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Monitoring police ethics: a 2013 survey of Queensland recruits and First Year Constables

Inside

Acknowledgments

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Summary

This Research and Issues paper reports on a 2013 survey of the ethical attitudes of Queensland Police Service (QPS) recruits and First Year Constables (FYCs). Because this survey was the first administration of a revised survey instrument, this paper does not compare the results of the 2013 survey with those of earlier years.

We found that:

- The professional values of both recruits and FYCs aligned closely with the QPS values.
- FYCs had positive perceptions of the QPS ethical culture and said that most types of wrongdoing in the QPS were infrequent.
- Respondents were generally able to correctly identify behaviours that violate QPS policy.
- Of the types of wrongdoing presented, respondents considered the most serious were sharing confidential police information with an unauthorised person; lying in a police report; and stealing items from a crime scene.
- The type of wrongdoing considered the least serious was routinely accepting gifts or gratuities while on duty.
- Respondents were least inclined to report officers who accept gifts or gratuities while on duty; use offensive language towards members of the public; and engage in secondary employment without approval.
- Pivotal factors in their decision making about whether or not to report wrongdoing were the seriousness of wrongdoing; an ethical or legal responsibility to report; and having adequate evidence.
- Factors that discouraged reporting were a lack of trust in the person they reported to; being identified as the person reporting wrongdoing; lack of protection from the organisation; and not having adequate evidence to make a report. Conversely, support from co-workers and management would increase reporting of wrongdoing.
- The positive effects of ethical training were found to erode after recruits were exposed to the operational policing environment.
- The values, perceptions and knowledge of FYCs did not appear to differ according to work location.

Taken together, the results of the 2013 police ethics survey provide some insight into the professional values, knowledge and perceptions of recruits and FYCs. They indicate that the QPS can improve their officers' intention to report misconduct by clearly communicating the organisation's expected standards of behaviour, and by addressing officers' concerns about the degree of protection and support they might expect from peers, supervisors and the organisation.

Introduction

The Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) monitors the ethical culture of the QPS in a variety of ways. These include monitoring complaints about police, conducting major investigations, and conducting a long-term program of research.

The CMC has conducted regular surveys to monitor the ethical attitudes of QPS recruits and First Year Constables (FYCs) since 1995. Over time, research instruments need to be refined to ensure that they remain relevant and measure what they intend to. In 2012, in collaboration with the QPS, we conducted a major review of the police ethics survey in an effort to better understand:

- the professional values of respondents
- their perceptions and knowledge of the QPS ethical culture
- their perceptions and decision making about behaviours that violate QPS policy.

The 2013 police ethics survey was the first administration of the revised survey. As a result, we did not compare its results with those of previous surveys.

In 2013, the survey was completed by 590 Queensland police recruits and FYCs.

Research aims

In this study, we aimed to better understand:

- the alignment between the professional values of early career officers (recruits and FYCs) and the values of the QPS
- FYCs' perceptions and knowledge of the ethical culture of the QPS
- recruits' and FYCs' perceptions and decision making in relation to wrongdoing (or "ethical dilemmas").

To achieve these aims, we answered 14 key research questions, presented in Appendix 1.

Methodology

We used the CMC police ethics survey to address the research aims.

Measuring values in the workplace

Research suggests that the degree of alignment or *congruence* between the values of the individual and the values of the organisation — rather than the values of the individual alone — underpins the attitudes and behaviours of employees in a workplace (Liedtka 1989; Meglino & Ravlin 1998; Ruiz-Palomino & Martinez-Canas 2013).

Although the QPS has a set of official organisational values, from a measurement point of view, these values do not assist us in measuring officers' professional values. Consequently, it was necessary to develop a detailed set of QPS values based on key documents, including the *Standard of Practice*, the *Client Service Charter*, an information booklet about ethics (*Ethics and ethical decision-making in the Queensland Police Service*), the *Public Sector Ethics Act 1994*, and the 2011 *Code of Conduct for the Queensland Public Service*.

