

## **A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SCOTTISH POLICE BOARDS**

*(A profile of the composition of Police Boards in Scotland)*

*This project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Scottish Government*

Philip Etherson  
University of Strathclyde  
[p.etherson@strath.ac.uk](mailto:p.etherson@strath.ac.uk)

Supervisors:  
Mik Wisniewski, University of Strathclyde.  
Prof. Nick Fyfe, University of Dundee

**Summary:** In Scotland the governance of policing is shared between central government, local government and chief constables with Police Boards as the primary arm of local governance for each police service. However, little published research has been done on the role and performance of Police Boards although recently reports such as HMIC'S "*Independent Review of Policing in Scotland*" raised questions over their effectiveness, authority, accountability and scrutiny.

This Ph.D. research project intends to compare and review Scottish Police Boards to gain an understanding of the effectiveness of the governance of the Police Board. As an initial part of this longer-term research, profiling of the composition of the eight Scottish Boards was undertaken.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The governance of policing in Scotland is shared between central government (Scottish ministers), local government (through Police Boards) and the eight Chief Constables; this division of responsibility is known as the 'tripartite system'. Policing policy is the responsibility of the Scottish ministers who are answerable to the Scottish Parliament. Chief Constables are solely responsible for the operational duties of police officers and civilian staff and are answerable to Scottish ministers and their respective Police Boards. The Police Boards are the local government arm of police governance and their main functions include setting their force budget, appointing senior officers and looking to ensure best value and continuous improvement.

There are eight Police Boards in Scotland, covering the eight police forces, with a combined budget of over £1 billion. The police forces in Scotland range in size from Strathclyde Police, which covers 12 individual local authority areas with a combined population of over 2.3 million, through to the Dumfries & Galloway Constabulary, which covers the single council area of Dumfries and Galloway with a resident population of around 146,000. The membership of Police Boards in Scotland comprises elected councillors from the relevant local authorities. The number of members on each Board varies between police services from as many as 34 members on Strathclyde Police Authority, to 11 members on the Dumfries and Galloway Police, Fire and Rescue Committee. Scottish Police Board structure contrasts to that in England and Wales, where Police Authority members are a more or less equal mix of local authority councillors and non-elected independent members. The independent members are chosen by a selection panel from a short list of members of the public that have applied for the position. The applicants, who will be over the age of 18 years, will have lived or worked in the area concerned for at least 12 months. It is a requirement that one of the Police Authority members is a magistrate.

There has been little research done on Police Boards. The Scottish Government, the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland and representatives of Police Boards are of the opinion that the system of governance is generally working well (Scottish Parliament, 2008). However, there have been concerns raised by the HMIC'S "*Independent Review of Policing in Scotland*" over the governance of policing and in particular the role of Police Boards. Key findings from the review indicate concerns that Boards have very little influence over local policing decisions made through community planning and Single Outcome Agreements (SOA's), they have a lack of mandate to consider the national policing requirements and they have a lack of independent support to enable them to properly deliver the degree of scrutiny, challenge and accountability required. There is also evidence from a Home Office study (Docking, 2003) that there is little public knowledge of Police Boards

This research project, funded by ESRC and the Scottish Government, intends to examine Police Board governance by a comparison and review of the interactions between Police Boards and their Stakeholders.

Key areas for the research include:

- Examining the interface between Boards and their police forces
- Examining the relationships between Boards and their communities
- Examining the relationship between Police Boards and the Scottish Government
- Examining how Police Boards interface with each other through the Police Authorities Conveners Forum

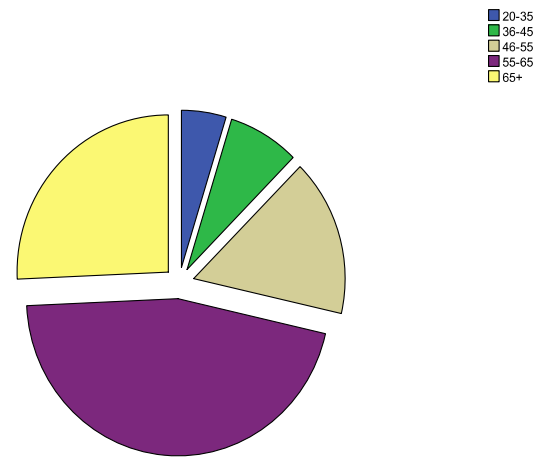
To help with this a survey was conducted in July 2009 to collect factual information about the composition of the eight Police Boards. The questionnaire was kept short and simple to avoid misinterpretation or confusion and was designed to maintain anonymity.

