definition, extends beyond your degree, and may involve postgraduate study or general professional development. For example, if you are a degree-entry police officer, lifelong learning may involve taking post-registration modules, sometimes called ‘standalone modules’, which are offered by many universities. These could help you top up a diploma to an honours degree, or, if you already have a degree, they could help you generally in your **continuing professional development (CPD)**.

CPD in policing is recommended by the College of Policing and is recognised as assisting individuals maintain and also enhance their ‘*capacity to practise legally, safely ethically and effectively*’ (College of Policing, 2019b)

Case study



- How is CPD demonstrated in the personal account below?

“Coming to the end of my police career, I undertook an undergraduate degree in Policing Studies at LJMU. My day job involved acting as an advocate for police officers experiencing mental health issues and, with the academic grounding provided by my undergraduate studies, I realised it was a topic I had to explore further. I didn’t think a taught course would give me the freedom to study a topic of my own choosing but I then learnt about the flexibility offered by an MRes, which welcomed punks, poets and potters. I decided to add policemen to that list and signed up.

Postgraduate study is about self-reliance. It is quite a step up but the ability to share experiences with your peers makes it eminently achievable. The academics on the programme were wonderful. They certainly challenge you, at times, but they do that to demonstrate that masters study is about making your own way. The extraordinary encouragement I received even saw me having a paper published in a police journal – something I could never have imagined. I am now writing up my PhD, which I believe finally puts to rest all those worries I had about being a mature student.”

Reflection



What do you think your priorities in terms of CPD will be when you become a police constable?

Appendix:

The language of higher education

Assessment	Tasks and processes used to determine the level of your knowledge and skills
Blended learning	Learning which combines traditional classroom study and web-based learning
Collaborative learning	Working collectively and co-operatively with other students
Continuing professional development (CPD)	The learning activities that professionals engage in order to develop their knowledge and skills throughout their career
Credit	Credits are awarded to students in recognition of the completion of a unit. (The number of credits allocated is based on the notional hours of learning needed to complete the unit successfully.)
Critical thinking	The process of analysing and evaluating information and ideas, and demonstrating how this process has informed your own understanding, ideas and opinions
Degree	A qualification awarded on successful completion of a course in HE
Diploma	A qualification awarded by a university, which is at a lower level than a degree
Directed study	Independent study under the guidance of a staff member
Distance learning	Learning where the student mainly studies from home via correspondence, using web-based resources – perhaps occasionally attending university workshops etc
Facilitator	A teacher who helps facilitate your learning rather than teaching you directly, enabling a two-way process between student and teacher
Formative	Describes work that you are asked to do which is developmental rather than formally assessed (compare with summative)
Further education (FE)	Education beyond secondary school but at pre-degree level
Higher education (HE)	Education at university level, including certificates, diplomas and degrees
Independent learning	Learning which is directed by the student

Learning outcomes	What you will be able to do or understand by the end of the course
Lecture	An educational talk to a (usually large) group of students
Lecturer	A member of staff who has significant teaching, and often significant research, commitments
Lifelong learning	Refers to a view that learning occurs throughout life and that there are opportunities for learning at all ages and not just when you are a child or young adult (a view that is supported by the government and most educators)
Module	One of the units that make up a complete course at university
Office hours	The times when your lecturer is officially available, usually to discuss problems or queries, or to provide individual guidance
Portfolio	A personal record (normally written) of your learning experiences (increasingly seen as a valuable tool to aid student learning; the best portfolios include reflective aspects)
Postgraduate	Study undertaken once you have a Bachelor's degree (two further degrees are available at postgraduate level – the Master's degree and the Doctorate – though sub-degree awards such as Postgraduate Certificates (PGCert) and Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip) may also be available).
Problem-based learning (PBL)	PBL is a form of 'enquiry based learning' (EBL), an umbrella term for learning in groups where enquiry (asking questions and investigating) is central to the process. It is an innovative type of learning designed to help students develop their thought processes (and, indeed, their policing practices). PBL involves finding solutions to real-world problems by working co-operatively with other students. In PBL, teachers act as facilitators rather than teachers.
Professor	A senior grade of the teaching/research staff, normally given for exceptional contribution to a particular field of study
Programme of study	The overall course of study you are undertaking, such as a diploma or degree
Reflection	Thinking about and questioning your own experiences, thoughts and behaviour in order to enhance personal, academic and professional development
Seminar	A formally timetabled, small group discussion normally facilitated by a teacher or lecturer
Student autonomy	The ability to take charge of your own learning and development

Summative	Describes work that you are asked to do which is formally assessed, and must be completed and passed if you are to continue your programme of study (compare with formative)
Syllabus	A description of the content you will cover in the module or course
Tertiary education	Education beyond secondary school, including further and higher education
Tutorial	Tuition given to an individual or small group
Undergraduate	Study undertaken at or below Bachelor's degree level (the Bachelor's-with-Honours degree is the benchmark university award and in the strictest sense of the word, you don't graduate until you have this degree. Bachelor's degrees are sometimes called 'first degrees' to differentiate them from higher degrees that are normally taken as second or third degrees. Don't confuse these with the gradings (1st, 2:1, 2:2 and 3rd) that are given to first degrees.)
Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)	A web-based platform to support course delivery in universities
Vocational qualification	Qualification aimed at developing skills for employment, often including work-based experience

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