To measure the alignment between the values of individuals and the QPS values we identified, we asked respondents to rate these QPS values on a five-point scale from *not important* to *extremely important* according to how important the values were to them in their role as a police officer or, in the case of recruits, in their future role as a police officer. We grouped individuals' responses to the items into three categories (or subscales) of values (behaving ethically; safety of the officer, colleagues and community members; positive relationships with colleagues, community members and stakeholders), which were then combined into an overall measure of value congruence.

Description of the sample

Between February and June 2013, we surveyed 590 recruits and FYCs. A CMC researcher recruited all respondents in person at a training course held at either the Brisbane (n = 509) or the Townsville (n = 81) police academy. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and the survey was administered electronically. Three distinct cohort groups of early career officers were surveyed:

1. police recruits in their eighth week of training (Police Recruits Operational Vocational Education, PROVE) referred to as "early recruits" (23% of the sample, n = 135)
2. police recruits who had completed their ethics training (Professional Standards Training course from the Ethical Standards Command), referred to as "post-ESC recruits" (42%, n = 248)
3. FYCs who were attending the academy for an in-service course after six months of operational experience, referred to as "FYCs" (35%, n = 207).

We estimate that the response rate exceeded 90 per cent. However, it was not possible to accurately measure the response rate due to respondents entering and leaving the room to access computers to complete the survey online.

The sample comprised males and females of a range of different age groups, and FYCs were from different geographic work locations (*Brisbane, urban area other than Brisbane*, and *rural area*).

Please contact Applied Research and Evaluation if you require more detail about the survey instrument, the analytic approach or the results.

Measuring perceptions and knowledge of the QPS ethical culture

The ethical culture of an organisation can help in understanding the workplace behaviour of employees (Kaptein 2008; 2011). Police culture, in particular, has been described as a set of widely shared attitudes, values and norms that help officers to manage the strains of the work environment (Paoline III, Myers & Worden 2000). Police culture is also often depicted negatively and as an obstacle to ethical behaviour (Hickman, Piquero & Greene 2004; Ingram, Paoline III & Terrill 2013; Klockars et al. 2000; Kutnjak Ivkovic & Sauerman 2012; Prenzler 2009a).

We measured perceptions and knowledge of the ethical culture of the QPS in two ways. We asked respondents how they perceived the ethical culture of the QPS, and how frequently specific types of wrongdoing occurred in the QPS. Because recruits had not yet been exposed to the normal policing environment, we only sought the perceptions of FYCs.

Perceptions of the QPS ethical culture. We measured six dimensions of ethical culture using an established scale, (Kaptein 2008; 2011),[1] with language adapted where necessary to suit the QPS. The six dimensions were:

- clarity of the organisation's expected ethical standards
- ethical role modelling of supervisors
- commitment to behave ethically
- visibility of (un)ethical behaviour[2]
- openness to discuss ethical issues
- reinforcement of ethical behaviour.

For each dimension, a series of statements were presented, and FYCs were asked to respond to each statement on a five-point scale from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. We combined their responses to form measures of the six separate dimensions of ethical culture, and one overall measure of ethical culture.

Frequency of wrongdoing. FYCs were also asked how frequently 14 specific types of wrongdoing occur in the QPS. These types of wrongdoing were based on behaviours presented in the 16 scenarios of ethical dilemmas (see next section). FYCs could select one of seven responses (*never, has occurred but not in the last year, once in the last year, a few times in the last year, monthly in the last year, weekly in the last year, daily in the last year*). There is likely to be some bias in these results, as some respondents may have felt uncomfortable reporting to the CMC how often wrongdoing occurs in the QPS. To improve the accuracy of responses to these questions, FYCs also had the option of responding *I'd rather not say*. Regardless, responses to these questions may underestimate the actual level of wrongdoing that occurs in the QPS, and should be interpreted with caution.

