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Fast Track and Direct Entry evaluation

Overview paper

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Fast Track and Direct Entry evaluation

Overview paper

1. Programme background and aims

The Fast Track (FT) and Direct Entry (DE) programmes are designed to open up entry routes into policing¹ and offer career progression opportunities in line with other professions. They aim to strengthen force leadership teams, by placing talented individuals with fresh perspectives and the potential to progress into inspector and superintendent roles. In the case of DE (and, to some extent, FT external²), an added aim is to bring in knowledge, skills and ways of working from previous careers.

2. Programme overview

The programmes recruit annually, using a rigorous selection process. They combine centrally delivered training and on-the-job learning, working through the ranks in force. All have challenging in-programme assessments, including exam and work-based assessments, largely mirroring national police promotion requirements. They have set timeframes for completion and all guarantee employment in home forces at the target rank on successful graduation.

Table 1: Programme members: joining and completion figures

Programme	Number of members as at June 2019				
	Year launched	Joined	Completed	Left	Remaining
DE Superintendent	2014	33	25	4	4
DE Inspector	2016	54	11	9	34
FT external	2014	62	41	18	3
FT internal	2015	252	98	15	139

¹ The FT Inspector and DE Superintendent programmes were launched in response to Winsor Review recommendations: Winsor, T. 2011, 'Independent Review of Police Officer and Staff Remuneration and Conditions – Part II' available online at: library.college.police.uk/docs/Winsor-Part2-vol1.pdf

² FT external closed to new intakes after two recruitment rounds.

3. Evaluation overview

While too early to assess the full potential of FT and DE programmes³ of this nature, the evaluation has allowed important findings and learning to emerge. The evaluation ran for five years for DE Superintendent and FT and three years for DE Inspectors – from programme launch in 2014 and 2016 until June 2019. The fieldwork included 64 interviews with programme members and 33 with their line managers/mentors, surveys with 433 respondents and analysis of recruitment and assessment data. Seven chief constables and one chief officer from eight participating forces were also interviewed. For further details, please see the full evaluation reports for the FT, DE Superintendent and DE Inspector programmes.

4. The concept of Direct Entry and Fast Track

4.1 Can the concept of Direct Entry and Fast Track work in policing?

The evaluation has shown that Direct Entry and Fast Track programmes can work in policing.

The traditional approach of constable-only initial recruitment, with an indefinite promotion path, is not the only way to bring new entrants into the service and for aspiring leaders to move through the ranks. Police constables with strong leadership potential can be successfully fast-tracked to inspector within two years. New recruits can become competent inspectors within three years (FT external) or within two years for those with prior management experience (DE Inspectors), and new recruits with senior management experience can become competent superintendents within 18 months.

As of June 2019, 175 individuals had successfully completed their FT or DE programme. For all programmes, the evaluation found that almost all members felt ready for the target rank at the point of programme completion – with a recognition that they would need to keep learning on the job, as could be the case for any officer taking up a new role. Members' views on their readiness were echoed by a sample of their line managers and mentors, along with a common perception, also expressed in chief constable interviews, that members had the drive and personal ability to quickly fill skills and knowledge gaps. Follow-up DE Superintendent fieldwork, three years post-graduation, found no evidence cohort members had required or received any more support than would be usual for newly promoted officers to perform in role.

³ The DE Inspector programme was introduced later than the FT and DE Superintendent programme in 2016. Due to reporting timescales, only one DE Inspector cohort has completed the programme as at June 2019

4.2 Can they bring benefits?

The Fast Track and Direct Entry programmes have brought high calibre and exceptional leaders into inspector and superintendent roles and have had some success increasing diversity at those levels. Programme graduates are motivated to take up more senior roles and continually improve policing. There is evidence the direct entrants are challenging norms, offering different perspectives, looking to solve problems and encouraging others to do the same.

Bringing in new talent: The evidence suggests that participating in the programmes is challenging and requires resilience and commitment. Across all programmes, there have been examples of line managers, mentors/coaches and chief officers describing programme members as exceptional. For the external programmes (FT external and DE) there is evidence of established police officers having their negative preconceptions of the programme overturned after working with a programme member. As of June 2019, one DE superintendent had been promoted to assistant chief constable and two others had become chief superintendents. Five FT officers had been promoted to temporary and substantive chief inspector.

