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This document is based on the full report of *The ethical perceptions and attitudes of Queensland Police Service recruits and first year constables, 1995–2008*.

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Report summary

The ethical perceptions and attitudes of Queensland Police Service recruits and first year constables, 1995–2008

Introduction

Ethical standards are crucial to any organisation, particularly the police service, as ethical behaviour is the first line of defence against misconduct and corruption. Any lowering of the high ethical standards the community expects of police can be corrosive and lead to a decline in integrity, and a subsequent loss of public confidence in the Service.

This report reflects 15 years work by the former Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) and the Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) in administering the police ethics survey to Queensland Police Service (QPS) recruits and first year constables. The survey not only examines the ethical attitudes and perceptions of junior police officers over an extended period but is a barometer of the ethical culture of the QPS.

The ethics survey is just one way in which the CMC monitors the QPS and identifies potential problems regarding police integrity. Major misconduct investigations and our day-to-day functions of receiving and monitoring complaints about police are also valuable sources of information about actual conduct throughout the Service. Together, these different indicators help us form a comprehensive picture of the ethical climate of the QPS.

Data collection for the ethics survey began five years after Queensland's historic Fitzgerald Inquiry which led to much-needed reforms in policing, and changes since then have been significant. Our findings, based on data up to 2008, indicate that there has been some positive change in the ethical attitudes of QPS members, but there is still room for improvement.

While we do not believe there is currently systemic corruption in the QPS, CMC investigations into police in the past two years have detected a slight decline in ethical standards. We are working with the QPS to introduce initiatives to address these issues, and will continue to do so.

We envisage this report — and the police ethics survey itself — as a vehicle for enabling the QPS and the CMC to work together to identify areas where the QPS is making improvements, to recognise areas that pose problems, and to develop strategies to address ongoing concerns. To this end, the CMC keeps the Service informed of recent survey findings, and has provided annual summary reports directly to the Ethical Standards Command and the QPS Academy since 2008.

Our findings give cause for optimism that the problems we have identified can be effectively addressed with continued collaboration between the QPS and the CMC.

Martin Moynihan AO QC
Chairperson

Surveying Queensland police recruits and first year constables (FYCs) about ethical attitudes and perceptions is one way in which the Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) performs its monitoring role of the Queensland Police Service (QPS). We have surveyed these groups regularly since 1995.

The purpose of this report is to describe the results of all surveys conducted between 1995 and 2008. It focuses on the overall views of recruits and FYCs about police misconduct, and examines whether or not these views have changed over time. As an additional insight, it also considers recruits' and FYCs' perceptions of the culture of the QPS and its approach to discipline, management and ethics.

Several positive findings emerged from the surveys:

- a general view among respondents that improper behaviour by police officers is serious and inexcusable
- numerous changes over time in respondents' attitudes and perceptions, in particular:
 - FYCs now appear to take a harder line on improper behaviour by police than in the past.
 - More FYCs now say they would take action if they knew a fellow officer was involved in improper behaviour.
 - Fewer FYCs now believe that it is usual for a typical QPS officer to turn a blind eye to peers engaging in improper conduct.
 - More FYCs over time have indicated that the QPS clearly articulates to officers its expectations in relation to proper behaviour.
 - FYCs over time have tended to believe that there is a greater chance of an officer involved in some improper behaviours being caught.
 - More FYCs over time have viewed the QPS's approach to discipline and management as involving supportive and rewarding features.

Despite these improvements, we also identified the following areas that still deserve further attention:

- relatively lenient views among all respondents about accepting free alcohol at Christmas in appreciation of extra patrols provided during the year
- relatively lenient views among FYCs about using a police vehicle to pick up equipment for a personal building job while on duty

- a lingering belief among respondents that QPS officers involved in many acts of wrongdoing are unlikely to be caught
- reluctance among respondents to say they would take action about their colleagues' improper behaviour
- an even greater reluctance among respondents to say they would formally report misconduct to the QPS or the CMC
- perceptions, particularly among FYCs, that the QPS's management focus is overly punitive.

This summary report is designed to provide policy makers and other interested parties with an overview of these and other key findings. Those seeking further details about our research are encouraged to review the full report available on the CMC's website, <www.cmc.qld.gov.au>.

Why does the CMC conduct the police ethics survey?

Studying police misconduct and corruption is not an easy task. Official data (complaints records, for example) almost certainly underestimate the actual level of improper behaviour within a police service because most incidents are either undetected or unreported. Similarly, in a survey situation police officers may be reluctant to report their own or others' unethical behaviour, even with the guarantee of anonymity or confidentiality.

Nevertheless, surveys of police officers can be used in other ways to assess the integrity of a police service and its potential for improper behaviour. In particular, police officers can be asked a range of questions about their knowledge of and attitudes towards various aspects of police misconduct, corruption and integrity. For example, they can be asked about:

- their knowledge of the disciplinary process in their department
- their views on the seriousness of particular improper behaviours
- the likelihood of certain behaviours being detected and punished
- the willingness of officers to report improper or corrupt behaviour
- the perceived level of departmental tolerance of misconduct and corruption.

Questions like these are much less likely to meet with opposition from police officers than questions about the actual behaviour of the officers themselves or others. Asking police officers to complete surveys that cover these topics can therefore provide valuable information for gauging the culture of integrity within a police service. This is what the CMC's police ethics survey aims to achieve.

The survey was originally administered in 1995 by the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) as part of its review of the implementation of the Fitzgerald Inquiry recommendations relating to the QPS. Since then, the CMC has continued to regularly survey QPS recruits and FYCs. This research aims to gauge the attitudes and perceptions of recruits and FYCs on a range of matters related to police ethics and misconduct, and to track any changes over time.

More specifically, the police ethics survey aims to answer the following questions:

- How informed do recruits and FYCs feel about ethical issues and the QPS complaints and disciplinary process?
- How serious do recruits and FYCs believe misconduct and corruption to be?
- Do recruits and FYCs perceive a high likelihood of misconduct and corruption being detected in the QPS?
- How willing are recruits and FYCs to say that they would report misconduct and corruption?
- What do recruits and FYCs say about the culture of the QPS?
- How do recruits and FYCs view the QPS's approach to management and discipline?