Measuring perceptions and decision making in relation to ethical dilemmas

Research suggests that when employees are faced with an ethical dilemma, they make a series of assessments and decisions before taking action. To understand these assessments and decisions, we measured three stages of this decision-making process (adapted from Rest 1986 in Rajeev 2011). The first stage is *ethical sensitivity*, where individuals must first be aware that they are faced with an ethical dilemma before they can form an *ethical judgment* in the second stage, such as how serious the situation is. *Ethical intention* is the third step in the decision-making process, where individuals form an intention to act in a given way, such as an intention to report misconduct (Kish-Gephart, Harrison & Trevino 2010; Rajeev 2011).

To measure decision making about ethical dilemmas, we presented respondents with 16 scenarios that represent the types of situations that officers may face during their career. The scenarios depict a range of wrongdoing, some of which constitute misconduct. These scenarios were drawn from a survey that has been administered to police in a range of countries (Klockars & Kutnjak Ivkovic 2003; Kutnjak Ivkovic 2009) and the previous version of the CMC's police ethics survey (which itself was based on Huon et al. 1995). These scenarios were mapped against Prenzler's typology of corruption to ensure that the scenarios presented a range of behaviours (Prenzler 2009b).[3]

For each ethical dilemma presented, we measured the three stages of decision making that precede behaviour (described above).

1. **Knowledge of wrongdoing.** Respondents were asked whether the behaviours presented in the scenarios were violations of QPS policy (*yes, no, unsure*). All behaviours presented in the scenarios were violations of QPS policy, thus providing clear benchmarks.
2. **Perceptions of the seriousness of wrongdoing.** Respondents were asked to rate the seriousness of the behaviours on a five-point scale, from *not serious* to *extremely serious*.

1 Kaptein's *Corporate Ethical Virtues Model* allows us to measure the different dimensions of an organisation's ethical culture, and provides an insight into the cultural elements that influence and account for unethical behaviour.

2 That is, how visible unethical behaviour and its consequences are in the QPS.

3 Prenzler's typology is designed to cover a broad range of wrongdoing: graft, bribery or classic corruption; process corruption; brutality or excessive force; unprofessional conduct or miscellaneous misconduct; internal corruption or workplace deviance and off-duty unprofessional conduct.

3. **Intention to report wrongdoing.** Respondents were asked to rate how likely they would be to report a QPS officer who engaged in the behaviours on a five-point scale, from *definitely not* to *definitely yes*.

We also sought to understand some of the leading factors[4] that influence intention to report wrongdoing. Respondents were asked to indicate factors that would encourage them to report wrongdoing or, alternatively, to discourage them from reporting wrongdoing. Additionally, respondents were asked about factors that would substantially increase their likelihood of reporting wrongdoing. For these questions, multiple responses were permitted.

Key findings

Professional values and ethical culture

The professional values of both recruits and FYCs aligned closely with the QPS values

The professional values of both recruits and FYCs aligned closely with the QPS values or, put another way, their value congruence was high. This is a positive result for the QPS. It demonstrates that Queensland police recruits and FYCs considered the principles of the organisation to be important to them in their role (or future role) as a police officer. Of the three categories of values measured — "behaving ethically", "safety of the officer, colleagues and community members" and "positive relationships with colleagues, community members and stakeholders" — respondents valued safety most.

