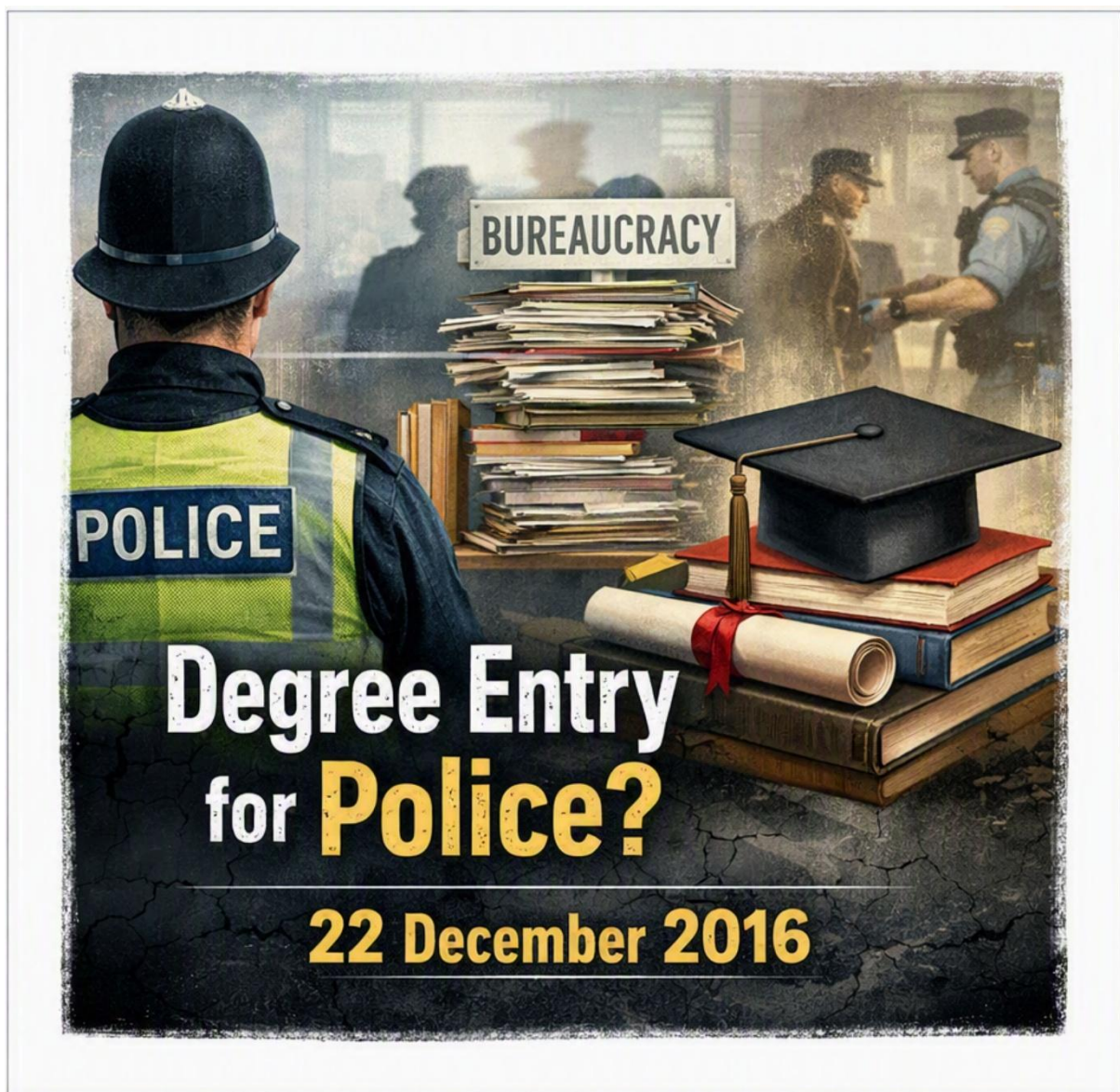


Degree level entry for all Police Officers is a retrograde step which will push a common sense approach to policing even further away down the bureaucratic queue

Adam Tugwell | 22 December 2016



With everything happening across the political and public sector world feeling so very uncertain already, it will have come as a surprise to many that the Government has

allowed the College of Policing to announce that [candidates wishing to become Police Officers will be required to have Degrees from 2020.](#)

The reasoning cited behind this move is the increasing level of activity within the role including the research which Police Officers are required to undertake online. But is this itself really justification enough to raise the bar to an occupation and public service which in recent years has been a key target to become a lighthouse of diversity?

Information Technology and 'web fluency' levels are arguably highest within the generation now reaching the workplace at 16 and above – irrespective of the level of formal education they have attained, simply because use of smartphones and PCs to access the web has now reached a point of social permeation where children are culturally conditioned in their use. To suggest otherwise would arguably demonstrate just how seriously out of touch our policy makers have now become.

Cyber-crime has become increasingly prevalent. But it has not in any way superseded the need for real-world policing, which has itself become painfully absent in recent years as a mix of bureaucracy and the public sector funding crisis have hit the Police Service very hard indeed. The widespread perception exists that the physical presence of our Police forces have now dwindled to a point where it would logical for us to ask if our communities are really safe.

The concept that more can be delivered using less is one that is now followed in every sector. In some cases there are significant efficiencies that can be made within organisations of all descriptions, particularly when new technology can reduce the workload or requirement of staff numbers. However, this is not without consequence as [the current raft of strikes in the UK](#) have arguably displayed. There is also a significant question to be addressed regarding these economies being made when the financial benefit has become the priority over the experience of the customer or members of the public.

Like many, I grew up with a respect for the Police which is increasingly hard to justify, given the level and type of interaction which Police Officers and Police Community Support Officers now have within the community. The focus on a system of delivery where you once felt that a Police Constable really did have autonomy as they enforced and represented the Law appears to have long since left the building. It appears to have been replaced with a bureaucratic nightmare where Officers now have to look over their shoulders before they decide either to engage or to act.

It may seem romantic, but an age where a Police Officer didn't have to resort to making arrests or presenting Court Summons to achieve a real-life result with 'petty crime' was not so long in the past. Yes, these Officers of the Law did not have to chase their quarry online, but they also engaged with would-be criminals in a much more meaningful way. One which was adapted to the specific circumstances they were addressing and did not

result in so many young people being tarred by acts of stupidity which with the arrival of the net itself, have become far too accessible to the people looking for controversy who need no degree to go searching for any mud that can easily be used to stick.

Most of those less senior Officers had very little formal education. But what they did have was life experience and common sense by the bag load; the essential ingredient for constructive interaction with people of all levels and of all kinds.

Being 'streetwise' isn't something that can be taught from a text book. One of the simple facts that the College of Policing may be seriously overlooking, is that degree level students want to earn their money straight away. University leavers will not have the world view or wherewithal that the public should be able to expect any Police Officer to have, whilst waiting for the graduates who would make ideal police officers to gain experience in other occupations first may prove to be a fruitless exercise given that they will probably stay in other safer, more lucrative and perhaps even more rewarding careers if they have by then already found them.

Police Officers in the UK already undergo extensive training to support them in their roles, and extra modules to support non-specialist officers to fit their IT skills to the purposes of our Law enforcement regime would be no quantum leap for those who have qualified for entry by today's terms.

Sadly, this move towards elitism within the Police Service has all the hallmarks of taking one very large step in the progress of bureaucracy too far and risks disenfranchising communities from those in power beyond that too.

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