

The Tutor Constable System in Police Scotland: Improving capacity, capability, and realising tangible improvements.

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BACKGROUND

The literature suggests that the role of 'tutor' constables during the transitional phase between classroom and field learning is important, not only in closing the theory-practice divide between the 'classroom' and the 'real' world of operational policing, but also in probationer socialisation into the organisation sharing organisational and occupational cultural norms, both formal and informal, particularly with regards to equality and diversity (HMICS, 2021, p.39). Despite its importance, "the tutor phase of police probationer training remains perhaps the most significant but least well-evaluated aspect of police training" (Charman, 2017, p.73), including within the Scottish context.

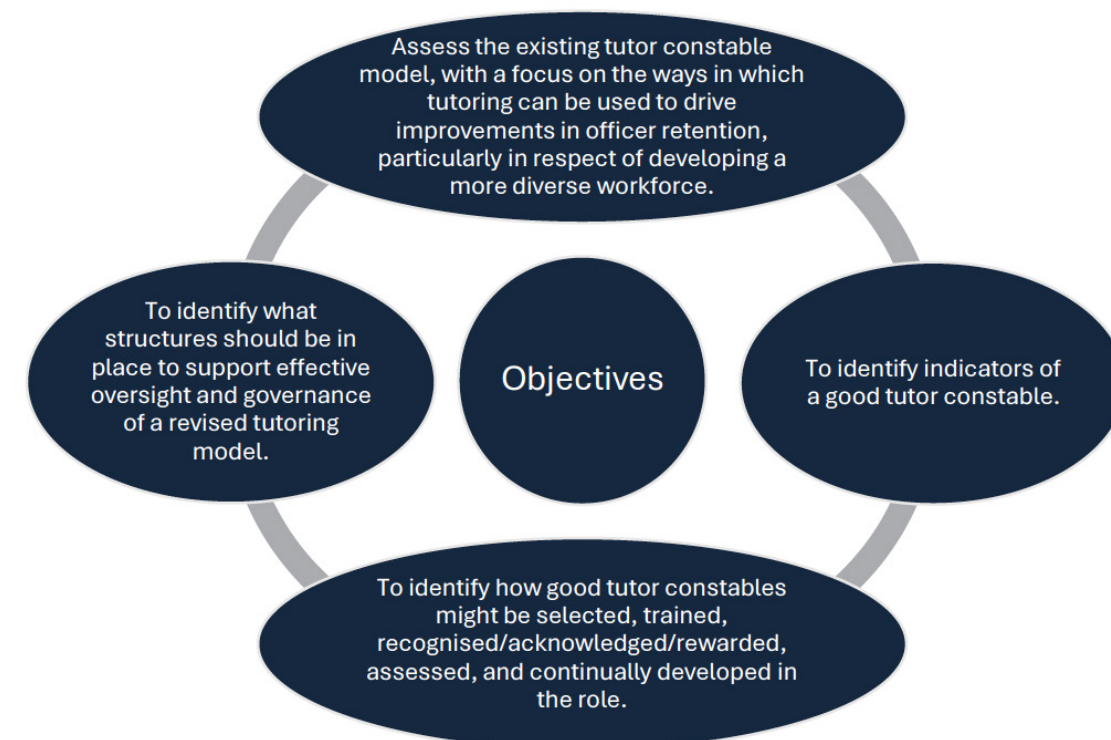
PROJECT SPONSORS

This study was commissioned by Chief Supt Alan Gibson, Supt Jackie Dunbar, and Chief Inspector Rachael Burns, Operational Training Delivery, Police Scotland.