Although the survey directly assesses the ethical perceptions of recruits and FYCs only, the results also serve as a useful guide to the overall ethical climate of the QPS. It is envisaged that the answers to the above questions will help to inform the QPS's decision-making with regard to the ethics education and training of its officers. To this end, the CMC now provides annual summaries of the police ethics survey directly to the QPS so that its training courses can be quickly modified when necessary. More generally, conducting regular ethics surveys has been identified as a possible measure for preventing corruption. By assessing officers' perceptions of misconduct and by identifying attitudes that may predispose police agencies towards unethical behaviour, the results of our ethics survey can help QPS management to implement strategies to control and prevent misconduct and corruption.

What does the survey involve?

The main part of the survey describes 12 hypothetical situations that police officers may encounter during their careers. These situations, which we refer to as 'misconduct scenarios', involve a range of improper behaviours, from those that may be considered less serious to those that are more serious.¹ The 12 misconduct scenarios are shown in Table 1. For each scenario, we ask respondents to tell us:

- how serious they think the behaviour is (from *1, not serious* to *10, extremely serious*)
- how likely they think it is that an officer involved in the behaviour would be caught (from *1, not at all likely* to *7, very likely*)
- what actions they might take if, as a police officer, they knew that another officer was involved in the behaviour.

We also present recruits and FYCs with a series of statements that relate to matters such as the QPS's approach to discipline and management, the consequences of reporting misconduct in the QPS, justifications for improper behaviour by police, and the leadership and support provided by supervisors. Seventeen statements are presented to both recruits and FYCs, as shown in Table 2. FYCs are also presented with 10 extra statements that reflect the few months of experience they have gained as a police officer on the street (Table 3). For each statement, we ask respondents to tell us how much they agree or disagree (from *1, strongly disagree* to *7, strongly agree*).

In interpreting the results presented in this report, it is important to remember that the survey mostly asks questions about respondents' *perceptions*. Readers should bear in mind that perceptions are subjective, and may not reflect reality.

¹ We acknowledge that two scenarios (Scenarios 6 and 8) describe behaviour that may not necessarily be regarded as police misconduct, particularly according to the definition provided in the *Police Service Administration Act 1990*. We have referred to the scenarios collectively as 'misconduct scenarios' in this report for reasons of simplicity.

Table 1: The 12 misconduct scenarios presented in the police ethics survey

Scenario	Abbreviation
<p><i>1. Off-duty officer tries to avoid a random breath test (RBT)</i> An off-duty police officer who has drunk a little too much is stopped for an RBT by police officers he doesn't know. The off-duty officer is obviously a bit under the weather. He identifies himself as a fellow police officer in an effort to avoid blowing in the bag.</p>	Avoid RBT
<p><i>2. Officer at a bottle shop break-in pockets cigarettes</i> The local bottle shop has been broken into for the third time in as many weeks. The responding patrol enters the premises to wait for the owner to arrive and sort out the mess of cigarettes and liquor lying all over the floor. One of the officers bends down, picks up a torn packet of cigarettes from the shattered window display, and puts the packet in his pocket.</p>	Pocket cigarettes
<p><i>3. Officer retaliates against a youth who assaulted a female officer</i> A young female first year constable responding with her partner to a disturbance call (a pub brawl) receives a nasty black eye from a tattooed youth wielding a billiard cue. As the arrested youth is led into the cells, the male team member gives him a savage kidney punch, saying, 'Hurts, doesn't it.'</p>	Kidney punch
<p><i>4. Officer has an accident in a police vehicle and then misrepresents the accident in a report</i> During a quiet period on patrol, two officers decided to test how the rear of the police vehicle would slide in a deserted, wet car park. Their attempts resulted in a minor collision with a shopping trolley. Rather than go into full details about the scrape when reporting the damage, the driver stated the car was 'sideswiped' by an unidentified vehicle while they were attending to an inquiry.</p>	Misrepresent accident
<p><i>5. Officer adds words to a suspected rapist's statement</i> An offender is picked up for a particularly nasty rape/assault in a local park. There's no doubt he's the culprit. There's an excellent ID but the offender who is streetwise says nothing. To make matters certain, the arresting officer attributes the words 'OK, I <u>was</u> in the park but I didn't touch the bitch' to the offender in his notebook.</p>	Rape suspect
<p><i>6. Officer makes a pick-up outside the patrol area</i> On a quiet Saturday afternoon, an officer decides to travel well outside his area of patrol to get some equipment for his Sunday building job. In radio contact all the time, he picks up the gear and returns to his patrol area.</p>	Pick up equipment
<p><i>7. Officer conducts a registration check to get the details of an attractive woman</i> The young lady in the Mazda sports car is very attractive and smiles at the young officer in the patrol car alongside at the traffic lights. The officer, following a couple of lengths behind, radios for a vehicle registration check to find out her address.</p>	Registration check
<p><i>8. Officers accept free beer at Christmas time</i> The publican of a local tavern requests some extra police patrols as he is experiencing some problems with troublesome patrons. The officers at the station accept a couple of cartons of beer sent by the publican to the station's Christmas party in appreciation of the officers' service during the year.</p>	Cartons at Christmas
<p><i>9. Officer forcefully moves a youth on</i> A youth on a deserted street is told to move on by the senior member of a car crew. At the youth's look of indifference, the officer jumps from the car and slams the youth against the wall (without injury), turns him round, and shoves him on his way.</p>	Youth move on
<p><i>10. Officer sells confiscated drugs on the street</i> An officer decides he/she can make a little extra cash by taking small proportions of confiscated drugs from the property room and selling it on the streets. Given the expense of a mortgage and a family, the officer feels justified in his/her actions; besides, the users would get the drugs from some other source anyway.</p>	Sell confiscated drugs
<p><i>11. Officer ignores suspected pot smoking by a housemate</i> An officer has been sharing accommodation with two housemates for about a year. Over the last couple of weeks the occasional lingering, sweet odour of the housemate's clothes has led the officer to think that this housemate is smoking pot. Since the officer has no other problems with the housemate, the officer decides not to take any action.</p>	Housemate's pot
<p><i>12. Officer accepts steroids</i> A young officer is finding that working on the street dealing with offenders is physically tough. A lot of other officers 'pump iron' to increase their size and strength, in order to make troublemakers think twice. When presented with an opportunity to bulk up a little faster with the help of steroids, the officer eagerly accepts.</p>	Accept steroids

