**A comparative case study of Reserve Deputies in a Florida sheriff’s office and Special Constables in an English police force**

**Iain BRITTON, Ross WOLF, Matthew CALLENDER**

**Abstract**

Volunteers operating as ‘sworn’ police personnel with full policing powers are a common feature of policing organisations in many countries, including Special Constables in the United Kingdom and Reserve and Auxiliary police officers and deputy sheriffs in many law enforcement agencies in the United States. There has been only limited research into the experience of serving as a volunteer in such policing roles in either United States or United Kingdom settings, together with very little comparative research into volunteer officer experience across different international settings. This manuscript presents a small-scale, comparative qualitative case study based upon interviews with volunteers from a Reserve Unit in a Sheriff’s Office in Florida and with volunteer Special Constables from an English police force, exploring their perspectives and experiences of volunteering in their respective policing organisations. The research identifies key differences between the settings in respect of past experience and volunteer pathways, models of training and confidence of operational capability, development and management of roles, the opportunities to develop specialisation for volunteers, and leadership. The paper points to the value of comparative research in police voluntarism and calls for more research in this area.

**INTRODUCTION**

One key element of a shifting policing landscape is a trend towards a growing plurality of provision of policing (Bullock, 2014, Crawford, 2008; Lister, 2006); a ‘policing family’ delivering policing in communities which is considerably broader than Regular police officers. Within this “pluralised, fragmented and differentiated patchwork” (Crawford, 2008, p. 147) of actors increasingly involved in policing delivery, there is an array of voluntary roles, which can be broadly conceptualised as ‘volunteers in policing’ or as ‘citizens in policing’. Albrecht (2017, p. xiii) identifies that there are “a wide array of examples from all over the globe” (Albrecht, 2017, p. xiii) of volunteers serving in policing roles, including in sizeable numbers in both the United States and the United Kingdom. The value of police volunteers has increasingly been recognised, as “a link between the police and those they serve, a way of peeling back the “blue curtain”” (Dobrin & Wolf, 2016, p. 221), as a means of drawing in new skills and expertise (Britton & Knight, 2016), as an approach to addressing challenges of austerity (Bullock & Leeney, 2014), as an element of building empowered and engaged communities (Friedman, 1998; Gravelle & Rogers, 2009; Morgan, 2012; Ren, Zhao, Lovrich & Gaffney, 2006; Steden, van Caem & Boutellier, 2011) and as a means of enhancing community cohesion and civic engagement (Bullock, 2014; Crawford, 2008; Johnston, 2003; Lister, 2006; Loader, 2000).

Within this broader context of voluntarism in policing, volunteers performing the roles of police officers has deep roots in the history and tradition of policing (Dobrin, 2015; Gill & Mawby, 1990; Greenberg, 1984, 2015; Leon, 1991; Seth, 1961), As Britton and Callender (2017, p. 148) argue, “the paradox is that, whilst special constables are hardly a modern innovation, pre-dating models of ‘regular’ (paid) police officers, it can be argued that they represent one of the most promising and potentially radical areas of innovation in modern policing.”

Despite there being a significant volume of volunteer police officers across a large number of jurisdictions, “it is surprising how little is known about this aspect of policing” (Dobrin & Wolf, 2016, p. 220). The policy and practice of police volunteering remains largely peripheral to wider debates on police reform and to the wider academic literature on policing (Britton & Callender, 2017). As Bullock and Leeney (2014, p. 485) argue, in the UK context, “we know little about the motivations and experiences of those who volunteer. Nor do we know much about how the Special Constabulary operates in practice, the management and regulation of this sizable volunteer force.” A relatively small number of research studies have been published in respect of the experiences of volunteer officers (Britton, Callender & Cole, 2016a; Bullock & Leeney, 2014; Gaston & Alexander, 2001; Gill & Mawby, 1990; Hieke, 2017; Leon, 1991, Mirrlees-Black & Byron, 1994; NPIA, 2010; Pepper, 2014; Pepper & Wolf, 2015; Whittle, 2014; Wolf, Holmes & Jones, 2015b; Wolf, Pepper & Dobrin).

