

The birds and the bobbies: exploring the perceptions and experiences of wildlife crime officers to inform policing curriculum development in Wales

An exploration of the perceptions and experiences of Welsh wildlife crime officers (WCO) to inform and develop the policing curriculum.

Key details

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Police region	Wales
Level of research	PhD
Project start date	October 2023
Date due for completion	July 2027

Research context

Professional policing degrees in England and Wales are structured around the National Policing Curriculum (NPC), which serves as a core framework. The NPC is a comprehensive and detailed document designed to equip students with a strong foundation in policing theory and practice. While the curriculum covers a broad range of essential policing topics, it does not currently include specific references to wildlife crime.

Recent years have seen legislative changes in Wales in response to increasing concerns over climate change and loss of biodiversity. These have included the passing of the [Wellbeing of Future](#)

[Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) and the [Environment \(Wales\) Act 2016](#). The introduction of a [Welsh Rural and Wildlife Crime Strategy](#) alongside the creation of a new all-wales rural and wildlife crime coordinator has further changed the policing context.

In response to these changes, this project seeks to explore opportunities for further enhancing professional policing education. By engaging with wildlife crime officers (WCOs) serving within Welsh police forces, this research aims to understand the challenges they encounter in both policy and practice, gather their perspectives on the education of future officers, and consider how these insights can inform and strengthen policing education about wildlife crime.

Research question

What insights can be drawn from the perceptions and experiences of wildlife crime officers in Wales to enhance the professional policing curriculum?

There are four main objectives that this research will consider.

1. To contextualise the alignment between Welsh wildlife crime policy and the current professional policing curriculum in Wales.
2. To investigate the perceptions of wildlife crime officers in Wales regarding their roles, challenges, and experiences in policing wildlife crime.
3. To critically examine the educational needs identified by wildlife crime officers concerning the policing of wildlife crime.
4. To develop recommendations for enhancing the professional policing curriculum based on the insights gathered from wildlife crime officers.

Research methodology

The research will adopt a single-method qualitative approach, namely semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured approach has been selected to help strike a balance between the aims of the study whilst maintaining flexibility to allow participants to express and explain their own views, thoughts and perceptions (Clark et al 2021). A schedule of broad questions will be used to guide the interviews, but participants will have the freedom to identify what they believe is important based on their lived professional experience.

Exploring the professional experiences of WCOs is key to the aims of the study. Therefore, a purposive sampling approach will be adopted. The research does not strive to be generalisable to the wider population, but to provide a platform for the voices of a very specific group of professionals – namely WCOs serving within Welsh police forces.

Following data collection and transcription, the research findings will be subjected to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Transcripts will initially be coded, and then these codes will be developed into themes inline with the aims of the research and the supporting literature/theory. There will be a particular focus on the way in which participants identify and discuss key areas which they perceive as important for the educational development of professional policing students with regards to wildlife crime.

References

- Braun, V & Clarke, V. (2022) Thematic Analysis a Practical Guide. London: SAGE
- Clark, T., Foster, L., Sloan, L. & Bryman, A. (2021) Bryman's Social Research Methods (6th Ed). Oxford: OUP
- [Environment \(Wales\) Act 2016](#) [Accessed on 03/02/2024]
- [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) [Accessed on 03/02/2024]
- [Welsh Government. \(2023\) Wales' Wildlife and Rural Crime Strategy 2023-2025](#) [Accessed on 03/02/2024]

Interim publications

Ambler L. 2026. '[Wildlife crime and curriculum development: A pilot study on officer perceptions to inform policing education in Wales](#)'. International Journal of Criminology and Policing Education, 1(1).

Research participation

Participants are sought from serving or formerly serving wildlife crime officers from any of the four Welsh police forces.

If you would like to participate in this research, please contact: lcambler@cardiffmet.ac.uk