Table 2: Statements describing attributes of QPS culture, standards and management

Focus	Statement
QPS's approach to discipline, management and ethics	1. The QPS rules for proper conduct have been made clear to me.
	2. The QPS takes a very tough line on improper behaviour by police.
	3. The QPS recognises and rewards proper behaviour by police.
	4. Supervisors in the police service are conscientious about detecting and reporting misconduct.
	5. The ethical training of police officers is very effective.
	6. Honesty is rewarded in the police service.
	7. The QPS concentrates on what we do wrong rather than what we do right.
Behaviour of officers	8. There is little incidence of improper conduct in the QPS.
	9. Police officers are very respectful in their treatment of the public.
Reporting misconduct in the QPS	10. It is not unusual for a typical officer to turn a blind eye to improper conduct by other officers.
	11. Whistleblowing is not worth it.
	12. An officer who reports another officer's misconduct shouldn't expect much support from the police hierarchy.
Possible justifications for improper behaviour	13. An officer who reports another officer's misconduct is likely to be given the cold shoulder by his or her fellow officers.
	14. Sometimes you have to break the rules if you want to get on with other officers.
	15. Expecting officers to always follow the rules is incompatible with getting the job done.
	16. It is understandable if officers behave improperly after the QPS has let them down.
	17. Police don't have the powers to do the job which the public expect of them.

Table 3: Additional statements about QPS culture, standards and management presented to FYCs

Focus	Statement
Supervisors and managers in the QPS	1. Supervisors (Sergeants and Senior Sergeants) are 100 per cent behind organisational goals.
	2. Commissioned Officers and Senior Executives are 100 per cent behind organisational goals.
	3. The officers in charge of my station set a good example for new officers.
	4. I find it easy to talk to my supervisors about problems I am facing in my work.
Officers' attitudes and behaviour	5. Police on the ground have higher standards than I expected.
	6. The average police officer is 100 per cent behind organisational goals.
	7. My values and those of the police service are very similar.
	8. Typical officers put more effort into their job than I expected.
	9. Typical officers feel a great deal of loyalty to the service.
Academy training	10. My Academy training conforms with my experiences as a police officer on the street.

Who was surveyed?

Between 1995 and 2008, we surveyed 1150 recruits and 1463 FYCs at the Oxley and Townsville campuses of the QPS Academy. All surveys were administered to recruits and FYCs in person, and were supervised by either a researcher from the CMC or a facilitator from the Academy.

We estimate that, over the 14-year period, we surveyed around 16 per cent of all recruits who started training, and around 24 per cent of all FYCs. It is important to point out that these percentages do not reflect the willingness or otherwise of recruits and FYCs to participate in our survey. Rather, the percentages reflect the number of classes we asked to participate. In other words, in most years only a few classes of recruits and FYCs were asked to participate; we never asked all recruits or FYCs to complete the survey.

Although we surveyed only a relatively small sample of all recruits and FYCs, our survey respondents had age and gender profiles that were similar to the profiles for recruits and constables more generally. We also found that, consistent with a trend towards older sworn officers over the survey period, the recruits and FYCs we surveyed in later years tended to be older than those we surveyed in earlier years. Overall, we do not believe that the recruits and FYCs who completed the survey differed in any substantial way from those who did not.

What did we find?

Positive findings

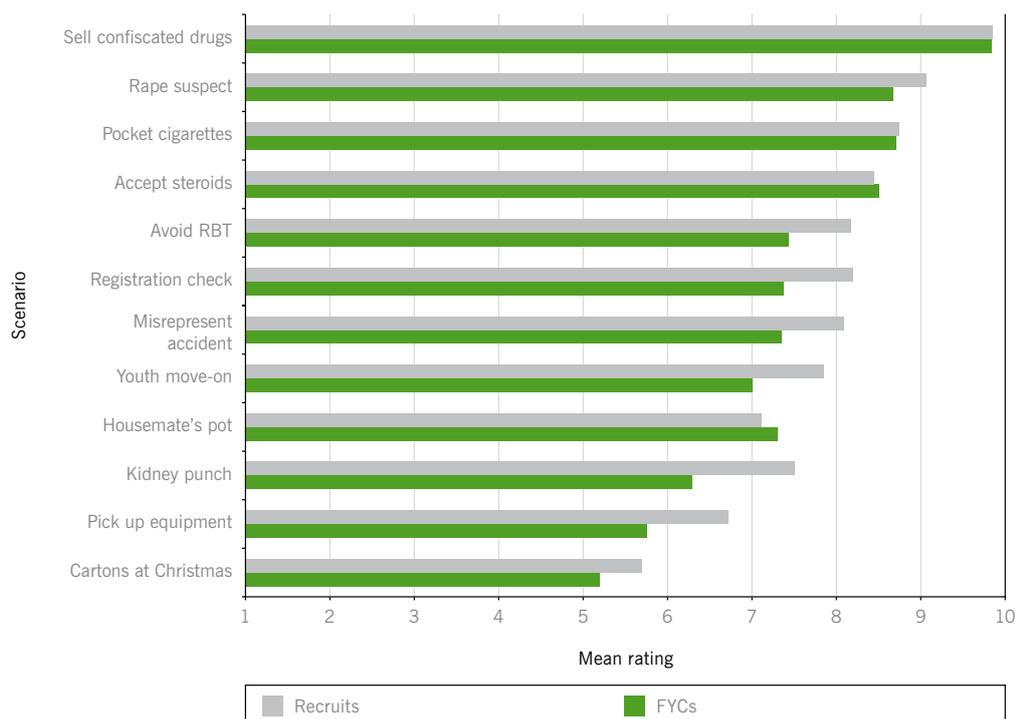
Two key positive findings emerged from the surveys conducted since 1995.