Whilst the body of literature exploring the experiences of volunteer police officers remains relatively small, and some of the studies are now quite dated, the literature has been consistent in terms of several key findings. There is a consistent theme of the limitations or inadequacies of Special Constable training (Bullock & Leeney, 2014; Gaston & Alexander, 2001; Gill & Mawby, 1990; Leon, 1991, Mirrlees-Black & Byron, 1994; NPIA, 2010; Whittle, 2014), with the perceptions of Special Constables that their training has not prepared them sufficiently and that the transition into practice is not well managed and supported (Whittle, 2014). Cultural challenges are consistently identified (Bullock & Leeney, 2014; Gaston & Alexander, 2001; Gill & Mawby, 1990; Leon, 1991, Mirrlees-Black & Byron, 1994; NPIA, 2010), with what is referred to by Gill and Mawby (1990, p. 131) as an “undercurrent of scepticism” amongst Regular police officers in respect of Special Constables. Albeit this cultural context is also recognised as being a complex one (Bullock and Leeney, 2014, p. 495) in which many Special Constables themselves report positive relationships with Regular officer colleagues. Identity and authenticity as a police officer is seen across the studies as important to volunteer officers, as is integration and feeling valued (Bullock & Leeney, 2014; Gaston & Alexander, 2001; Gill & Mawby, 1990; Leon, 1991, Mirrlees-Black & Byron, 1994; NPIA, 2010, Whittle, 2017). There are also arguments of a “mismatch” (Bullock and Leeney, 2014, p. 488) between skills, experience and opportunities, and a sense of Special Constables being “confined” (Bullock and Leeney, 2014, p. 497) as Special Constable deployment tends to focus upon a limited range of roles (Britton et al., 2016a; Leon, 1991; Mirrlees-Black & Byron, 1994).

One element explored in some depth across several of the studies has been the motivations of those who volunteer as police officers. There is recognition that the reasons why Special Constables volunteer are complex, that some of the motivations involved “may be characterised as altruistic and some of which egoistical” (Bullock and Leeney, 2014, p. 490), that a majority of those joining the Special Constabulary are interested in a future paid career in policing (Bullock & Leeney, 2014; Gaston & Alexander, 2001; Gill & Mawby, 1990; Leon, 1991, Mirrlees-Black & Byron, 1994; NPIA, 2010, Whittle, 2017), that Special Constables are not homogenous in their motivations to volunteer (Bullock and Leeney, 2014, p. 492), and that it is important that motivations to volunteer become better understood (Bullock and Leeney, 2014, p. 492).

The vast bulk of the published studies into the experience of volunteer police officers have been narrowly focused upon one setting, with fieldwork undertaken with Special Constables in England and Wales, and discussion of findings and conclusions framed solely within that context. Only three of the studies cited above (Pepper & Wolf, 2015; Wolf et al., 2015b; Wolf et al., 2016) explore the experiences of volunteer officers in a setting other than Special Constables in the UK; none of those three studies had an in-depth, interview-based approach. This reflects an important gap in the literature, given that internationally the majority of volunteer police officers are not Special Constables in the UK, and it is clear that the literature would benefit from a broader, international body of fieldwork.

Of the studies engaging with volunteer police officer experience, only two (Pepper & Wolf, 2015; Wolf et al., 2016) have involved comparative fieldwork across international boundaries, in both cases involving relatively small-scale survey-based research projects with UK Special Constable and Reserve Deputies from the United States. Bullock (2017, p. 94) makes the case for the value of such comparative research, arguing that “Volunteer police units are seen around the world… international comparisons are revealing and play a role in generating understanding of how policing systems operate, as well as how they might be improved.”

