



CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMISSION

FIRST YEAR CONSTABLE STUDY

SUMMARY REPORT #2

January 1993

Christine Bond and David Gow

1. INTRODUCTION

Four hundred recruits commenced the Certificate Course in February 1991, of whom 368 graduated and entered the Field Training Program (FTP) in December 1991 as First Year Constables (FYCs). A survey of these FYCs was conducted in late 1992 on behalf of the Criminal Justice Commission. The Constables were the first group to complete the FTP.

The survey was similar to a questionnaire completed by the Constables in December 1991 just before commencing the FTP.** A total of 342 FYCs participated in this study. They identified themselves as 99 females, and 239 males (4 non-responses); 211 stationed in the south-eastern corner of the state, and 126 outside this area (5 non-responses).***

FIGURE 1: ATTRITION DURING TRAINING (INTAKE 1)

Number starting Certificate Course (February 1991)	400
Number finishing Certificate Course (December 1991)	368
Number finishing Field Training (December 1992)	357
Total lost from first intake	43

2. CERTIFICATE COURSE

The Constables' assessment of the Certificate Course is of considerable interest in light of their year's experience "on the street". The FYCs were asked to rate a series of statements about the structure and content of the course (see Figure 1). There was a strong preference for the Academy semester rather than the University semester (90% strongly agreed with the statement that "I preferred the Academy semester to the University semester"). However, the responses were more widely distributed when the FYCs rated the statement "the University semester should be abolished". Although 43% agreed, 36% disagreed and a further 21% were undecided.

The FYCs' opinions on the content of the Certificate Course indicated general agreement on several issues. Nearly all the FYCs stated that there should be more emphasis on law during the University semester (91%), and more emphasis on procedures and paperwork during the Academy semester (99%). About two-thirds (61%) stated that learning about disadvantaged groups in society was useful.

Although nearly all (96%) of the FYCs felt that modifications to the Certificate Course were needed, there was general agreement that some aspects of the course curriculum had been relevant to the job of Constable.

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The results of this questionnaire were presented in *Summary Report #1*.

Percentages have been rounded, and therefore may not add up to 100%. Remember that not all FYCs answered every question; thus percentages are based on the number responding to the question.

In the university semester, the majority of the FYCs found learning about the law (80%), learning about the role of police in society (68%), and learning about criminal justice theories (50%) relevant to their work as Constables. However, just over one-quarter (28%) of the FYCs rated ethics subjects as irrelevant to their work, and a similar proportion (26%) were unsure of the relevance of learning about ethics and professionalism during the university semester.

There was greater agreement among the FYCs about the relevance of the Academy curriculum (see Figure 2). Generally, operational policing aspects were rated most relevant to a FYC's duties. Almost all found station duty (99%), learning about the law (99%), and weapons training (98%) relevant to their jobs as Constables. Communication skills applicable to policing (85%), the police role (78%), and the causes of crime (76%) were also rated as relevant by over three-quarters of the FYCs. Only 12% indicated that management theories had any relevance to a FYC.

3. PREPARATION FOR "THE FIELD"

The survey also sought to assess the extent to which the FYCs felt the Certificate Course prepared them for Field Training. Overall, about three-quarters (72%) reported that they felt unprepared for Field Training. Twelve percent disagreed—they felt prepared, and one-fifth (16%) were unsure. These figures are difficult to interpret in light of the responses to the survey conducted *before commencing* Field Training when 24% reported that they were unprepared—most (50%) were unsure. (See Figure 3).

In particular, most FYCs did not feel adequately prepared to caution juveniles (92%), to obtain witness' statements (89%), to give evidence (92%), or to issue warrants (83%). However, the majority of FYCs considered that the Certificate Course had adequately prepared them to handle noisy parties (79%), random breath tests (63%), traffic offence notices (61%), and the sick and elderly (60%).

Around half of the FYCs felt prepared to liaise with the community. Fifty percent said that they had adequate training to work with the community to make neighbourhoods safer; while 45% considered that they were adequately prepared to talk to the community to help identify policing problems.

FIGURE 2: RELEVANCE OF ASPECTS OF ACADEMY CURRICULUM

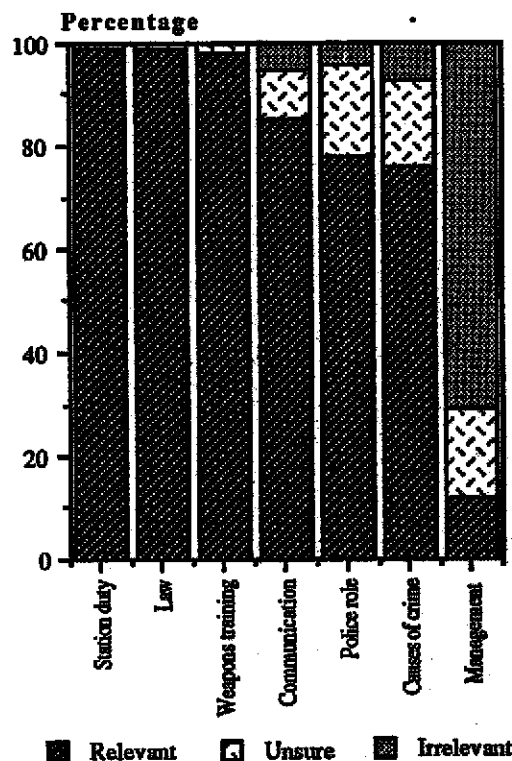


FIGURE 3: HOW PREPARED FOR FIELD TRAINING (Assessments Before and After FTP)