Increasing diversity: The external programmes (FT External and DE) have recruited people from a diverse range of previous careers and close to a third of members have come from private sector jobs (see **Annex A, table 1**). The programmes have successfully brought people into police leadership roles who would not otherwise have joined at that point in their lives.

The proportion of women on all programmes has been higher than represented nationally⁴ at the target ranks – close to double for the DE programmes and the FT external programme. There has been higher representation of people from black and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds across all programmes, although only marginally for DE Inspectors. The proportions of programme members from these demographic groups was lower than in national population figures (see **Annex A, table 2**).

Nearly all the chief officers interviewed were interested in DE as a potential way to improve the representation of people from a BAME background in leadership teams and had hoped for higher representation on the programmes. There were, however, positive views around how the

⁴ Home Office (National Statistics), July 2019, 'Police Workforce England and Wales, March 2019' available online at: [gov.uk/government/statistics/police-workforce-england-and-wales-31-march-2019](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-workforce-england-and-wales-31-march-2019)

programmes had supported diversity and inclusion in a wider sense. DE was appreciated for bringing in different perspectives. FT internal was valued for enabling the identification and promotion of talented serving officers, including those who may not have been aware of their own potential and/or had been held back by other barriers to career progression.

Positive influence: The evaluation found that DE members (and, to some extent, FT members) had a more inclusive, empowering leadership style than usual at their target rank. This difference in leadership style was partly due to their previous experience, but was also encouraged and developed in College inputs. There was evidence that the leadership style reportedly increased morale, organisational commitment, professional curiosity and interest in evidence-based policing among those they worked with, including more senior colleagues. More generally, programme members (particularly DE superintendents) were often described as less constrained by hierarchy, more willing to challenge upwards, more open to change and more prepared to look outside of policing for inspiration and learning.

Nearly all the interviewed chief officers described the direct entrants as challenging norms and encouraging others to be more enquiring. For all of the external programmes (FT external and DE programmes) the very presence of programme members was said by some respondents to be encouraging people in force to think differently.

Using prior work skills and knowledge: A common pull for participation in DE programmes and, to some extent, FT external, was the opportunity to use pre-existing skills and knowledge in a policing context. In the more extensive fieldwork (DE Superintendents), examples of this have been drawn out in relation to almost all programme member participants with some striking examples, particularly around partnership working.

5. Learning for future delivery

The College has been continually improving the programmes since they first launched, drawing on interim evaluation findings and monitoring data. The following highlights issues that could require further consideration and may influence options around future delivery.

5.1 Communication and championing the programmes

The Fast Track and Direct Entry programmes are challenging to complete and have ambitious aims, including around promoting long-term cultural change. To recruit high-calibre and diverse applicants, and to help them succeed in role, the programmes need effective marketing, as well as in-force and national championing.

Members are recruited to offer new perspectives and make a positive difference to policing. To this end, they can benefit from knowing their unique qualities and approaches are valued (particularly at a senior and chief officer level) and that being different will help, not hinder, their careers.

Chief officer interviews revealed different approaches to sharing information about programmes and members in force. The controversial nature of the programmes could encourage a low-profile approach, but proactively publicising programme successes may be useful to securing workforce support. Members relied on the goodwill of colleagues while learning on the job. Ensuring this continues is vital for programme delivery. Buy-in at every level may be important for optimising 'return on investment'.

5.2 Improving force delivery

In-force governance arrangements need to be in place and fully applied to ensure programme members are well supported and able to focus on their development. The evaluation found levels of support were not consistent across forces.

The programmes were mainly delivered in force, with cohorts coming together for College-delivered modules. It was important that programme 'national minimum requirements' for force delivery were met and the evaluation found deficiencies in this respect. There was considerable variation between members' experiences in force – particularly around the appointment of suitable mentors, access to appropriate development opportunities and roles, and the use of individual personal development plans. Given the challenging nature of the programmes, appropriate support is important for wellbeing, as well as achieving learning objectives.