**Volunteer Police Officers in the United States**

Police departments, sheriff’s offices, and policing agencies throughout the United States train, hire, and utilise police volunteers differently, with disparate responsibilities and widely varying approaches at State and agency level in respect of regulation and training. There is very wide variation across the approximately 18,000 law enforcement agencies (President’s Task Force, 2015) in the United States in whether to use, and how to use, volunteers in policing roles. The majority of these police departments, and sheriff’s offices have less than 100 ‘sworn’ (warranted) personnel, and local control over policies and procedures is a normal practice. Policing in the United States has evolved to reflect a great deal of variety of models and practice, and so too have volunteer roles in policing. Although most agencies in the United States use the terms of “reserve” and “auxiliary” to define volunteers with at least some police powers, the meanings of these terms are varied. Examples of auxiliary police with extremely limited powers can be found throughout the north-east, where ‘auxiliary’ police wear uniforms that look similar to regular police officers, but have no formal ‘warranted’ police authority. The south and west United States are more likely to use volunteer police with greater amounts of training and authority (Wolf & Jones, 2018), with many of these States utilising volunteer police with full police powers.

The number of volunteer police units and the number of volunteer officers in the United States is not known (Berg & Doerner, 1988; Dobrin, 2017; Dobrin & Wolf, 2016; Wolf, Albrecht & Dobrin, 2015a). Dobrin & Wolf (2016) utilised federal-level data from 2007-2013 to provide an estimate of 77,500 volunteers in United States policing, estimating there to be approximately 29,500 sworn volunteer reserve or auxiliary police officers, 29,000 sworn volunteer sheriff’s deputies, and an additional 19,000 non-sworn volunteer police and deputies. This estimate puts the number of volunteers at approximately 20% of the 404,000 full time police officers (Dobrin & Wolf, 2016), with volunteers providing an average nine volunteer hours a week to the role (Wolf et al., 2015b). It has been estimated that approximately thirty per cent of all public safety organisations in the USA utilise volunteers (Brudney & Kellough, 2000). Only limited research has been undertaken in respect of volunteers in United States policing. Research has pointed to police volunteers with law enforcement powers in the United States being more likely to be college educated white males, almost half are older than 40 years of age (Hilal & Olson, 2010; Wolf et al., 2015b) and volunteers in policing are more likely than other types of volunteers to hold full-time jobs (Hilal & Olson, 2010; Wolf et al., 2015a). Some volunteer police in the United States find the role to be a way to gather the experience necessary to apply for full-time positions (Wolf et al., 2015a). However, because many jurisdictions in the United States require that volunteer police have the same training as their full time counterparts (Dobrin, Wolf, Pepper & Fallik, 2017), and because some agencies allow volunteer police to work paid duty assignments in addition to their volunteer service (Wolf et al., 2015a) separated or retired full-time police may also continue their involvement in policing through volunteer units. A 2015 study of sworn volunteers in sheriff’s offices in the United States found that the primary reason that all respondents were motivated to serve in this role was to be involved with their community (Wolf et al., 2015a).

Specifically related to this current study, volunteer law enforcement officers in Florida are authorized by law with the authority to make arrests and to carry firearms. Florida uses two classifications of volunteer police officers. The agency that participated in this study utilises both auxiliary-certified and fully-certified part-time volunteer officers in its Reserve Unit. Auxiliary officers have approximately 300 hours of police academy training and are fully ‘sworn’ (warranted) officers, but have limited authority to act only when under the direct control of a fully certified Florida law enforcement officer, and cannot work independently. Independent reserve officers have full state certification as law enforcement officers with almost 800 hours of academy training, and once field training is complete can work in a solo capacity and supervise auxiliary officers. All members of the Reserve Unit are issued with the same equipment and wear uniforms that are identical to their full-time deputy counterparts. The unit also has several vehicles for use of its members that are spread throughout the county that are marked identically to the vehicles used by full-time deputies.