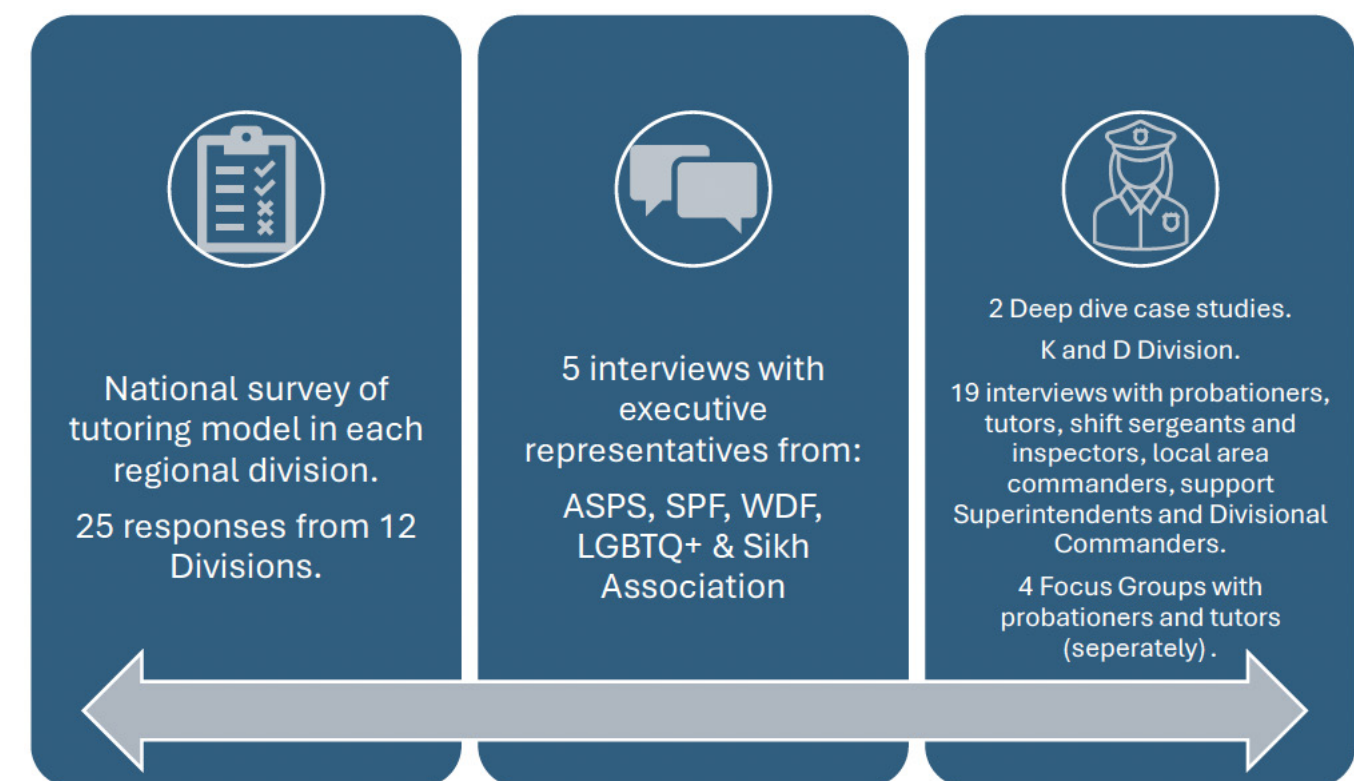
RESEARCH AIM

The aim of this study is to provide empirical evidence to inform changes to policy and practice within Police Scotland which enhance the capacity, capability, and professionalism of Police Scotland's approach to tutoring police recruits during their initial police learning programme.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES



STUDY DESIGN



WHAT WE FOUND

The existing Tutor Constable Model

POSITIVES

- Probationers perceive tutors as most important person re enjoying the job, being accepted by the shift, successfully completing their probation.
- A positive experience for many. Probationers often felt that they had been “lucky” in getting a good tutor or tutors.
- Generally, probationers valued having the same tutor to begin with but also valued working with other tutors as confidence and competence adequately developed
- Operational ‘on-the-job’ learning and development as part of a response policing team was valued by Probationers, Tutors, and Divisional managers and leaders.

