

# Community Safety Practitioners: training to develop capacity

Jim McManus identifies the need for national standards of training for community safety coordinators.

**D**eveloping staff to do what is expected of them in probation, youth offender and other teams is not easy, but defined standards can be identified from a variety of agencies, including CJNTO and the probation courses which succeed the DipSW. Occupational standards exist which help Human Resources departments and those doing the jobs alike. They may not be perfect, but they exist.

Occupational profiles, and consequently the definition of training and development needs, are much less visible for many of the agencies and people who need to be engaged in crime and disorder partnerships at strategic and operational levels. For example, there is no single, uniform occupational profile for a community safety coordinator in a large metropolitan authority, or for her or his counterpart in the police or the NHS. We also lack a distinct profile for smaller local authorities, especially non-metropolitan districts, where staff engaged in community safety are typically part of multi-function units reporting and dealing with a range of functions from 'Best Value' to social policy. CJNTO has produced some extremely useful work, but as yet not even this can meet the needs of community safety governance, and meeting strategic levels in either local government or the police.

Any occupational profile which is developed needs to cope with the organisational complexity and diversity of people in local government and the police. Many district authorities and some county councils complain, with some justification, that the crime and disorder reduction partnerships model is built on unitary local government. This leads to enormous complexity in working in shire counties where with district, county and parish you have three, and with national parks authorities sometimes four, tiers of local government (McManus 2001). Add the NHS and police to this mix and you have a potential logistic nightmare (McManus and Mullet 2001).

## Back to the future

This problem is nothing new. It is a characteristic of a nascent industry or new professional field, especially in the public sector. As such, we've seen it before with Child Protection, Community Care, Best Value, New Deal for Communities and latterly Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. New activities are added which combine existing competencies and skills (strategic planning, needs assessment) with new knowledge needs (crime reduction) and areas where practice and skill should be good but sometimes aren't (multi-agency

working.) This presents problems for training providers, commissioners and users alike, and many current training schemes in crime reduction are not designed to meet all of these needs. Historically, local government has been surprisingly good at taking on new functions and running with them, from Elderly Peoples Homes under Part III of the *National Assistance Act 1948* onwards.

Nacro has been conducting an ongoing evaluation of the training it offers partnerships. We did this through group interview evaluations of training events, evaluation forms, telephone interviews and a half-day event with a range of people who had attended training. We have also been engaged in consulting different partnerships and people within them about their training needs. As part of this we have just completed an analysis of the training needs of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) in the South West Region, commissioned by the Regional Crime Reduction Director. The Home Office itself is conducting a strategic review, and this process consulted a range of providers and commissioners of training.

One outcome of this work is that practitioners tell us there is a lack of an effective national picture of the training needs of community safety practitioners at the strategic level. There is good practice in a range of local authorities and police agencies. There are an increasing number of M.Sc courses in community safety, but these do not meet everyone's needs. So how do we meet these needs?

First, we need a profile of the kinds of activities and competencies found in CDRP roles. I would suggest the following framework:

## 1. Organisational role and framework

It is vital to understand this. Some people involved in a CDRP need a governance-level profile of skills and experience for their role. This typically involves championing change, political influencing, board level roles (e.g. chairing CDRPs) and the kind of leadership a Chief Executive should exercise. Nacro took the DTI Management Charter Initiative standards for these roles. There is a need for a distinct training programme for such governance roles, and we have been developing ways of working with them. A major barrier to this is time, but personal development programmes for such roles have been developed in the past, most notably by INLOGOV, the Local Government Management Board, and the Institute of Healthcare Management.

For coordinators and senior managers, there are also occupational profiles. The most comprehensive of these are the Australian standards (National

Campaign Against Violence and Crime 1998). This profile sets a standardised framework, which includes developing, delivering and negotiating change and projects, managing processes and involving others. It provides a useful model for competencies and activities, though as with any standardised training profile, it needs to be responsive to local situations (Chiu, Thompson *et al* 1999). Practitioner roles are also needed, and CJNTO is just one provider which can help in training needs analysis. Other coordination roles also need to be developed, for roles like community safety coordinator. Again there is a framework for this.

## 2. Technical skills required and needed

This is a highly complex issue. Most coordinators will need skills in project management, some will need statistical analysis skills. Any training programme needs to understand the skills they need. There are many routes into this role, and many difference in roles (some coordinators will be senior officers in local authorities, police or NHS, managing a team of staff. Others will be 'one person factories' delivering everything from data analysis to strategies. Others will need training in policy frameworks on young people.) Nacro took a group of fifteen coordinators from different organisations and types of partnership and, using a repertory grid technique, developed a profile of topics for training. This then informed our CDRP Training Needs Inventory® for partnerships and coordinators.

## 3. The transfer of skills from previous roles (adaptive expertise)

To be truly effective, training for community safety practitioners needs to enable them to transfer skills from previous roles, and adapt their expertise from these roles to a new situation. Many people Nacro interviewed said that they felt de-skilled coming to their new role, and had no specific training before they started. In police the problems tended to be the complexity of understanding how local authorities worked. For local authorities it was coming to a new type of field. There is, effectively, no level playing field for crime reduction coordinators in either the type of roles they do, or their previous career. Encouraging transfer of skills, therefore, should be a high priority for any training they receive.

Secondly, we need some standards which can be agreed upon across the UK. Regional Crime Directors in England, the Scottish Executive and the National Assembly Crime Reduction Director in Wales all have crucial roles in this. So too do the training providers, CJNTO and agencies like the Police Federation, Institute of Healthcare Management, Local Government Association, Welsh Local Government Association and Convention of

Scottish Local Authorities. The Home Office Strategic Review needs to be taken to heart by those of us involved in this field, but we also need a model to follow. The recent review of the public health function will lead to development of a multi-disciplinary training and occupational profile for public health practitioners (Department of Health, 2000). This will incorporate all statutory and non-statutory agencies. We could do much worse than use this development as a useful framework, regardless of whether it is linked to accreditation.

Thirdly, we need appropriate support and funding for this. Again this is a crucial role for the regional/national figures. Equally, however, training providers need to realise that to really build capacity in organisations we need to move away from providing information to enabling people to act more effectively. We need to re-think how we assess training needs, design courses and deliver them and, especially, how we build in the transfer of skills. For providers who are largely technical experts who do training this may not come easy.

Training is not everything, but it is clear that unless we have a coherent picture of where and how it fits in with the next stage of developing capacity in crime and disorder partnerships it could become increasingly irrelevant, and in some instances, counterproductive.

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