A view that improper behaviour is serious and inexcusable

As we would expect, the majority of recruits and FYCs we surveyed over the years seemed to regard improper behaviour by police as serious and inexcusable. Figure 1 shows that the majority of behaviours described in the misconduct scenarios were viewed on average as 'very serious' (mean rating between 6.5 and 8.5) or 'extremely serious' (mean rating over 8.5) by both recruits and FYCs.

Our results also suggested that relatively few respondents accepted possible justifications for police misconduct. For example, no more than a quarter of recruits and FYCs agreed that 'sometimes you have to break the rules if you want to get on with other officers' (22% of recruits, 25% of FYCs), or that 'it is understandable if officers behave improperly after the QPS has let them down' (19% of recruits, 24% of FYCs).

Figure 1: Mean seriousness ratings assigned to the misconduct scenarios by recruits and FYCs (ordered from most serious to least serious)



Improvements over time

We were also pleased to find a number of positive changes in the views and attitudes of recruits and FYCs since 1995. These changes were especially noticeable among the FYCs. In particular:

- *FYCs now seem to take a harder line on improper behaviour by police than in the past.*

When compared with FYCs surveyed in earlier years, we found that FYCs surveyed in later years tended to view the majority of behaviours described in the scenarios as more serious. Some changes were particularly noteworthy. For example, FYCs in 1995 viewed kidney punching a youth in a police cell as only 'moderately serious' on average; in contrast, FYCs since 2005 have consistently viewed this behaviour as 'very serious'.

Attitudes that may help to justify or excuse improper conduct by police officers also seemed to be less evident among FYCs in the later years of the survey. For example, fewer FYCs in 2008 than in 1995 agreed that 'expecting officers to always follow the rules is incompatible with getting the job done' (40%, down from 64%), or that 'police don't have the powers to do the job which the public expect of them' (50%, down from 83%).

- *In most scenarios, there are now more FYCs who say that they would take some action if they knew a fellow officer was involved in improper behaviour.*

Some changes were particularly large. For example, only 33 per cent of FYCs in 1995 said that they would do something about an officer who conducted a registration check to find out the address of an attractive woman; this contrasts with 73 per cent in 2008. Similarly, only 46 per cent of FYCs in 1995 said that they would take action if an officer punched a youth in a police cell; in 2008, this had increased to 81 per cent.

It seems that FYCs have also become more likely over time to say that they would talk to a senior officer about a colleague's improper behaviour. In fact, this trend was evident for all but the most serious scenario.

- *Fewer FYCs now believe that it is not unusual for a typical QPS officer to turn a blind eye to improper conduct by their peers.*

The percentage of FYCs who agreed with this statement generally declined over the survey period, from 66 per cent in 1995 to 46 per cent in 2008.

- *More FYCs over time have indicated that the QPS clearly articulates to officers its expectations for proper behaviour and provides its officers with effective ethics training.*

The percentage of FYCs who agreed that 'the QPS rules for proper conduct have been made clear to me' tended to increase from 1995 onwards (73%, compared with 88% in 2008). Similarly, more FYCs in 2008 (66%) than

in 1995 (53%) said that they felt the ethical training of police officers was very effective.

- *In about half of the scenarios, FYCs over time have tended to believe that there is a greater chance of an officer involved being caught.*

For the following behaviours, the likelihood of an officer's conduct being detected has generally been rated as higher and higher since 1995:

- kidney punching a youth in a police cell
 - slamming a youth against a wall after giving him a move-on direction
 - having an accident in a police vehicle and lying about how the accident occurred in a police report
 - while off-duty and after having a few too many drinks, identifying oneself as a police officer to avoid an RBT
 - stealing a packet of cigarettes while attending a break-and-enter scene
 - adding words to the statement of a rape suspect to make a conviction more certain.
- *More FYCs over time have viewed the QPS's approach to discipline and management as involving supportive and rewarding features.*

The percentage of FYCs who agreed that 'the QPS recognises and rewards proper behaviour by police' generally increased over the survey period, from less than 20 per cent in the first few years of the survey to between 25 and 35 per cent over the last few years. Similarly, the percentage of FYCs who agreed that 'honesty is rewarded in the police service' has tended to increase — from around 23 per cent in the survey's first two years, to around 40 per cent since 2005.

There have also been several positive changes among the recruits since 1995. In particular:

- Four of the 12 behaviours covered in the survey are now regarded by recruits as more serious. These include kidney punching a youth in a police cell, having an accident in a police vehicle and lying about how the accident occurred in a police report, and an off-duty officer under the influence of alcohol identifying himself as a police officer in order to avoid an RBT.
- For half of the behaviours, there are now more recruits who say that they would do something about it if they knew that another officer had engaged in it. These include kidney punching a youth in a police cell (up from 71% in 1995 to 94% in 2008), accepting cartons of beer from the local tavern in appreciation of extra patrols provided during the year (up from 54% in 1995 to 69% in 2008), and having an accident in a police vehicle and lying about how the accident occurred in a police report (up from 80% in 1995 to 95% in 2008).

- Fewer recruits now believe that it is usual for a typical officer to turn a blind eye to other officers' improper conduct — down from 67 per cent in 1995 to 40 per cent in 2008.

These positive changes over time may result from factors such as:

- the recruitment of people with higher personal ethical standards — for example, older recruits
- new processes and technologies that make committing some acts of misconduct more risky — for example, audits of police computer use, cameras in mobile telephones, closed-circuit television (CCTV)
- increased management focus on ethics and integrity — for example, including ethical standards (complaint trends and investigation timeframes) in the QPS's Operational Performance Reviews²
- more emphasis being placed on the supervision of inexperienced staff
- improved training and education for police officers — for example, an increased emphasis on ethical decision-making.

The nature of our research has not allowed us to determine the extent to which each of these factors, if any, have played a role in the positive changes we observed. It is clear, however, that each of these factors represents an improvement within the QPS, and we would encourage the Service to continue to undertake such activities.