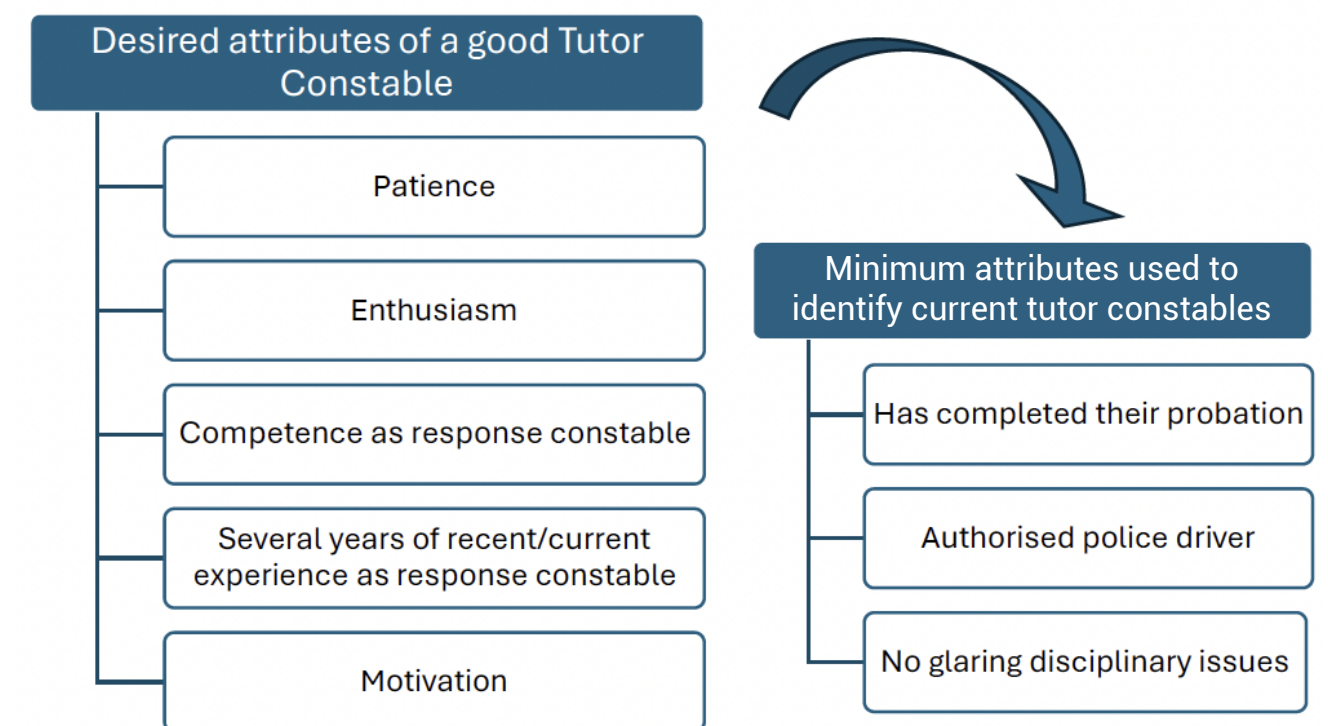
AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- The model is fragmented, fragile and uncoordinated. There is no national oversight and governance (Operational Training Delivery currently has responsibility for Module 1 and on-going formal assessment, whilst ‘on-the-job field’ training is the responsibility of 13 operational policing Divisions who have different approaches to one another).
- There is insufficient focus on the professional development of probationers (and tutors) during ‘on-the-job field’ training. Probationers are seen first and foremost as deployable resources to meet demand.
- Insufficient space and time for Tutors to show Probationers how to do new tasks properly at the start. Doesn’t help minimise ‘practice shock’ nor is it helpful in developing competence and confidence.
- Over-reliance on the dedication of tutors who often struggle with the demands of the tutor role and their day job.
- Limited variety of calls makes it challenging for probationers to evidence core competencies and values (e.g., lesser used direct measures – FPNs).
- Probationers often don’t know who their Tutor and Sergeant will be until just before they leave the Police College which they find discomfoting. Doesn’t reinforce the psychological contract which has been developed at SPC during Module 1 (see Grant et.al., 2024)
- Tutors are unsighted on what Probationers are taught and what key messaging they receive, for example around ethics and values, and do not receive information about how probationers have performed, whether there are learning needs which need to be addressed, etc.
- The current model is hindering Police Scotland’s wider strategic ambitions to develop its people and enhance their wellbeing.



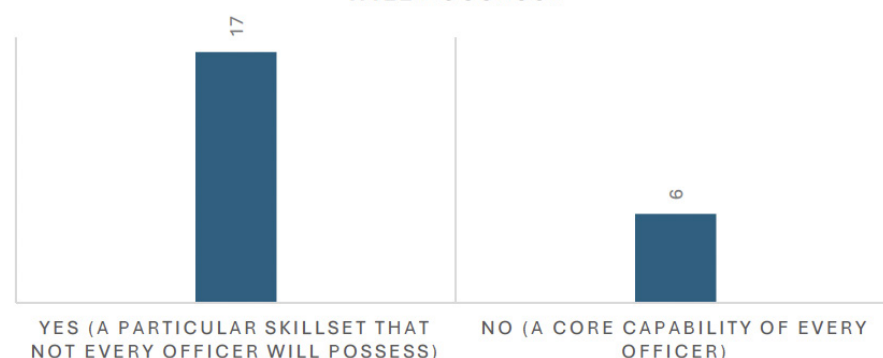
TUTOR CONSTABLES

Given the imbalance between the number of available tutors and the number of probationers, managerial officers did not always focus on the desired attributes identified by participants but had an informal minimum standard when identifying tutor constables:



Whilst most divisional representatives considered tutoring a particular skillset not every officer possesses, there was a lack of consensus within and between divisions, with some officers arguing that it is a core capability of every police officer. How tutoring is understood and framed has an impact on the development of recruitment, training and expectations of the role.