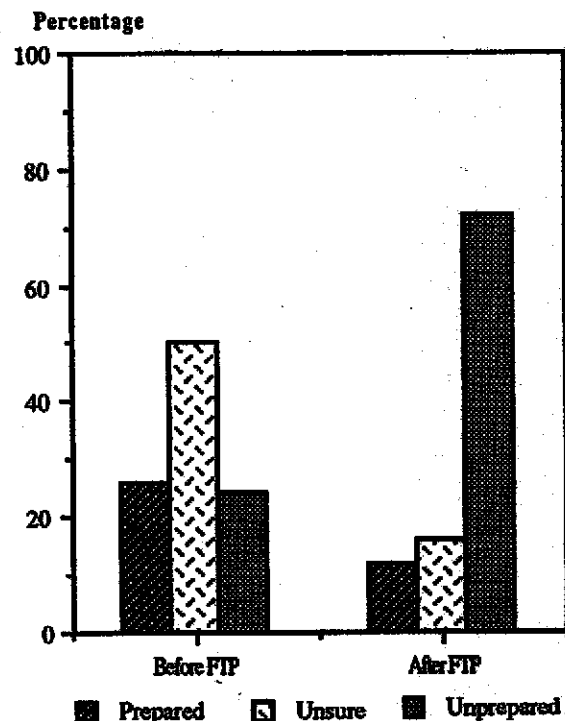


FIGURE 4: SELECTED CHANGES TO THE FIELD TRAINING PROGRAM

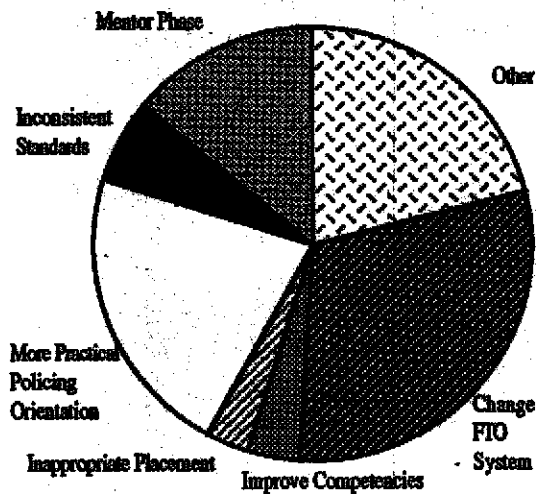
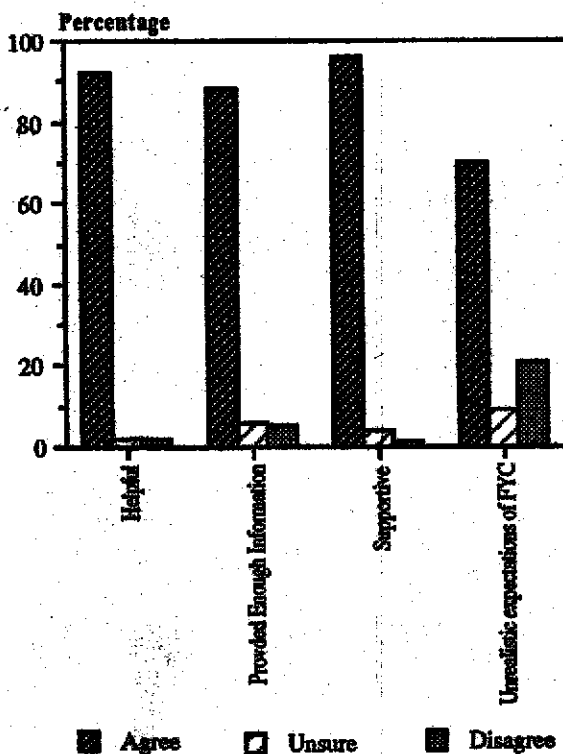


FIGURE 5: ASSESSMENT OF THE FIELD TRAINING OFFICERS



4. FIELD TRAINING

The survey asked the FYCs to identify possible improvements to the FTP. Just under half (47%) indicated that changes to Field Training were needed. Of those who provided suggestions, almost one-third (30%) commented that they would like to see changes to the Field Training Officer (FTO) system. The majority (72%) of these comments were related to the selection, training, and quality of FTOs. Fourteen per cent of those who mentioned changes identified the mentor phase as requiring modifications. Typical responses were to have more than one mentor (43%), or to have a longer mentor period (45%).

Another common view (22%) was that the FTP needed to be more oriented to "real practical policing"—that is, there needed to be more operational skills developed, and greater emphasis on law and paperwork. Other concerns included the competencies (4%), placement during the FTP (3%), and inconsistent standards among both regions and FTOs (6%).

