Defining Community Safety Expertise
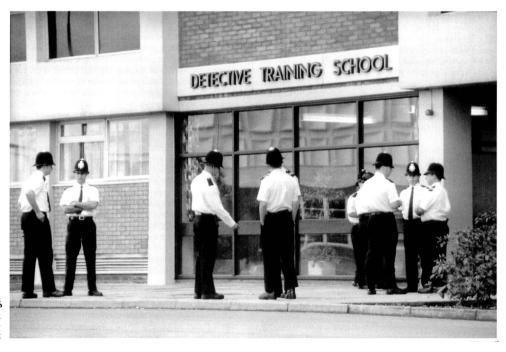
Gordon Hughes and **Adam Edwards** describe the contestation and compromise in the training and socialisation of a new 'profession'.

There are few areas in criminal justice and social policy that have seen such a growth industry as that which has occurred recently in the UK around community safety and local crime and disorder reduction partnerships. In the wake of New Labour's flagship legislation, the 1998 *Crime and Disorder Act* (henceforth CDA), we have seen a massive proliferation in posts dedicated to the pursuit of the by no means easily reconcilable goals of both community safety and crime and disorder reduction. This is most strikingly apparent across virtually every local authority in England and Wales given their statutory duty since 1998 (together with the police and other partners) to develop local partnerships with strategies for reducing crime and disorder. Recent survey research undertaken by one of the authors (Gordon Hughes together with Daniel Gilling) has not only uncovered an unsurprising but rapid expansion in the number of local authorities with clearly designated community safety officers/managers in post since 1998, but also the growth of an increasingly specialised set of tasks for different members of the increasing numbers of community safety workers operating in teams in the larger

authorities and those with a longer history of community safety work both before and since the watershed moment of the Morgan Report of 1991. Anyone looking through the new jobs section of the *Guardian Society* section on a weekly basis cannot fail to notice the continuing proliferation of new community safety posts and the allied growth of a new institutional complex around crime and disorder reduction, involving project officers, audit and information research officers etc. There is now a growing number of community safety departments which form part, however uneasily, of the local authority structure.

Where is community safety expertise heading?

Such developments of course raise major questions about where the occupation may be heading. What are the likely careers of community safety managers/ and their 'sub-altern' officers and assistants? And what are the likely training needs of these new cadres of 'joined up' government with regard to the 'wicked issue' of community safety and crime and disorder

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reduction? In this brief article we can offer little more than the raising of questions and a critical overview of the state of play in the tangled world of training and education of community safety experts in the UK. However central to our argument as both researchers and educationalists in the new policy field of community safety and crime reduction is the contention that the debate on the future training needs of this new profession — or is it a new managerial corps — is not one that can be treated as a purely technical exercise. The work of community safety officers and managers, despite the attractions of the seemingly apolitical and managerialist logic of 'What Works' and evidence-led and measurable performance indicators and outputs, is inevitably riven with moral and deeply political concerns which training programmes cannot ignore (Edwards and Hughes, forthcoming).

A growth industry in training

Alongside and in symbiotic relationship to the processes of institution-building around community safety and crime and disorder reduction at the national, regional and local levels of government, we are also witnessing a growth in the knowledge industry based on the training of what may number up to over a thousand budding experts in crime and disorder reduction across the UK. The key players are the Home Office and its crime reduction college's new modular training courses, the Audit Commission, the training courses and guides produced by Nacro and Crime Concern, the NVQ-driven national skills template from CJNTO and of course a growing number of HE institutions concerned to develop diploma, undergraduate and masters courses in community safety/crime and disorder reduction. As Tilley notes (2001), a process of accreditation is occurring where those occupying the new roles will have been inducted into the skills needed for them to do their jobs in technically approved ways.

At present there is a ongoing battle between these (self-) interested parties in 'governing the soul' of the emergent occupational group. The future 'moral career' of the community safety expert is by no means foreclosed. However, in our view, technicist and managerialist discourses of training and the skills base of the community safety occupation are to the fore and may need contestation if the broader potential and vision of community safety partnerships are not to be drowned in a sea of audit-driven and measurable performance management outputs with all their potentially perverse incentives (see Tilley, 2001). What has been striking in much of the training literature to date is the absence or at best down-playing of the knowledge and values base that the officers and managers themselves may see as crucial to their own ethically-sound as well as effective work (but see Gilling and Hughes, forthcoming).

Towards a critical and reflexive learning culture?

From our own research and work in developing undergraduate and postgraduate courses in crime prevention and community safety, it is clear that the graduates who make up the large majority of community safety managers and officers may not currently be best served by the short courses with 'quick-fix' answers and 'tool-kits' made up of 'off the shelf' examples of 'what works' in specific localities and with regard to specific targets of a central government-driven agenda of (street) crime and disorder reduction. One particularly worrying development

in the post-CDA era has been the virtual excising of 'community safety' from the Home Office-driven agenda for these partnerships. As Wiles and Pease (2000) noted, it is surely significant that we have community safety in a Crime and Disorder Act rather than crime and disorder in a Community Safety Act! The long-term consequences of this dominant discourse are by no means certain and the struggle for the heart of what constitutes a progressive, pan-hazard, and social justice-oriented community safety policy and practice remains unfinished. It was unlikely that many local authorities and experienced community safety managers will easily give up on the social regeneration paradigm of community safety in the immediate post-Morgan Report years of the 1990s. However, the current odds in our supposed 'risk' society for the future trajectory of community safety expertise and the definition of their training needs are weighted in favour of managerially defined goals of calculating what is attainable and measurable in highly technicist ways. There is the clear danger that what can be reduced in crime and disorder is largely synonymous with what can be counted, audited and clearly targeted. This is potentially at the cost of a critical culture which encourages a normative engagement among practitioners with the pressing and irreducibly political and moral questions raised by the current crime control strategies for 'weeding and seeding' populations and categories of people in different localities. It is perhaps necessary for academics and their educational (rather than narrowly training) courses to make sure that this critical and reflexive culture among members of this hybrid and exciting occupation is allowed to blossom.

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