

Speech: Speech to the Police Education Qualification Framework conference

Many thanks for inviting me to speak today. It is always a really good opportunity to talk about something that is for us an absolutely key priority, which is police professionalisation.

But, just before I do talk about the course and professionalisation, I am just going to comment on the events that took place in Westminster last week.

Much has already been said in tribute to PC Keith Palmer, who you will know from what you have seen or heard and read, he gave so much which is beyond words in terms of bravery and heroism in order to keep others safe. But I also not only want to add my tribute to Keith here today but actually to all police and, indeed, your partners across the emergency services, for the phenomenal work you did to help those who were so tragically affected. It is almost impossible to describe the great debt we owe to Keith for what he did and what he gave up in order to protect our democracy.

In what is perhaps the most painful of circumstances, the police's reactions – along with those of your colleagues across the emergency services – were remarkable.

It is just another phenomenal demonstration of what you know happens in one way or another every single day across this country to keep others safe as they go about their daily lives in their communities. It is something we rely on and something that for our country and our communities actually reminds people just how important that work is.

It is the good work that prevents those problems in the first place that people don't talk about and remember, so I think it is important that we take this opportunity to think about the importance of this for our communities.

It also reinforces something that I would hope all of us in this room this morning are aware of, who are passionate about it – and something I was talking to colleagues from across Europe about over the last couple of days – we have got the best police in the world.

Part of what this is about and what we are talking about today and in the months and years going forward is not only about how we retain that position but actually about how we develop it even further.

Today's event does promote a major element of the reform programme as we strive to recognise the fantastic professionalism that is already in evidence across policing. And it is perhaps one of the most significant aspects of reform, in both scale and scope for the police, going forward.

So, turning to the core of what I want to say today, it is really quite satisfying that radical reform of this type and the ambition that this has got is not being led by ministers – or anyone in Whitehall – but by policing

itself under the leadership of your professional body, the College of Policing.

We established the college as the first professional body for policing in 2012 – charged with setting high standards and with making sure we do what we can to help everyone in policing to meet them through the course of their career. And now, in 2017, it is heartening to note that policing has some of the hallmarks of a genuine profession in place:

- a code of ethics has been delivered
- a culture of continual professional development is beginning to be, at the very least, embraced
- the body of professional knowledge is continually growing
- and the final pillar – standards of education – are now being put in place, through the Policing Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF)

Now, I hope you don't mind if I refer to this as the PEQF for the next few minutes.

I have to say that it is clear to me as I have been looking at this – and I hope it is increasingly clear to everyone working across the country – and most importantly to those police professionals working at the sharp end – that there is a big role for the college. A role in leading for policing on some of the most critical issues. Providing leadership essentially for the sector: on standards; and on professionalism particularly, which is obviously the subject of today's conference.

Why this is important

Our workforce reform goals are clear. We want to ensure the police force is flexible, capable and professional: agile enough to adapt as crime and society changes. As we know it is changing with the digital world and moving very fast. And this change can only accelerate with increases in interpersonal crimes and those perpetrated at distance across virtual and physical borders. Borders that for criminals are pretty much translucent and yet for us in policing too often become rigid.

Police leaders need to understand what is required to effectively investigate high-harm crimes. They need to ensure that specialist teams have the resource and capability to deal with the complex nature of these investigations and to ensure that front line officers have the ability to look past sometimes what can be the immediate issue, identify potential vulnerability and know the appropriate action to take. So to fully complement the PEQF the college is also consulting on the development of a licence to practise and universal registration in which officers would need a licence to practise in certain

crucial areas, including working with the most vulnerable.

Forces need to think actually quite ambitiously about the types of interventions and capabilities needed to transform their response to and for victims. And given that protecting the vulnerable is not the sole responsibility of the police, we also need to make sure we are considering how they can work more effectively with partners to achieve this end.

Tackling cyber-crime and crimes against the vulnerable requires people who can challenge perceptions and support the victims of crime. Without these sorts of skills we would never have discovered the depth and extent of child sexual abuse or, indeed, modern slavery.

A more flexible, capable and professional police service

So, policing needs to be prepared to meet the challenges of the future and the PEQF aims to give officers access to the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in doing just that.

Graduate level skills and attributes are already demonstrated on a daily basis by members of the service and will become increasingly important in policing.

I am really pleased to see that, through the PEQF, the college is seeking to accredit those skills where they are already held in the policing, as well as to ensure that future joiners to the police will have them at the start of their career and then just develop them further as they go through.

But I also want to be very clear that this doesn't mean that we only want to see one kind of person working in policing. Far from it. We all benefit from diversity of thought as well as individual. That is why it is great to see a variety of entry routes to a policing career, whether through a pre-join policing degree, as a graduate recruit, or upon the completion of a degree apprenticeship.

I am just going to focus on the degree apprenticeship for moment.

The government is committed to delivering some 3 million new apprenticeship starts by the end of this parliament; to increase productivity in the economy and raise the standards of workplace training more generally. Let's not forget that until very recently there was no such thing as a degree apprenticeship in policing at all. But building on the work of early pioneers the college's work to develop a degree apprenticeship at pace, and to ensure its accreditation, shows what a 'can-do' attitude can deliver and it is one that policing is famous and which is to be applauded.