FYCs had positive perceptions of the QPS ethical culture and said that most types of wrongdoing in the QPS were infrequent

FYCs perceive QPS ethical culture to be positive. This shows that those new to the operational policing environment generally considered that the organisation had the features of an ethical culture. Of the many facets of "ethical culture", the QPS scored highest on "ethical role modelling of supervisors" and lowest on "visibility of (un)ethical behaviour".[5]

FYCs also indicated that most of the specific types of wrongdoing examined occurred infrequently. Of the 14 types of wrongdoing presented, FYCs reported that only four occurred more than once in the last year. Specifically:

- "accepting gifts or gratuities" — 18 per cent (*n* = 36) indicated that this occurred on a monthly or weekly basis, and 11 per cent (*n* = 23) reported it occurred daily
- "using offensive language towards members of the public" — 16 per cent (*n* = 33) indicated that this occurred on a monthly or weekly basis, and 2 per cent (*n* = 3) reported that it occurred daily
- "using excessive force" — 15 per cent (*n* = 32) indicated that this occurred more than once in the last year
- "using a police vehicle for an unauthorised purpose" — 14 per cent (*n* = 28) indicated that this occurred more than once in the last year.

Knowledge and perceptions of wrongdoing

Respondents were generally able to correctly identify behaviours that violate QPS policy

There was generally high recognition of behaviours that violate QPS policy. Specifically:

- over 90 per cent of FYCs and post-ESC recruits were able to correctly identify 13 of the 16 violations
- over 90 per cent of early recruits correctly identified 12 of the 16 violations.

However, our results also highlighted areas where knowledge of wrongdoing could be improved. FYCs and post-ESC recruits were less able to identify the following three types of wrongdoing:

- "routinely accepting free or discounted meals" — around a third of FYCs (36%, *n* = 75) and post-ESC recruits (34%, *n* = 85) said this was not a violation of QPS policy, while 23 per cent of FYCs (*n* = 47) and 15 per cent of post-ESC recruits (*n* = 36) were unsure whether or not it was a violation
- "turning a blind eye to a friend or acquaintance's illegal behaviour while off-duty" —27 per cent of FYCs (*n* = 55) and 18 per cent of post-ESC recruits (*n* = 43) did not identify this as a violation of QPS policy
- "using offensive language towards members of the public" — 27 per cent of FYCs (*n* = 56) and 16 per cent of post-ESC recruits (*n* = 40) did not identify this as a violation of QPS policy.

The types of wrongdoing respondents considered the most serious were sharing confidential police information with an unauthorised person; lying in a police report; and stealing items from a crime scene

Of the 16 specific types of wrongdoing presented to respondents, FYCs considered "stealing from a crime scene" as the most serious. Both recruit groups considered "lying in a police report" the most serious behaviour, while early recruits also equally considered "sharing confidential police information with an unauthorised person" as the most serious behaviour.

4 These factors were adapted from Brown (2008).
5 A high score for "visibility of (un)ethical behaviour" is one indicator of a positive ethical culture.

Routinely accepting gifts or gratuities while on duty was considered the least serious type of wrongdoing

All three respondent groups viewed routinely accepting gifts or gratuities as the least serious type of wrongdoing presented to them. This result indicates that the QPS is still some way from achieving the kind of cultural change envisaged in its gifts and benefits policy.

Reporting wrongdoing

Recruits and FYCs were least inclined to report officers who routinely accept gifts or gratuities while on duty; use offensive language towards members of the public; and engage in secondary employment without approval

Of the 16 specific types of wrongdoing presented, respondents were least inclined to report officers who routinely accept gifts or gratuities while on duty; use offensive language towards members of the public; and engage in unapproved secondary employment.

Conversely, almost all respondents were most inclined to report another officer who stole items from a crime scene; shared confidential police information with an unauthorised person; accepted bribes to do or neglect something while on duty; or lied in a police report.

Pivotal factors in their decision making about whether or not to report wrongdoing were the seriousness of the wrongdoing; an ethical or legal responsibility to report; and having adequate evidence

Table 1 lists the leading factors that influence the intention of recruits and FYCs to report wrongdoing.

Respondents generally considered the seriousness of wrongdoing as the factor that would most influence their decision to report another police officer's wrongdoing (see Table 1). Another leading factor for all respondent groups was if they saw it as their ethical responsibility to report the wrongdoing.