DOES YOUR DIVISION VIEW TUTORING AS A CORE CAPABILITY, OR SOMETHING THAT REQUIRES A PARTICULAR SKILLSET THAT NOT EVERY OFFICER WILL POSSESS?



GENERAL THEMES

The themes of this study can be divided into five themes: Selection, Training and development, the tutoring process, tutor workloads and contradicting themes.

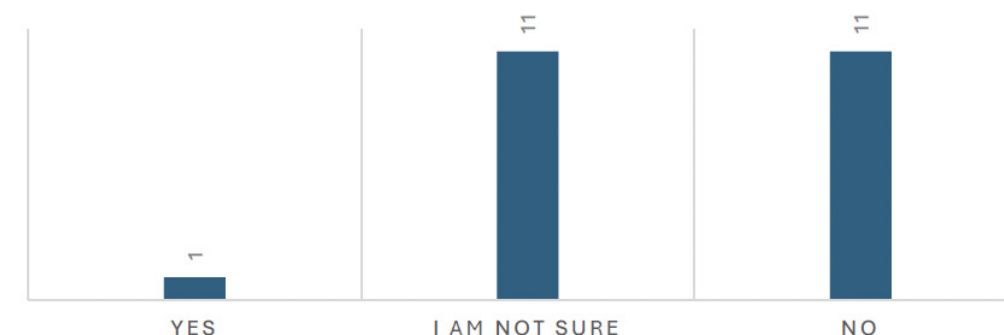
THEME 1: SELECTION

- There is not a national tutor constable role profile and job description. Only two divisions had stipulations about at what stage a response officer can become a tutor constable i.e., 2-3 years post-probation.

THEME 2: TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

- There is a sense of organisational injustice amongst Tutors, particularly relating to inadequate training, Continuous Professional Development and workload.
- The existing model has no formal performance monitoring of tutors.
- Tutoring is considered a supervisory role and therefore seen by some local managers, albeit informally, as a development opportunity for future promotion.
- The initial tutor cop training course was unanimously perceived as inadequate - is too short, isn't face-to-face. The lack of ongoing CPD was widely seen as a weakness which needs to be addressed.
- Tutors are struggling with the challenges involved in tutoring neurodivergent probationers and probationers for whom English is not their first language. They do not feel suitably knowledgeable or trained.
- Tutors have no guidelines that address diversity and inclusion and relate particularly to the tutoring process. The one division that said that they had such policies related these to the general values and principles of the organisation rather than tutoring specific.

DO YOU HAVE ANY LOCAL POLICIES OR GUIDELINES ADDRESSING THE ROLE OF TUTORS IN FACILITATING RETENTION OF PROBATIONERS WITH A FOCUS ON INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY?



THEME 2: TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT CONTINUED

- Tutors and shift Sergeants were unsighted on what probationers are being taught during Module 1 at the Scottish Police College, therefore it is unclear how Police Scotland ensures the link between skills, values and knowledge taught at the college and in the field.
- Tutors perceive that they are teaching knowledge and skill gaps not addressed during Module 1 e.g., completing an SPR, rather than mentoring but are not trained or qualified to the same level as staff at Tulliallan, Divisional Training teams etc.

THEME 3: THE TUTORING PROCESS

- Probationers frequently experienced 'practice shock' when joining local policing teams after the Police College. There may be ways to alleviate this 'shock' through more support during the transition.
- Generally, probationers valued having the same tutor to begin with but also valued working with other tutors as confidence and competence developed.
- 'On-the-job' learning and development as part of a response policing team was valued by probationers, tutors, and Divisional managers and leaders.
- New recruits are perceived as coming in with different expectations and demands which established officers either do not agree with or contradict current ways of working.
- General perception amongst Tutors and Divisional managers that the standard of probationers is declining e.g., verbal and written skills, and changing attitudes e.g., "entitled".

THEME 3: THE TUTORING PROCESS CONTINUED

- Limited variety of calls makes it challenging for probationers to evidence core competencies and values (e.g., lesser used direct measures – FPNs).
- The monitoring system was considered cumbersome and officers questioned what happens with the 'evidence'.more support during the transition.



THEME 4: TUTOR WORKLOADS

- Tutor burnout was a significant concern for senior managers across divisions due to:
 - Continuous heavy workloads (probationers and their own).
 - Changing profile of need of probationers (often in relation to neurodiversity) which requires more or different tutoring.
 - Inadequate training and support to address these challenges.