In force, a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) had day-to-day responsibility for the programmes, with a chief officer lead. Whether this is a suitable arrangement in all forces needs consideration. More structured, organisational level support may be

better, for example, led by force HR or organisational development departments. It needs to be recognised that the programmes are radically different to other talent development initiatives and may need quite different resourcing. They offer guaranteed, rapid promotion (subject to passing assessments) into management and senior management roles.

The evaluation, particularly of FT, uncovered varied views around how prescriptive in-force programme requirements should be. Freedom to tailor opportunities in force to suit individual and organisational needs could be valued, but appropriate governance should be in place to ensure a balance between prioritising force needs and the development needs of the individual. All individuals involved in delivering a DE or FT programme could benefit from adequate and specific training and guidance themselves to best support programme members.

The programmes were deliberately introduced with broad aims in mind, essentially to support the continuous improvement of policing. Now shown to be workable and able to bring benefits, a next step could be to have more tightly defined programme aims or for forces to recruit with specific needs in mind. Findings from the evaluation would suggest more clarity around purpose could potentially increase support and force engagement with the programmes. Those involved would also be clearer about what the programmes were trying to achieve.

5.3 College modules

Ways to better tailor learning to suit individual needs could be considered, along with methods to ensure consistently high-quality inputs that have lasting impact. Stronger reinforcement of the programme aims to make a positive difference is needed.

The evaluation identified that given the variety of prior experience and skills/knowledge of programme members, delivering modules that suited everybody was challenging. Achieving the appropriate balance between focusing on developing skills, such as leadership/management and evidence-based approaches, versus using modules to help prepare members operationally was particularly difficult. The latter was seen as a priority for members, particularly for those without prior policing experience, whereas for those who had not worked outside of policing (FT internal) the non-operational modules were viewed as particularly valuable. There has been a suggestion that inputs should also provide more opportunities to test out decision-making in a safe training environment.

Given the focus of the programmes on bringing different approaches into policing, it was felt that innovative learning methods and having less reliance on serving/retired officers for module delivery would be beneficial. Having consistently high-quality inputs has also been raised as important. Changes have been made and are under way for the DE programmes, including innovative online distance-learning components and a new curriculum.

5.4 Attraction and recruitment

It may take more marketing, positive action and time for the Direct Entry programmes to have broader appeal. Work should continue to attract talented applicants from underrepresented groups, as well as people with no prior police connections or interest in police careers. As ongoing from programme launch, recruitment processes should be continually monitored and adapted to ensure fair assessment of all applicants.

Although the programmes are attracting people from BAME backgrounds, more can be done in this area. Ongoing changes have been made to recruitment methods, based on good practice and learning from experience. A recent independent review of the DE Inspector recruitment processes found them robust and fair. Marketing needs to attract candidates with the right skills and experience. Positive action initiatives and targeted marketing should continue and be developed, with a recognition that greater success may take time. Another option could be to use the programmes to fill specific skills gaps (potentially ensuring prior work skills and knowledge are used effectively) or to increase the representation of specific demographic groups in leadership teams.

Recruiting more individuals who are completely new to policing and those from the private sector may require more concerted and extensive attraction initiatives, including ways to familiarise people with the programmes and police work. Opportunities are already available and being promoted for prospective candidates to meet officers, undertake short attachments, or defer for one year to enable a more informed decision before joining.

Ways to make joining less of a career risk (perceived or real) could also be reviewed. Existing options could be emphasised in marketing – for example, the potential for in-programme deferrals, career breaks and undertaking the programmes part-time, allowing existing careers to be continued to some extent.

Annex A: Data tables

Table 1. Previous work sector/employment status of programme members

Previous employment status	DE Superintendent	DE Inspector	FT external
Public sector	21/33	34/54	27/62
Private sector	11/33	16/54	20/62
Student/unemployed/other/ prefer not to say	1/33	4/54	15/62

Table 2. Programme members (joined programme) demographics/
national figures

Demographic group	DE Superintendent	Superintendents England and Wales (all)	DE Inspector	FT internal	FT external	Inspectors England and Wales (all)	National Population (census data 2011)
BAME background	3/33	38/ 896 (4%)	3/ 54	36/ 252	8/ 62	260/ 5,555 (5%)	14%
Female	16/33	247/ 896 (28%)	23/ 54	88/ 252	30/ 62	1,327/ 5,555 (24%)	51%

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