Many (46%) of the FYCs considered that the FTP and the Certificate Course were not integrated. Around one-third (35%) were undecided about the fit between the Certificate Course and Field Training. However, over three-quarters (79%) stated that at the end of Field Training they felt confident performing their duties.

5. FIELD TRAINING OFFICERS

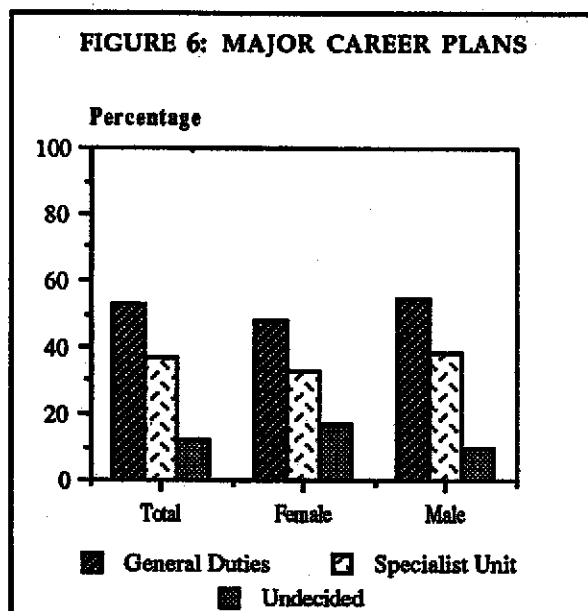
The FYCs gave a high level of approval to their FTOs (see Figure 5). It was generally reported that the FTOs carried out their responsibilities under the program (92%), that the FTOs were helpful (95%), and that the FTOs provided sufficient information to the FYCs (88%). Almost all (96%) of the FYCs stated that their FTOs had been supportive. Most FYCs (70%) also indicated that their FTOs had an unrealistically high expectation of the FYCs legal and procedural knowledge. But for one-fifth (21%) of the FYCs this was not the case.

Generally, the FYCs agreed that officers-in-charge of stations (73%), District Education and Training Officers (90%), and fellow officers (82%) were supportive. "Other senior officers" were not as widely perceived as supportive—67% of the FYCs rated them as supportive.

6. CAREER PLANS

There is a continuing high level of job satisfaction among the FYCs. Before commencing the FTP, 96% were satisfied with their career choice. After the FTP, 91% were satisfied. Almost three-quarters (73%) indicated that they had never considered resigning from the Queensland Police Service during their Field Training year. Indeed, around half (47%) expressed an increase in their desire for a policing career since entering Field Training. Only 8% considered that they now felt less desire to be a police officer than at the beginning of Field Training.

Figure 6 shows how the FYCs saw their future careers—two years after the completion of the FTP. (Some respondents indicated more than one career plan for the next two years.) Interestingly, the dominant response was "working on the streets"—over half (53%) of the FYCs considered that they would be uniformed general duties officers. Over one-third (37%) of the FYCs reported that they would like to be working in Task Force or a specialist unit. Of those who wanted to "specialise", the most popular "specialities" included the Criminal Investigation Branch (22%), drugs (15%), the Juvenile Aid Branch (10%), and Special Emergency Response Team (9%). No FYC mentioned the Traffic Branch. However proportionately, more females chose the CIB than males (27% vs 21%); male FYCs were more likely to choose break and enter as a "speciality" (8% vs 0%). Interest in sexual offences, prostitution, mounted police, and missing persons was only shown by female FYCs. Overall twelve percent of the FYCs were undecided about their career plans.



7. EDUCATIONAL PLANS

The FYCs indicated a continuing commitment to pursuing further tertiary studies. Before starting the FTP, 91% indicated that they intended to do further study, with just over half (57%) of the recruits expressing an interest in completing the Justice Studies or Justice Administration degrees.

After the FTP, over four-fifths (83%) reported that they intend to do further university study in the next two years. Just over one-third (37%) of the FYCs indicated that they intended to complete the Bachelor of Arts (Justice Studies) or the Bachelor of Arts (Justice Administration); about one-fifth (21%) expressed an interest in studying towards a different Bachelor's degree. Another fifth (20%) said that they were interested in pursuing TAFE studies. Only 2% of the FYCs proposed to complete degrees already started before joining the Police Service.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This is a preliminary report of some key results of the First Year Constable survey. They reveal that the FYCs have:

- a considerable degree of scepticism about the relevance of the university semester to their roles as FYCs;
- a perception that the Certificate Course did not prepare them well to carry out the practical duties of a FYC;
- a high level of approval of their FTOs;
- a high level of job satisfaction;
- a high degree of commitment to pursuing higher education;
- and overall, considerable confidence, at the end of Field Training, that they can perform their duties.

8. FURTHER INFORMATION

This second summary report was prepared from data collected as part of an evaluation of the Certificate Course. For further information on this survey or the evaluation, contact Christine Bond, Research and Co-ordination Division, Criminal Justice Commission. Phone: (07) 360 6031.