2 Operational Performance Reviews (OPRs) were introduced in 2001 and are one of the QPS's key performance management tools. OPRs are conducted annually in all police districts in Queensland, as well as all commands and corporate divisions. They involve discussions that focus on all aspects of service delivery in the particular area under review, including crime management, traffic enforcement and road safety, community safety, and professional standards and ethical practice. According to the QPS, 'review discussions reinforce the Service's strategic direction and provide the opportunity to explore emerging issues with strategic implications, enabling the Service to develop informed responses to challenges as they arise' (QPS 2009, p. 23). OPRs are chaired by the QPS Commissioner, and also involve the QPS's two Deputy Commissioners and the Deputy Chief Executive (Resource Management).

Ongoing concerns

Despite many improvements over time, we identified several areas that deserve further attention. In some cases, we have made suggestions for dealing with them; in others, we have indicated how they may be given greater consideration in other projects currently under way.

Relatively lenient views towards some types of improper behaviour

We found that two behaviours described in the misconduct scenarios were viewed by recruits and FYCs as less serious and perhaps more acceptable. Although there were some positive changes over time, recruits and FYCs still viewed accepting free alcohol sent at Christmas in appreciation of extra police patrols provided during the year as only moderately serious. FYCs held similarly lenient views about an on-duty officer using a police vehicle to pick up equipment for a personal building job.

It is often argued that there is a 'slippery slope' to police corruption. This suggests that a police officer's slide into more serious forms of corruption begins with the acceptance of gratuities or the commission of minor indiscretions. The theory is that, once an officer accepts one improper practice, regardless of how minor it is, they will gradually move on to rationalise and accept practices that are more and more unacceptable.

How valid this theory is in practice is widely debated in the academic literature (see Feldberg 1985; Kania 2004; Sherman 1985). Nevertheless, there is always the possibility that the acceptance of gratuities and the commission of other minor indiscretions by police officers may gradually lead some officers to accept and engage in increasingly serious forms of misconduct. For this reason, relatively lenient views among police officers, even with respect to so-called lower-level improper behaviour, are cause for some concern.

Accepting gratuities may also have adverse impacts on the public's perceptions of its police service. A 1995 survey of Brisbane residents, for example, found that 'there was a strong feeling that acceptance of gratuities puts police in a compromising position' (Prenzler & Mackay 1995, p. 24). Whether or not accepting a gratuity leads to favouritism or some other undesirable outcome, it can create negative public perceptions and lead to a loss of confidence or trust in the police. Given that the research referred to above is now 15 years old, it is timely to re-assess public opinion on this matter. The CMC has incorporated some relevant questions in its latest public attitudes survey of Queenslanders, and the findings will be reported publicly at a later date.

To develop strategies to counteract the relatively lenient views expressed by recruits and FYCs, it is important to consider the possible reasons for our findings. These include:

- the influence of police culture (see Skolnick 2005), where the attitudes of more senior officers and supervisors may endorse or even encourage the acceptance of various ‘perks’ associated with the job
- policies and procedures about the receipt of gifts and benefits that are inadequate, inconsistent or unclear, and that are not adequately communicated to officers.

To deal with these problems, we suggest that comprehensive and ongoing ethics training that emphasises the seriousness of all improper behaviour by police should be provided to all officers throughout their careers — not just recruits. Such training should focus on increasing awareness of relevant QPS policies, articulating expectations about officers’ conduct, and clarifying the consequences of ethical and unethical behaviour. It should also involve consideration of the ethical dilemmas faced by police officers, and provide officers with the skills to identify and manage them.

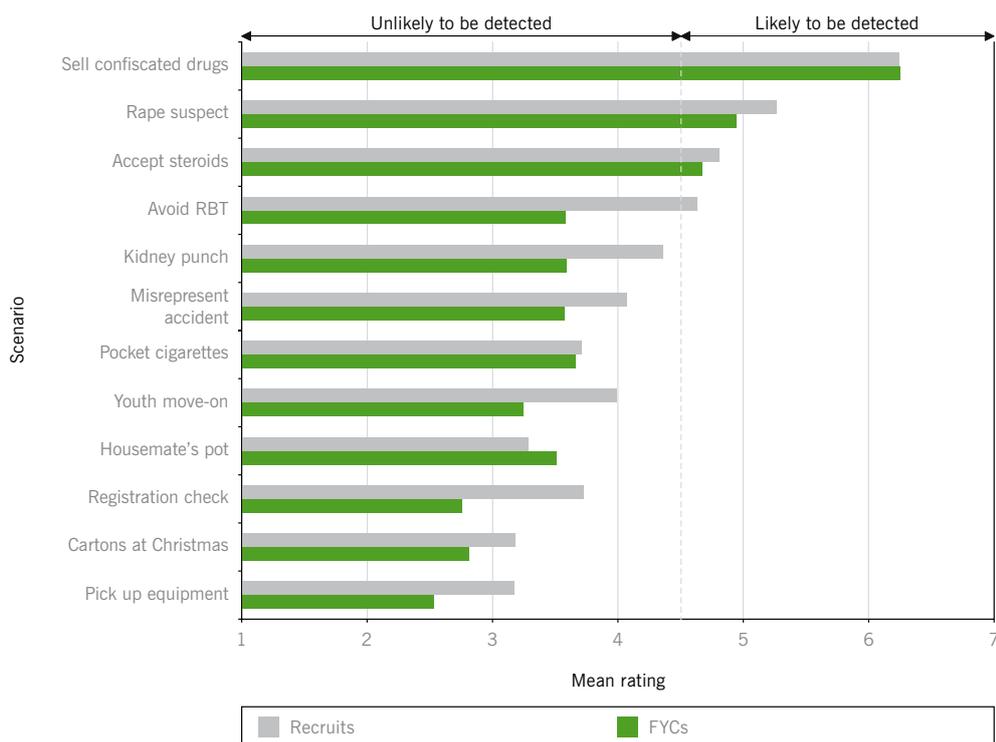
We also acknowledge that the QPS is currently reviewing its policy on gratuities. In light of the matters discussed here, the QPS should ensure that the revised policy communicates a clear and consistent position on the acceptance of gifts and benefits by officers. It is important that the revised framework and relevant guidelines are then adequately communicated to all QPS members, including recruits.