The contact details of all Scottish Police Board members were obtained as a result of the archival literature review and internet research. This internet review, amongst other information, was also able to establish the sex, political party and relevant Police Board for all the members. The survey was sent with an introductory letter and a stamped addressed envelope to all Board members directly for their personal attention and response.

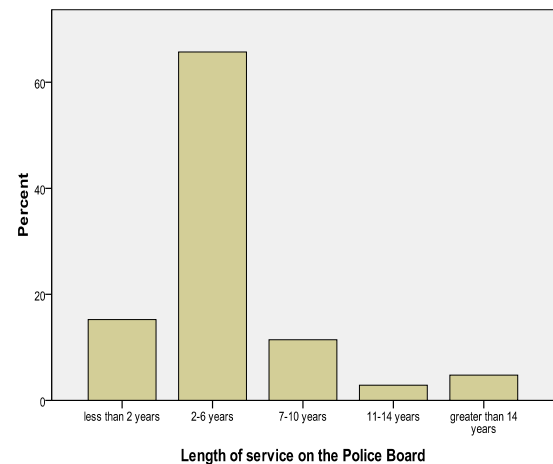
## FINDINGS FROM POLICE BOARD MEMBERS SURVEY

A total of 113 of the 149 surveys sent to members were returned, a response rate of 76% which implies that the survey gives a good representation of the profile of Scottish Police Board members. This report reflects the results of that survey without making any comment on those results.

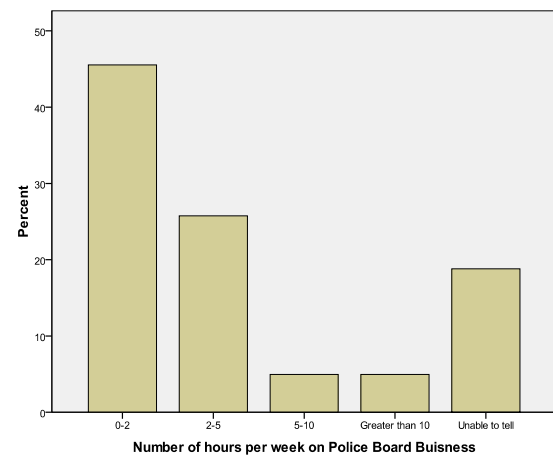
**Figure 1 - Age of Board members**



**Figure 2 – Length of Police Board service**



**Figure 3– Hours per week on Police Board business**



The demographical profile of Police Board members is in contrast to that of the Scottish population (Scotland's *People*, Annual Report, results from 2007/2008). Police Board membership is overwhelmingly male, with 81% of the members male. This means that only 19% of Board members are female compared with around 52% of the Scottish population. Board members are also older than the Scottish population generally (Figure 1); 49% of Scotland's adult population were under the age of 45, whilst only 13% of members were. Over 70% of members were aged at least 55 years with around 35% older than 65, compared to only 20% of the Scottish population being of pensionable age (*The Scottish figures include women over 60 years and therefore is likely to be a higher figure than over 65 years*).

All respondents indicated they had lived in their Police Board area for at least 2 years with almost all respondents (95%) having lived there for at least 10 years.

The majority of respondents reported that they had less than 6 years councillor experience. Perhaps even more relevant as a Police Board member are 82.3% of respondents indicating less than 6 years Police Board experience (Figure 2). This suggests that the majority of respondents were elected councillor for their local authority for the first time at the last council elections in May 2007 and are therefore relatively new as a councillor and Police Board member with just over 2 years experience (at the time of this survey - July 2009).

Members are typically selected by their council following local government elections according to local council standing orders and based on the political balance of the council. Members are then put forward as their council representatives for the Police Board. Eighty one percent of respondents indicated that they had informed their party either formally or informally that they had an interest in joining the Police Board prior to selection. The remaining 19% had been selected without having shown any interest in Police Board activities.