THEME 5: CONTRADICTIONARY VIEWPOINTS

Participants could not agree if a national oversight and governance structure is required for tutoring. There were fears that this might lack an understanding of local needs and impact the ability to create local solutions.

It was not clear if a payment as incentives for tutor constables are required to increase up take and improve the tutor constable program.

A formalized and/or national selection process for tutors was not necessarily considered desirable as many officers appreciated local line managers knowledge and skill in identifying suitable candidates.

Whilst informally this is already the case, it was not clear if formal recognition of tutoring for advancement for specialist roles or promotion would improve the current system.

RECOMMENDATIONS POLICY PRINCIPLES

RECOMMENDATION 1

The 'on-the-job' learning phase should prioritise Probationers learning over being seen first and foremost as a deployable resource.

RECOMMENDATION 2

To support recommendation 1, the existing model should be adapted to create more space and time during the first few months for probationers to thoroughly learn how to do things properly, thereby increasing their confidence and competence.

RECOMMENDATION 3

In addition to creating sufficient time and space to learn how to do things properly, there should be greater focus and providing sufficient opportunity for Probationers to develop competence in all 18 key competencies as early in their 'on-the-job' learning phase as possible.

OPERATIONALISING THE POLICY PRINCIPLES

Creating the time and space to reduce 'practice shock', develop competence & confidence and provide firm foundation for deployment to response teams

RECOMMENDATION 4

To realise recommendations 1,2, and 3, Probationers should initially be deployed into an on-the-job environment where there is time to foreground learning, reduce practice shock, close the theory-practice divide, and build confidence before deployment onto a response policing team.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Building on recommendation 4 and acknowledging the challenges around the sufficiency of Tutors, Probationers should be formally tutored (or 'taught') for shorter periods – 12 weeks – longer for those with additional support needs. Thereafter, probationers should be 'mentored' by more experienced constables.

SELECTING, TRAINING, DEVELOPING, & ASSESSING TUTORS.

RECOMMENDATION 6

A national role profile and person specification should be developed.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Prospective Tutors should be re-vetted before taking up their role.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Development and implementation of a new, accredited Police Scotland tutor training course, with particular focus on learning, training and assessment, mentoring, and supporting probationers with different needs e.g., those who are neurodivergent, those for whom English is not their first language. It should allow for an in-person element to discuss possible challenges, reflect on concerns and allow for questions.

RECOMMENDATION 9

As part of their training, tutors should be provided with a summary of the key messages probationers get in Module 1 at the Scottish Police College, thereby helping to ensure that tutors can teach/mentor in line with the skill, values and knowledge the College provides.

RECOMMENDATION 10

Ensure that probationers and tutors have the chance to get to know each other before leaving the Police College and joining a local policing team. If it cannot be the future tutor, probationers should be able to meet with the response team Sergeant/ Inspector so that they can assign an appropriate tutor based on need.

RECOMMENDATION 11

There should be dedicated CPD opportunities for tutors and a regular mandatory training to ensure that tutors are up to date on what the college teaches, current needs of probationers, and the evidence-base on what works to support practice-based or on-the-job learning.

RECOMMENDATION 12

Based on tutor constable minimum role profile, tutors should undergo regular 360-degree assessment of their competency as a tutor.

OVERSIGHT & GOVERNANCE

RECOMMENDATION 13

There should be a review of the existing oversight and governance arrangements regarding the operational learning phase of the Probationer Training Programme, with a view to addressing the existing fragmented arrangements (i.e., where Operational Training Delivery supported by a National Development Unit have the oversight and governance of Module 1 and their on-going formal assessments during the probationary period, together with the current 1-day Moodle Tutor training course, whilst 13 Operational Policing Divisions have oversight and governance of tutor selection, the day-to-day development of probationers etc).

FUTURE WORK TO SUPPORT THESE RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Pilot a comparative analysis of the Dedicated Tutor Unit, Community Policing Teams, and Hybrid tutoring models. Outcomes to inform final costed recommendations; co-development and evaluation between PSOS and SIPR Organisational Development Network.
2. Explore if there is a generational shift in expectations, needs and ways of working between established and new officers, and if so, what the implications might be for recruitment, retention, tutoring, and for approaches to management and leadership.
3. Development, piloting, and costed evaluation of revised Tutor Constable training course, co-development and evaluation between PSOS and SIPR Organisational Development Network.
4. Development of an on- going CPD Programme for Tutor Constables).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

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