Perceptions that QPS officers involved in acts of wrongdoing are generally unlikely to be caught

There is a perception among recruits and FYCs that many kinds of improper behaviour by police officers are unlikely to be detected in the QPS. As illustrated in Figure 2, we found that the majority of behaviours described in the misconduct scenarios were viewed on average by both recruits and FYCs as unlikely to be detected. These included some behaviours that were viewed by our respondents as relatively serious, such as stealing a packet of cigarettes from a break-and-enter scene, and conducting a registration check to find out the address of an attractive woman.

The nature of policing itself may have an important influence on the belief that an officer involved in improper behaviour is unlikely to be caught. For example, police officers have substantial discretion, and tend to work out of sight of supervisors and members of the public. Inadequate supervision and management have certainly been important problems raised by the CMC in several recent misconduct investigations and the QPS has acknowledged their importance. The CMC endorses the QPS’s ongoing commitment to training and other initiatives, such as audits of police computer use and alcohol and drug testing, that focus on effective supervision and management. If shown to be effective, they should go some way towards reducing and managing misconduct risks and changing officers’ perceptions about being caught.

Figure 2: Mean likelihood of detection ratings assigned to the misconduct scenarios by recruits and FYCs (ordered from most likely to be detected to least likely to be detected)



Reluctance of some officers to report police misconduct

Some of the most troubling findings we made are that some recruits and many FYCs appear reluctant to take any action when they believe that an officer is involved in improper behaviour.

Even though more recruits and FYCs now than in the past say that they are likely to take action, we found that there is still a worrying tendency for many respondents to indicate that they would remain silent. This is particularly the case for those behaviours regarded as the least serious, where up to half of FYCs and up to 30 per cent of recruits still say that they would do nothing.

Perhaps of more concern is an even greater reluctance among recruits and FYCs to formally report misconduct.³ We found that, when recruits and FYCs say that they are willing to take action, this is most often an informal action such as talking to a senior officer or the officer involved, rather than a formal report to the QPS or the CMC. Even for the most serious instances of improper conduct, relatively small proportions of respondents said that they would formally report the officer involved. For example, around half of the recruits and FYCs surveyed over the years said that they would not report to the QPS an officer who steals confiscated drugs from evidence and then sells them on the street; similarly, over one-third of recruits and just over half of FYCs said that they would not report this behaviour to the CMC. Overall, 15 per cent of recruits and 25 per cent of FYCs since 1995 indicated that they would not report this behaviour to either of the two agencies.

This unwillingness to report clear and gross misconduct that, if proven, would result in dismissal from the police service and a criminal conviction is suggestive of problems within the QPS when it comes to officers reporting improper behaviour through official channels. The fact that we found few significant improvements over time in relation to this suggests also that little has changed since 1995.

³ Section 7.2(2) of the Police Service Administration Act places an obligation on any QPS officer (including a recruit) who 'knows or reasonably suspects' that misconduct has occurred to report the conduct to the police commissioner and the chairperson of the CMC. The Act defines misconduct as conduct that: (a) is disgraceful, improper or unbecoming an officer; (b) shows unfitness to be or continue as an officer; or (c) does not meet the standard of conduct the community reasonably expects of a police officer.

At least 10 of the scenarios presented to respondents in the police ethics survey describe behaviour that constitutes misconduct under this definition. The possible exceptions are Scenario 6 (travelling outside the patrol area to pick up equipment for personal use) and Scenario 8 (accepting cartons of beer from the local tavern at Christmas), although Scenario 6 would at least be considered a breach of discipline. Section 7.2(2) of the Police Service Administration Act also requires officers to take action in response to conduct that constitutes a breach of discipline.

To help us better understand why recruits and FYCs seem reluctant to respond to and formally report misconduct, we set out to determine whether any particular factors predict whether or not a person says they would take action. We found that three key factors seem to be involved:

1. Some behaviours are not regarded as serious enough by recruits and FYCs to warrant them taking any action. Recruits and FYCs are more likely to say that they would take action against misconduct if they think the behaviour is more serious.
2. Recruits and FYCs believe that many types of police misconduct will not be detected. Generally, recruits and FYCs are more likely to say that they would take action against misconduct if they believe that there is a higher chance of the officer involved being caught.
3. Recruits and FYCs appear to have a range of negative perceptions about the value and consequences of reporting misconduct in the QPS. In particular, the majority of recruits and FYCs surveyed over the years believed that whistleblowers are likely to be ostracised by their peers — over two-thirds of recruits and 80 per cent of FYCs agreed that an officer who reports misconduct is likely to be 'given the cold shoulder' by fellow officers. (There were slightly lower levels of agreement with the statement in 2008, but still over 60% of recruits and 75% of FYCs agreed.) Although relatively few respondents had negative views about the general value of whistleblowing and the support provided to whistleblowers by the QPS hierarchy, the prospect of repercussions from colleagues may exert a particularly strong influence on an officer's decision on whether or not to report misconduct in many situations. Among the FYCs, there is also a relatively common view that 'it is not unusual for a typical officer to turn a blind eye to improper conduct by other officers' (agreed to by around half of the FYCs surveyed since 1995). Such a belief may help to create a sense of peer pressure to remain silent.

We therefore believe that:

- Strategies that create a culture of integrity within the QPS, such as ongoing integrity and ethics training (as discussed above), may increase the perceived seriousness of improper behaviour and therefore the likelihood that officers will take action and formally report their colleagues' improper behaviour.
- To increase the likelihood of officers taking action and formally reporting their colleagues' improper behaviour, the QPS needs to ensure that all officers are aware of the mechanisms designed to support officers who report improper behaviour (such as the Internal Witness Support Unit), and that all supervisors are trained in, and responsive to, their responsibilities in this regard.

A lack of awareness of reporting requirements and obligations, or complex and inadequate policies and procedures, may also have contributed to respondents' high levels of unwillingness to say they would report or take any action about misconduct. Although the limitations of our survey do not allow us to consider the possible impact of these factors here, it is important that all officers are aware of their reporting obligations, and that QPS policies and procedures for reporting misconduct are clearly communicated, accessible, and easy to understand and apply.