Legal and evidentiary concerns would also affect respondents' decision making. About three-quarters of both recruit groups indicated that they would report wrongdoing if they believed they were under a legal obligation to do so, and having evidence to support their report of wrongdoing was important for three-quarters of FYCs.

Table 1: Leading factors that influence recruits' and FYCs' intention to report wrongdoing

Reason	Early recruits		Post-ESC recruits		FYCs	
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*
Factors that would encourage me to report						
The wrongdoing was serious enough	**84**	114	**82**	204	**84**	174
I saw it as my ethical responsibility to report it	**80**	108	**82**	202	**69**	142
I believed I was under a legal responsibility to report it	**75**	101	**69**	172	**58**	119
I had evidence to support my report	**70**	95	**67**	166	**74**	153
Factors that would discourage me from reporting						
I didn't trust the person I had to report to	**63**	83	**63**	155	**58**	119
I didn't think my identity would be kept secret	**65**	86	**59**	147	**61**	126
I didn't think the organisation would protect me	**61**	81	**60**	149	**61**	126
I didn't have enough evidence to report it	**55**	72	**53**	132	**62**	129
Factors that would increase my tendency to report						
Knowing that I would have support from my co-workers	**75**	100	**80**	199	**75**	155
Knowing that I would have support from management	**71**	95	**82**	203	**73**	152
Being assured that, if I gave my name, it would be kept secret	**74**	99	**69**	170	**62**	128
Having the opportunity to report without giving my name	**73**	98	**72**	179	**59**	122

Factors that discouraged reporting were a lack of trust in the person they reported to; being identified as the person reporting wrongdoing; lack of protection from the organisation; and not having adequate evidence to make a report

More than half of recruits and FYCs indicated that not trusting the person they had to report to was the key factor in discouraging them from reporting another police officer's wrongdoing (see Table 1). Concerns about being identified as the person who reported an officer's wrongdoing also discouraged reporting, as did concerns about a lack of protection from the organisation. Additionally, over half of recruits and FYCs indicated that not having enough evidence would discourage them from reporting wrongdoing.

Respondents said that support from co-workers and management would increase the reporting of wrongdoing

Most recruits and FYCs indicated that knowing they would have support from co-workers was a key factor in increasing the reporting of wrongdoing (see Table 1). Support from management was also important.

The results also show that mechanisms to protect the identity of the reporting officer would increase reporting. Specifically, being assured that their name would be kept confidential and the ability to make anonymous reports may increase reporting.

Group differences in values, perceptions and knowledge

We examined whether the professional values, perceptions and knowledge of the three groups of respondents differed according to their stage of training and work experience. For FYCs only, we also examined whether their professional values, perceptions and knowledge varied according to their current work location.

The positive effects of ethical training erode after recruits are exposed to the operational policing environment

The significant differences between the professional values, perceptions and knowledge of the three groups indicate two things. First, the differences between the responses of early recruits and post-ESC recruits help to show the positive effects of training on the attitudes of police recruits. Second, the differences between the responses of post-ESC recruits and FYCs indicate that exposure to the operational policing environment has a negative effect on respondents' values and attitudes.

Specifically:

- Post-ESC recruits had higher value congruence than FYCs, both in the overall measure of value congruence and the professional values specifically relating to positive relationships with colleagues, community members and stakeholders.
- Post-ESC recruits were better at identifying violations of QPS policy than early recruits were, but they were also significantly better than FYCs.
- Post-ESC recruits considered the wrongdoing presented as more serious than FYCs did.
- Post-ESC recruits were more inclined to report wrongdoing than early recruits and FYCs were, and early recruits were also more inclined to report wrongdoing than FYCs were.

Respondents' values, perceptions and knowledge did not appear to differ according to work location

There were no significant differences in FYCs' value congruence, ability to identify behaviours that violate official policy, perceptions of seriousness of wrongdoing and inclination to report wrongdoing based on their work location.