**Special Constables in England and Wales**

There are 11,690 Specials in England and Wales forces (Hargreaves, Husband and Linehan, 2018), who complete an estimated 3.6 million hours of voluntary service over the period of a year (Britton, Knight & Moloney, 2016b). Special Constables are part-time voluntary police officers. They are ‘sworn’ (warranted) police officers, and similar to the Florida context they have the same warranted police powers, and the same (or very similar) uniform and equipment of a ‘regular’ (paid) police constable. Each police force in England and Wales has a Special Constabulary. Whilst there is a greater consistency of model and practice compared to the wider variations across law enforcement volunteer officers in the United States, the size, leadership and functioning of the Special Constabularies do still vary quite significantly between forces (Britton et al., 2016b).

The role of Special Constable is a distinctive one. Their voluntary and part-time nature renders them distinctive within the wider population of Constables, whilst their front-line operational policing role as ‘sworn’ officers with full policing powers means that Special Constables represent a highly distinctive genre of volunteers. The emphasis of the Special Constable role in most forces is on front-line response policing, neighbourhood policing, and visible patrol; with the specific activity engaged in being typically very similar to ‘regular’ officers (Borland-Jones & Wolf, 2017). In an increasing proportion of forces some Specials are now also engaged in more specialist areas of policing, including aspects such as roads policing, cyber-crime and specialist public protection roles. Unlike the Florida context, there is no equivalent distinction in respect of ‘auxiliary’ and full-certification; however, each Special Constabulary including the force in this case study project, comprise younger-in-service volunteer officers who have not yet achieved ‘independent patrol status’, alongside ‘independent patrol status’ Special Constables who are able to patrol and function independently, without the need to be accompanied by another officer. Of the Special Constables across the police forces of England and Wales, just over 70% are male and just under 30% female (Britton et al., 2016b; Hargreaves et al., 2018;). Specials tend to be younger than in the United States context, with the highest numbers in their young twenties (Britton et al., 2016b; Borland-Jones & Wolf, 2017). Available data and research suggests that most Special Constables have an ambition in the future to join up as a ‘regular’ officer (Britton et al., 2016a, 2016a; Pepper, 2014), but that also a sizeable minority do not.

**METHOD**

This paper presents findings from a small-scale, qualitative comparative case study which undertook in-depth interviews with volunteers from two settings; a reserve unit in a Sheriff’s Office in Florida and a Special Constabulary in England. The study explored the perspectives and experiences of volunteer officers within the respective police organisational settings, based upon in-depth, semi-structured one-to-one interviews. Access to participants was first negotiated with the respective organisations by researchers where the purpose of the research was outlined. Volunteer Officers were sent an email containing a participant information sheet which outlined what the research was and what participation involved. Participants were offered the opportunity to ask questions prior to providing informed consent to participate. All interviews were voluntary. All participants who responded to the initial email and agreed to participate were interviewed. The interviews typically lasted between sixty and ninety minutes, with eleven interviews with Reserve Deputies in Florida and twenty-six interviews with Special Constables in the UK police force setting. Interviews were undertaken in January 2017 in Florida and between May and August 2016 in the English setting

Comparative research allows policy makers to examine the experiences and work of others for direction, information and guidance (Crossley & Watson, 2003). International comparative research may require substantial variations in methodology to avoid encroaching or intruding on cultural norms and for translational purposes; however, this current study did not require any significant deviation other than an occasional definition of a term to make sure that respondents were clear on the meaning of questions (for example, “sworn” and “warranted” police powers). Therefore, the same interviewing framework was utilised in both contexts of the comparative case study.

The interview schedule covered aspects of experience and perspectives in respect of their voluntary policing roles, including: motivations, morale and satisfaction, training and practice induction, their policing activities and experience in role, plans for the future, relationships with ‘regular’ (paid) police officers and others they serve alongside, supervision and support, and their perspectives on culture and on leadership. The interviews were fully transcribed verbatim. Data were thematically analysed following six steps of ‘familiarisation’ through reading transcripts, ‘code generation’, theme identification’, ‘review’ of themes and codes, ‘labelling themes’ and ‘report writing’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Where direct quotations from participants are referenced in the research findings within this manuscript, each participant has a unique numerical code, with those fronted by an ‘F’ being from the Florida interviews and those with an ‘S’ being interviews of Special Constables.