Perceptions that the QPS's management approach is overly punitive

We found quite a strong perception, particularly among FYCs, that the QPS management focus is overly punitive — that is, that there is an emphasis on punishing improper behaviour by police officers without equally recognising and rewarding proper and honest behaviour. Over half of the recruits (55%) and the great majority of FYCs (80%) agreed that the QPS concentrates on what officers do wrong rather than what they do right. Consistent with this, less than half of the recruits (43%) and less than a quarter of the FYCs (22%) believed that 'the QPS recognises and rewards proper behaviour by police officers'. Few FYCs (31%) also agreed that 'honesty is rewarded in the police service'. Although we did find some improvements over time in FYCs' attitudes, these negative perceptions were still strong in the later years of the survey for all respondents.

It is possible that attitudes towards discipline and management will become more positive as the QPS continues to focus on preventive and management responses to dealing with complaints, misconduct and breaches of discipline. For example, Project Verity, a joint QPS–CMC project initiated in 2003–04, has seen a more educative process to complaint resolution currently being trialled in two QPS regions. The new system focuses on empowering supervisors to deal with complaints at a local level, encouraging them to take responsibility for their staff and promote positive behaviours, allowing officers to learn from their mistakes, and improving performance.

The QPS is currently involved in Griffith University's Healthy Workplaces project, which is aimed at developing 'an innovative workplace intervention targeting physical health, psychological well-being, and staff performance' (Griffith University n.d.). Key goals include improving levels of job satisfaction and morale among QPS staff. The project is to involve three annual surveys of organisational climate, as well as focus groups and interviews with employees to gain an understanding of their perceptions of the work environment. The project may therefore provide another avenue for the QPS to examine and address the perceptions identified here of punitive management and discipline approaches and a lack of recognition for proper behaviour.

Areas for further research

Our findings revealed several matters that warrant additional research. In contrast to the areas of concern identified in the previous section, we believe that we need to know more about the following matters before we can make any concrete suggestions for change. The limitations of our survey and the often complex nature of the apparent problems identified here leave several unanswered questions. Only with further research will our understanding of these matters and their practical implications for the QPS become developed enough for us to confidently identify what, if anything, actually needs to be done about them.

An apparent deterioration in officers' attitudes towards ethics, integrity and QPS management after exposure to the operational policing environment

The clearest pattern to emerge from our findings is the marked difference between recruits and FYCs across all areas of the survey. We found with great consistency that:

- Recruits take a harder line than FYCs on improper behaviour by police. On average, they regard it as more serious, and as less excusable (as indicated by their lower levels of agreement with justifications for improper behaviour). They also say they are more likely to take action — and more formal actions — when they are aware of such behaviour.
- Recruits judge officers involved in misconduct as more likely to be caught than do FYCs.
- Recruits have more positive views than FYCs when it comes to the way the QPS approaches the discipline, management and ethics training of its officers. They also seem to believe that reporting misconduct in the QPS has more value and fewer negative consequences than do FYCs.

These findings suggest that, within one year of joining the police service, the ethical standards of officers may start to decline, and their attitudes towards various aspects of the organisation may start to become more negative. These findings are consistent with previous research conducted elsewhere in Australia and overseas, and are certainly not unique to the QPS (see, for example, Alain & Grégoire 2008; Huon et al. 1995; Savitz 1970; see also Catlin & Maupin 2004).

Factors that may help to account for such changes in attitudes, which have been identified in the literature and elsewhere include:

- a recruit's socialisation into the police occupation and culture, where new officers come to share the predominant values of officers in their department (Sherman 1982)

- the 'reality shock' that new officers face as they gain experience in day-to-day operational policing, which may lead them to feel disenchanting and disillusioned with their role if their initial and often idealistic expectations of police work are not met (Alain & Grégoire 2008; Sherman 1982)
- key differences in how disciplinary action is taken against recruits and FYCs and the context in which it occurs; generally speaking, the 'closed' nature of the Academy environment and provisions in the recruit contract ensure much faster resolution of complaints, and Academy staff are typically able to deal with conduct problems in a more managerial or administrative way before disciplinary action is required
- the possibility that recruits who possess more ethical attitudes and more positive views may leave the police service during their training or first year, meaning that the FYCs left to survey would be those who had less ethical attitudes to begin with.

Given the limitations of the current research, future research should further examine the possible impact of the operational policing environment on QPS officers' attitudes towards ethics, integrity and management. Further attention should also be given to trying to identify what factors may contribute to early changes in recruits' or FYCs' attitudes and perceptions.

Some negative trends emerging since 2002

As we highlighted above, we found many positive changes in recruits' and FYCs' perceptions of misconduct and attitudes towards QPS management across the full survey period (1995 to 2008). Despite this, we also found that several negative trends appear to have been emerging in some areas since 2002. In particular, we found that recruits in more recent years appear to:

- judge slamming a youth against a wall after issuing a move-on direction to be less serious
- perceive there to be a lower chance of being caught for an officer who fabricates evidence by adding words to the statement of a rape suspect or who steals confiscated drugs and sells them on the street
- be less likely to say that they would do something about an officer who conducts a registration check to get an attractive woman's address
- be less likely to say that they would report to the QPS an officer who fabricates evidence by adding words to the statement of a rape suspect.

Also, more recruits than previously seem to perceive the QPS's disciplinary focus as punitive and have more negative perceptions of the behaviour of police officers. There are also fewer recruits than previously indicating that the QPS takes improper behaviour very seriously, clearly articulates

to officers the rules for proper behaviour, and provides effective ethics training.

With regard to FYCs, they now seem to view an officer stealing confiscated drugs and selling them on the street as less serious. Consistent with this, fewer FYCs than previously are saying that they would report this behaviour to the QPS; this was also the case with regard to an officer who conducts a registration check to obtain the address of an attractive woman and an officer who fabricates evidence by adding words to the statement of a rape suspect.

It is important to note that, in most of these cases, the overall degree of change since 2002 has been small. The majority of recruits, for example, still perceive the QPS to be very tough on misconduct, and selling confiscated drugs on the street is still regarded by FYCs as extremely serious. It is therefore important to keep in mind the overall findings discussed previously. Nevertheless, it is possible that these more recent trends could be indicative of emerging problems within the QPS or in the ethical attitudes of recruits and FYCs. In most cases, such problems, if they exist, would be likely to be remedied by the strategies already suggested. We, of course, will also continue to monitor the attitudes and perceptions of recruits and FYCs over the next few years through the police ethics survey. Re-examination of the above matters, however, will be especially important for determining if the recent negative trends have continued, or if the possible underlying causes appear to have been dealt with.