Conclusions

This paper provides insight into the ethics of Queensland police officers in the early stages of their police career. It shows that the professional values of recruits and officers were aligned closely to those of the QPS, and officers exposed to the normal policing environment believed that the QPS has a positive ethical culture. Further, respondents' awareness of what is acceptable and unacceptable conduct appeared to be good. While these are encouraging results, some areas for improvement exist.

For two types of wrongdoing in particular — routinely accepting gifts and gratuities and using offensive language to the public — a considerable proportion of respondents were either unsure or believed the behaviour was not a violation of QPS policy. These two types of behaviour were also viewed as amongst the least serious, and officers were least inclined to report them. This pattern is consistent with what previous CMC research says about decision making about ethical dilemmas (CMC 2010; 2013), and suggests that knowledge and perceptions do have a bearing on officers' intention to report wrongdoing. Importantly, these were also the types of wrongdoing that they said occurred most frequently in the QPS.

The survey results identified some of the other factors that have a bearing on the decision whether or not to report wrongdoing. Many respondents indicated that ethical or legal responsibilities were important factors in deciding whether to report any wrongdoing they witnessed; support from co-workers and managers, along with anonymity and other organisational protections, were also critical to increasing their intention to

report wrongdoing. These results provide the QPS with some guidance about those factors that may be barriers to some officers reporting. Critically, some of these may be *perceived* rather than actual barriers, so may require awareness training rather than changes to policy or procedure.

Finally, the results indicate that the transition from the academy environment to the operational policing environment has a negative effect on police values, knowledge, perceptions and intention to report misconduct. That is, the positive effects of training appear to "wear off" once officers are sworn in and commence operational duties. This is consistent with the findings from police ethics surveys in previous years, and so is an area of ongoing concern (CMC 2010).

We note a recent change in QPS training may go some way to addressing this longstanding concern. The *professional standards training continuum* — recently rolled out across the state — is designed to provide officers with training specific to their position, level and role at particular stages throughout their career. In future years of the police ethics survey, we may see whether this training reduces the decline in ethical attitudes that appears to occur soon after recruits transition to the operational policing environment.

Taken together, the results of the 2013 police ethics survey provide some insight into the professional values, knowledge and perceptions of recruits and FYCs. It also indicates that the QPS can improve their officers' intention to report misconduct by clearly communicating the organisation's expected standards of behaviour, and by addressing officers' concerns about the degree of protection and support they might expect from peers, supervisors and the organisation.

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Appendix 1: Key research questions

1.	What predicts value congruence for recruits and FYCs?
2.	What proportion of recruits and FYCs can correctly identify behaviours that violate official policy?
3.	What factors are related to recruits' and FYCs' ability to correctly identify behaviours that violate official policy?
4.	Of specific types of wrongdoing, which do recruits and FYCs consider the most serious, and which the least serious?
5.	What factors are related to recruits' and FYCs' perceptions of seriousness?
6.	What proportion of recruits and FYCs say they would report wrongdoing by fellow officers?
7.	What factors predict recruits' and FYCs' inclination to report specific types of wrongdoing?
8.	What are the leading factors that encourage recruits and FYCs to report wrongdoing?
9.	What are the leading factors that discourage recruits and FYCs from reporting wrongdoing?
10.	What are the factors that recruits and FYCs believe would increase reporting?
11.	What element(s) of the QPS's ethical culture do FYCs consider to be most healthy, and what element(s) requires most improvement?
12.	What factors predict FYCs' perceptions of the ethical culture of the QPS?
13.	How frequently do FYCs say specific types of wrongdoing occur in the QPS?
14.	What factors are related to FYCs' reported frequency of specific types of wrongdoing in the QPS?

Several key research questions ask about "factors" that help us to understand the responses of recruits and officers. However, a recent CMC study has already examined the role of a larger range of factors in a general sample of police (CMC 2013). To avoid duplication, this paper will only examine two factors that may influence recruits' and officers' responses — the respondent group and, for FYCs' responses only, the work location.

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