**FINDINGS**

**Pathways and Motivations**

There were some clear differences between the two settings in terms of officer motivations. A desire to ‘join up’ as a regular officer, and thus seeing the volunteer policing role as a pathway to that ultimate paid career ambition, whilst evident to a degree in the US context was much more prevalent in the Special Constabulary interviews. This was not, however, ubiquitous and many Special Constable participants did not have such paid career ambitions.

Also, in contrast to the UK context, where very few of the Special Constable participants had paid law enforcement backgrounds, such backgrounds were a common attribute for the Florida volunteer officers. The arguments for this within the Florida interviews seem strong in terms of the sense of vocation and self-identity associated with policing and law enforcement as well as in terms of the significant contribution ex-regulars can provide. As one Reserve remarked about the transition from being full-time to the volunteer policing role: “There’s a lot personally invested with that badge and gun. For a lot, it’s hard to just let that go…” (F1). This poses a question as to why a similar pattern, from full-time policing into the Special Constabulary, is not seen in the same way in the UK context. This presents a critical question for the UK setting where increasing such ex-Regular recruitment pathways would support strategic objectives of increasing the number and capabilities of Special Constables. In the Florida context, there were certain practical benefits to remaining a volunteer officer after leaving full time service. This includes the opportunities available for working on off-duty paid assignments, the continuation of certification, and the ability to carry a firearm throughout the United States under national-carry laws as a certified police officer. In the UK site, there was a sense that for the Special Constabulary the predominance of young-in-service, and younger in age Specials, primarily attracted by motivations to join the Regulars, tended to create a cultural perspective within policing organisations of the Special Constabulary as a whole that might tend to discourage older, more experienced ex-Regulars from seeing it as a desirable ‘next step’ to volunteer into following their retirement or resignation as a (typically older and more experienced) Regular officer.

The English and Florida interviews were similar in terms of participants tending to share multiple motivations, and that across each of the settings there was a wide diversity of reasons shared for volunteering. Motivations in both settings had many strong similarities, including finding the time spent as a volunteer officer challenging, worthwhile, enjoyable, broadening in terms of experience, and personally fulfilling:

“The adventure, guns, cars, chance to get in and do well something very challenging, it’s fascinating, every time is different, my being there makes a difference for some of our most vulnerable people, and yes the adrenalin.” (F6).

“Spend some time doing something different. That has a bit more responsibility. Helps me communicate with people, I guess, and go do something that helps people. I see things on shift most people never get a chance to. Probably shouldn’t say this but it is exciting, it’s huge fun a lot of the time.” (S17)

For some participants in both settings, being a Special or Reserve Deputy complemented, or in some cases compensated, for aspects that they felt were missing otherwise in their professional lives, with their volunteering in policing providing very different experiences, perspectives and opportunities.

There were strong narratives in many of the interviews in respect of ‘purpose’ and ‘mission’. The importance of ‘justice’ and a desire to ‘protect’ communities and the vulnerable was central to participants motivational narratives. For some volunteer officers in both settings, this extended to a position of seeing the idea of volunteer officers as one that embodies broader principles for policing and law enforcement, especially in relation to community engagement and neighbourhood policing models:

“It’s what true community policing should be. It’s people that have normal day jobs, and gives them an opportunity to be that bridge to the community. This is what law enforcement should be about.” (F5)

The core identity of being a police or law enforcement officer was typically very important for both Specials and Reserve Deputies, with many interpreting this sense of identity of being a ‘Constable’ or a ‘Deputy’ more strongly than seeing themselves as being a ‘volunteer’. The volunteer officers in both settings took their voluntary roles on the front-line very seriously, with similar emphases on the importance, complexity and dangers of the activity officers undertake, and views that volunteers must be committed and well trained to be safe, to provide a useful additional resource, and to avoid becoming a risk or liability.