This new apprenticeship route is a really attractive option for people who want to take the first step in a really rich and varied profession. And because you can earn while you learn with an apprenticeship, I am hopeful that using the positive action tools which the college has pioneered, forces will be able to encourage and maintain access to policing from people from all communities and backgrounds.

Professionalism

As I said a few moments ago, this focus on recognising and developing professionalism across policing is one which I care passionately about and we should all want to see develop in policing.

Because policing in the 21st century, by its very unique nature, should be one of the most exciting and attractive careers available. It should attract the most talented and skilled recruits from all backgrounds and all areas.

Workforce reform is improving the attractiveness of policing as a profession and new recruitment initiatives like Direct Entry and Police Now are widening the talent pool and the range of prior experience available to policing.

Both these schemes are expanding. Police Now, having started in the Met, will be recruiting in 19 forces this year. And Direct Entry, which closed for applications earlier this month, has seen a massive 68% boost in applications. Again, this shows what can be achieved when we are focused on delivering and challenging what we have done before.

But while policing is becoming a more open profession, attracting applicants from different walks of life I think we all need to be very clear that there is already excellent police work going on up and down the country. And one of the most important things that the PEQF can be used for is to recognise the fantastic, professional work of those already working in policing.

To not just ensure that people realise how valued they are as part of their teams, but to give them recognition that other organisations also value, outside policing.

So that the drive for professionalisation is not just about new recruits, as important as that is, but must also be about raising standards across all ranks and roles.

Focus on the individual

So we must make sure that those working in policing can access the best skills, support, and qualifications available. In essence, we want policing to recognise its status as a profession and its people as the professionals – holding them to clear ethical and performance standards, as you would see in the other professional disciplines.

We need to see frontline professionals truly empowered to make their own decisions, knowing that they will be supported by excellent management at all levels.

This means I want officers and staff to feel confident about challenging their superiors. And those leaders, receiving that challenge, need to be open to it and confident about working with it because that is when we get real change and the best decisions be made.

But no organisation can achieve this kind of change without professional

support. So I think the College of Policing have a pivotal place in driving reform. They will ensure the right framework is in place on which to build a modern, flexible and effective policing profession.

And the college cannot do this alone. Higher education institutions are bringing expertise to the table and it is great to see so many of you in the room today, all with an interest in professionalising policing for the future and how we make that better and take that further.

A big challenge for policing

Let me be very straight about this – I recognise this is a really big challenge. It is a bold reform programme. But I know the college is going into this with its eyes open. If national standards are being set, then they need to be transferable across all police forces in England and Wales, and it is vital that all officers have access to training that equips them to deliver the high standard of service that the public expects.

And, to those who say that policing isn't and shouldn't be a graduate job, I would ask you to just pause for a moment and encourage you to challenge that thought. Because policing needs to be prepared to meet the challenges of the future and the PEQF aims to give officers access to the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in a fast changing environment.

The anomaly is often pointed out that, at any given partnership table, the police officer is likely to be the only person whose profession does not expect degree level qualification. And yet, the police officer is – more often than not – chairing that partnership meeting and at the very least the authority figure that people will look to for guidance.

And as Alex Marshall himself has said on several occasions, an educational qualification should not, cannot and will not replace the empathy, compassion and common sense already in policing. But what it will do is to allow police professionals to get the recognition they deserve for the complexity of the job they do everyday.

And yes, the college recognises that the PEQF and associated graduate entry routes would mean the financial burden of initial training would be passed onto some individuals. But this mirrors the approach that is also taken in other professions. Meanwhile the degree apprenticeship offers new entrants to policing the opportunity to earn a wage while becoming a police constable, with successful candidates acquiring a degree qualification at the end of the learning programme.

Introducing a degree apprenticeship tackles concerns that the costs of obtaining qualifications might affect policing's ability to secure the representative workforce it needs and that is important.

So let's be very clear. Changes of this magnitude can only really succeed and become embedded if everyone is on board. The PEQF will help accelerate the pace of change across all forces but there are significant cultural barriers to change here and forces need practical advice and support to see them

through.

That's why the college has been very clear that these proposals will only be implemented fully at a pace with which forces themselves are comfortable.

Now I do welcome your attendance today and applying your collective knowledge and experience to this crucial reform. I urge everyone to take the discussions that you have today back with you to prompt debate where you work and develop this further.

Conclusion

It is clear to me that the scale of reform underway – reform that is being driven by policing in fact – is a result of us reaching a situation where the system genuinely recognises the fact that we at the Home Office do not run policing. We want to make sure that the framework is there for the sector to run and develop and reform itself. The college has an important part of play in that as in fact does every single person sitting here today.

I won't deny there are high expectations and this is a challenging agenda. And I am delighted that the college has been able to step and meet this challenge, fulfilling its role as the professional body you need. One that can support everyone working in policing to raise standards and deliver a better service for the public.

The benefits of succeeding on this programme are actually very clear. It will make sure we are able to deliver the very best services to local communities provided by a skilled, professional and representative workforce.

I think professionalism needs to be absolutely at the heart of modern policing. This means recognising the high level skills already in policing, as well as raising the bar for new recruits to ensure that we continue to have the very best police forces in the world.

We need to have forces that are fit for the future and the college's new Policing Education Qualifications Framework is an important step in meeting this challenge.

Thank you.