Time spent on Board business varied considerably amongst respondents. Just over half of members said they spent less than 2 hours on Police Board duties per week whilst over three quarters indicated they spent less than 5 hours (Figure 3). There is also an indication from the survey data that those with more experience as a councillor and those with more experience on a Police Board tended to spend more time per week on Police Board duties. There was an apparent diversity between age of the respondent and the time spent on Board duties. Only 17% of those under 35 indicated spending more than 2 hours on Police Board duties per week compared to just over 60% of those over 65.

Nearly 80% of respondents were also involved in Police Board sub-committees.

**Table 1 – Policing experience before and after joining the Police Board**

	Members (%)	Members (%)
	Before	After
Had accompanied police officer on patrol	17 (15.2%)	55 (50.0%)
Have taken part in custody visiting scheme	6 (5.3%)	19 (17.3%)
Was an employee of a police service	13 (11.6%)	4 (3.6%)
Had some other experience of police work	26(23.2%)	23 (20.9%)
Had no previous experience of police work	57 (50.9%)	32 (29.1%)

**Table 2– Occupation other than as a councillor**

Occupation other than as a councillor	Members (%)
Yes full time for which remuneration is received	15 (13.8%)
Yes full time which is unpaid/voluntary	1 (0.9%)
Yes part time for which remuneration is received	22 (20.2%)
Yes part time which is unpaid/voluntary	10 (9.1%)
Yes - other	10 (9.1%)
No	58 (53.2%)

Members of Police boards also have their council responsibilities to perform and over 90% of respondents indicated that they were on at least three local authority committees or sub-committees as well as the Police Board.

Over 90% of respondents also indicated that they were members of non-Local Authority committees or sub-committees.

Just over half of respondents indicated that they had no direct experience of police work prior to joining the Police Board (Table 1). However, there appears to be a tendency for this to change on joining a Board, although around 30% of Board members still reported no direct experience of police work after having joined the Police Board. Just under half of respondents reported having another occupation other than a councillor (Table 2), this included almost 15% who indicated having another full-time occupation.

The duties involved as a member of the Police Board might reasonably be expected to include aspects of finance, management, human resources and governance. Almost three quarters of respondents indicated they had some experience in management but only half had any experience in finance and around 40% of respondents indicated that they had experience in human resources and/or governance.

The general profile of the average Police Board member would therefore be expected to be male, at least 56 years of age and to have resided in the Board area for more than 10 years. He would be relatively new as a councillor and Police Board member although he would have some experience of management. In addition to the Police Board he would be a member of at least three Local Authority committees or sub-committees as well as at least one non Local Authority committee or sub-committee. Having expressed an interest to join the Police Board he would spend less than 2 hours on Board duties per week.

## FUTURE WORK

It is intended that this survey will be followed by in-depth interviews with key members (conveners, vice conveners) of Police Boards to obtain a deeper knowledge of the governance of their respective Boards. Thereafter more in-depth interviews will be conducted with members of a smaller number of Boards selected for comparative analysis and with stakeholders such as senior police officers and government officials who liaise with Police Boards.

## SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

Audit Scotland. (2009), *Best Value 2, Proposals for Consultation*, The Accounts Commission, Edinburgh, Also available, <http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/> (last accessed 23/10/2009)

Docking, Maria (2003), *Public Perceptions of police accountability and decision-making*, Home Office Publications

HMIC'S. (2009), *Independent review of policing in Scotland, A report for the Cabinet Secretary for Justice*. Published by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland.

The Scottish Government. (2007), *Guidance for members of Police Authorities and Joint Police Boards*, <http://www.highland.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/CDE3F717-95BB-4B1A-B04A-0A573DE949D7/0/SEGuidanceforPoliceBoardsVers1Jun2007.pdf> (last accessed 03/10/2009)

The Scottish Government. (2009) *Scotland's People*, Annual report, results from 2007/2008 Scottish Household Survey, Table 2.2, P.12 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/09/01114213/0> (last accessed 23/10/2009)

The Scottish Parliament (2008) *Report on Inquiry into Community Policing* (Edinburgh: Scottish Parliament)