“At the end of the day, it’s an honour. It’s something that you have to earn – no-one gives it to you. It’s a serious business. You’re dealing with people’s civil rights and you go into some tough situations.” (F6)

In respect of their motivations to volunteer, there were some frustrations expressed in the interviews in both settings that ‘regular’, paid officer colleagues made insufficient effort in “getting to know why they [volunteers]are here.” (S4). This was apparent to some degree in Florida, with several of the interviews exploring issues of ‘regular’ Deputies being ill-informed about what Reserves do, and especially as to why people volunteer in the role. Within the UK setting with the Special Constables, this was most marked in respect of perceptions of regular officer assumptions that most or all Special Constables wished to join up as regulars.

This study reflects previous findings that there is a need for police organisations to better understand the motivations of those who volunteer (Bullock and Leeney, 2014, p.492). In terms of those motivations the study also finds similar patterns of complexity in those motivations as previous studies (Bullock & Leeney, 2014; Gaston & Alexander, 2001; Gill & Mawby, 1990; Mirrlees-Black & Byron, 1994; NPIA, 2010). The study identified two findings which are distinctive. The first is that the pattern, deeply evident within the Special Constabulary in the UK setting, of the ‘pathway’ into the Regular force as being a paramount motivational context for many Specials was not mirrored to the same extent in the US site. The second was that in the US setting there was a greater sense of ex-Regular Deputies ‘joining up’ as Reserve Deputies. Both of these findings are significant.

One of the challenges recognised within Special Constabularies in the UK (Bullock & Leeney, 2014; Gaston & Alexander, 2001; Gill & Mawby, 1990; Hieke, 2017, Leon, 1991, Mirrlees-Black & Byron, 1994; NPIA, 2010, Whittle, 2014) is of the high proportion of volunteers who are looking to volunteer for a relatively short period with aspirations to then join the Regular service, and the associated challenges of instead recruiting a greater proportion of ‘career’ Specials who are interested in longer-term careers of volunteering. The Florida interviewees were mostly the equivalent of ‘career’ Specials; Reserves who had volunteered or intended to for the long-term. This suggests that understanding in more detail how the Reserve Unit had developed that different mix of volunteers could provide useful learning into the Special Constabulary context.

Clearly one aspect that differed between the two settings was the attraction of ex-paid law enforcement personnel into volunteer roles, something which was rare in the Special Constabulary context. Identifying how to attract ex-Regular officers into the Special Constabulary could represent an important developmental step for the sustainability of Special Constabulary models over the longer-term, given the potential impact on longevity of volunteer careers, experience and competency, and relationships and reputation with Regular officers.

One interesting aspect of this debate is current changes in UK models for Regular police officer recruitment and training (College of Policing, 2016); there are uncertainties about how these will impact upon those who volunteer as Special Constables prior to applying to the Regular service, but one possible outcome is that it may reduce the flow of ‘Regular-pathway’ Special Constables, and as such have an impact upon overall Special Constabulary recruitment levels, at a point of time when such levels are already at a low point (Britton et al., 2016b)

**Training and Capability**

Issues of training approach and the adequacy of training were highly salient for the volunteer officers in both the UK and Florida contexts. Whilst there were several significant commonalities in their experiences and perspectives towards training, the experiences and perspectives of training and practice development were also distinct between the two sets of interviews, reflecting significant differences in the models for training and practice induction in both settings.

The training model in Florida more closely matched that of regular deputies than was the case for the Special Constables in the UK police force setting. Whilst the curriculum for the Special Constable training was similar to that for new regulars, the extent and coverage of the training was significantly less, training was delivered separately for Special Constables and regulars, and there was much less structure and support at field training stage for Special Constables than for regulars. In the Florida context, initial training was typically delivered together for regular and volunteer deputies with initial training delivery and certification via the Police Academy and subsequent field training being the same for volunteers and regulars, with auxiliary-certified officers receiving fewer blocks of instruction because of their supervised role.