Possible differences between the Oxley and Townsville campuses of the QPS Academy

We found several areas where the perceptions of respondents at Oxley and Townsville differed. Although the differences were not as numerous as those between recruits and FYCs, it appears that recruits and FYCs at Townsville have generally viewed some acts of misconduct as more serious and more likely to be detected than did recruits and FYCs at Oxley. Recruits at Townsville have also had slightly more positive views than recruits at Oxley in a few areas related to the QPS's approach to discipline and the behaviour of officers.

A number of factors may have influenced these findings:

- the fact that class sizes are generally much smaller at Townsville than at Oxley, and that recruit intakes at Townsville tend not to overlap; this may allow facilitators at Townsville to provide recruits with more in-depth and individualised training about relevant issues, to better monitor the conduct of individuals and to more closely focus on maintaining a high standard of behaviour among all recruits
- recruits who come from different backgrounds and possess different life experience

- different methods of delivering course content
- different facilitator styles
- more general differences in the Academy environments
- different operational experiences for those FYCs who attend Oxley (and will generally be working in South-East Queensland) and those who attend Townsville (who will generally be working in northern regional areas)⁴
- the fact that most surveys at Townsville were administered by Academy staff, while those at Oxley were typically administered by CMC staff.⁵

Given the combined nature of the data analysed here, and the fact that a variety of changes will have occurred at both campuses over the survey period, it is important for us to first determine, through our future ethics surveys, whether clear and consistent differences in the attitudes and perceptions of recruits and FYCs at Oxley and Townsville continue to exist.⁶ If so, it would then be important to determine through research what factors most significantly contribute to these differences. In this way, it could be considered whether those factors that contribute to the more ethical and positive views of recruits and/or FYCs at one campus can be applied to the other. Implementing the lessons learnt from the better performing campus at both Oxley and Townsville would ensure greater consistency in the officers produced by the two campuses, and serve to increase ethical standards and improve attitudes towards the QPS among all recruits.

4 Graduates from the Townsville campus are predominantly allocated to the three 'northern' QPS regions: Far Northern Region, Northern Region and Central Region. The Far Northern and Northern QPS Regions cover roughly the northern half of the state, while the Central Region covers roughly the area from just under Gladstone to around Proserpine — see the QPS *Annual statistical reviews* for a more detailed map of the QPS regions (e.g. QPS 2008). Conversely, graduates from the Oxley campus are usually allocated to the 'southern' QPS regions: North Coast Region, Southern Region, South Eastern Region, Metropolitan North Region and Metropolitan South Region. These regions cover the roughly the southern third of the state. When there is no induction at Townsville but one at Oxley, or there are particular staffing needs in the northern regions, some Oxley graduates may be allocated to the three northern regions.

5 From 2010 onwards, the method of survey administration will be standardised at the two campuses.

6 A 2008 analysis of data from the 2007 and 2008 police ethics surveys suggested that the differences between Oxley and Townsville reported here were even more marked, particularly among the recruits. In contrast, analysis of the most recent survey data from 2009 has revealed very few and generally inconsistent differences between the two campuses. It will be important, therefore, to continue to monitor possible differences between the two campuses over the next few years of the ethics survey to see whether any pattern of marked differences returns. Even if it is the situation that the number and the extent of differences between the two campuses consistently vary from year to year, it will still be important to identify what factors influence this variation.

Demographic characteristics that may be associated with higher ethical standards

Our analyses revealed that recruits' and FYCs' perceptions of misconduct were in some cases influenced by gender and age. Although the differences between males and females and respondents in different age groups were not as numerous or as widespread as those between recruits and FYCs, those that we did find by and large suggested that there were higher ethical standards among female respondents (in comparison with males) and among older FYCs (in comparison with younger FYCs). Specifically:

- Female recruits regarded seven of the acts of misconduct as more serious than did male recruits.
- Female FYCs regarded five of the acts of misconduct as more serious than did male FYCs.
- Older FYCs (particularly those aged 31 years and over) judged eight of the acts of misconduct as more serious than did younger FYCs (particularly those aged 25 years and under).
- In two instances (*pick up equipment* and *youth move-on*), older FYCs (36 years and over) were more likely than their younger counterparts to say that they would take action over misconduct.

It is important to highlight that our research has not allowed us to examine the extent to which differences in *attitudes* associated with gender and age translate into differences in actual *behaviour*, if at all. Although some previous research has suggested that females and older applicants⁷ may in fact demonstrate more 'ethical' behaviours as police officers (as indicated by fewer complaints about on- and off-duty behaviour, for example; Brandl, Stroshine & Frank 2001; Greene et al. 2004; Lersch 1998; Lonsway et al. 2002), it has been largely unclear whether these findings still generalise to Queensland (see CJC 1996).

Conclusion

The results of the police ethics survey provide us with important insights into the ethical standards of recruits and FYCs, and serve as a useful indicator of the overall ethical climate of the QPS. This not only allows us to recognise improvements that have occurred over time in relation to how the QPS and its officers perceive and deal with issues of misconduct and integrity, but it also provides us with an opportunity to identify ongoing concerns and work with the QPS to address them. Relatively lenient views towards some types of improper behaviour, perceptions that much improper behaviour is unlikely to be detected in the QPS, an apparent reluctance to take action over or formally report

7 That is, recruits who join the police service at the age of 26 years or over (Greene et al. 2004).

misconduct, and negative perceptions of the QPS's approach to discipline and management are all matters that require further attention. We hope that the findings of this report encourage the QPS to consider what has improved since 1995, how this has occurred, and how further improvements can still be made.

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Abbreviations

CCTV	closed-circuit television
CJC	Criminal Justice Commission
CMC	Crime and Misconduct Commission
FYC	first year constable
OPR	Operational Performance Review
QPS	Queensland Police Service
RBT	random breath test