These highlighted differences in models reflected across the interviews. A narrative which was strongly drawn across the Florida interviews was around the equivalency and extent of their training, and that it was undertaken alongside regular Deputies and by the same training staff. This was viewed to be a particular strength of their model, and was felt to underpin a strong level of credibility for the Reserve as a whole. For the Special Constables, there was markedly less self-confidence in the training they had received and stark concerns regarding the adequacy of initial practice training and support. A theme across the Specials interviews was a sense of “being a little bit in limbo and a little bit kind of left to find your own way.” (S16) in terms of the field training phase.

In both settings, the bulk of volunteer officers framed their desires for capability in their volunteer officer roles as being “equivalent”, or as near to equivalent as practicable, to those of ‘regular’ paid police officers or deputies.

“I feel if you’re going to ride with full-timers you’ve got to have their training. You can’t cut corners… The citizens can tell no difference.” (F2)

Consistent with previous research of experiences of Special Constables (Bullock & Leeney, 2014; Gaston & Alexander, 2001; Gill & Mawby, 1990; Leon, 1991, Mirrlees-Black & Byron, 1994; NPIA, 2010) limitations of training and lack of equivalency of training were identified again as highly salient issues for the Specials in this study. What is interesting in this research is the different approach identified in the Florida site. This stimulates thinking with regard to the degree of difference, and the degree of separation, in training between full-time personnel and volunteer officers. There is an argument that perhaps the greater the difference is, the greater the cultural challenges may be between volunteer police officers and their Regular officer colleagues. The Florida training model is interestingly different to the models typically delivered for Special Constables, and raises options to consider for future developments in Special Constable training.

The challenges of the scale of time commitment for the initial training phase were perceived as significant by the volunteer officers in both settings. The reflections in the study of both the Reserve Deputies and Special Constables in respect of the scale of training required prompt interesting considerations of what Bullock and Leeney (2014, p xxx) debate as the challenge of “balance” in approaches to managing Special Constables. Bullock and Leeney, (2014, p.500) argue that “There is a need to balance the operational requirements of the service and the expectations and motivations of volunteers.” One key example of this sits within these debates about the extent and demands of training approaches.

Several (comparatively) older volunteer officers in both the UK and Florida settings felt that the training models were designed for younger people entering law enforcement or policing, and were less geared towards those entering policing later in life. One key aspect of this was the physical elements of training and their mode of delivery, in particular in the Police Academy setting which was seen as having “a military physical training ethos” (F8).

“The programme is really designed around younger people coming into law enforcement as a first career or maybe early on in their career… getting on the mats and rolling around with people.” (F4)

“All we seem to focus on is beep tests [a test of physical fitness in the UK policing setting], personal fitness, defensive training wrestling on a gymnasium floor.” (S12)

Beyond the initial training phases, there were common experiences in both settings of the big impact for the volunteer officers of initially “doing it for real” (S3), which the volunteer officers recognised “any amount of classroom training can never fully prepare you for” (S11).

The initial translation from the primarily classroom-based instructional initial phase of training, through to the field-based, front-line setting was typically experienced as a dramatic moment for the volunteer officers in both settings, and for some individuals looking back also as a traumatic period for them personally.

“You’re unprepared for it, it is shocking and surprising sometimes to encounter some of the things you see out on the street; it’s a whole different world than in a training environment.” (F3)

“My first shift? To be honest, terrifying. Everything went so fast. I hadn’t done any of it before. The officer I was with, she was amazing, but didn’t have much time to explain anything. We attended a nasty fight, a domestic and a serious collision. I’m used to it all now, but that first night was a major shock.” (S3)

These findings are consistent with those in previous research, in particular Whittle (2014), that has identified the challenge of the ‘gap’ between the academy and real-life practice, and the challenges of achieving effective support and structure across the early stages of volunteer police officer careers.

Both volunteer officers in the UK and Florida shared frustrations at what they saw as unfair and uninformed criticisms of the level of training they had received.

“The idea that anyone would think that the Sheriff’s Office just grabs a guy, gives him a gun, and puts him on the street is a fallacy. We’re highly trained guys, I think.” (F4)

In part, these frustrations reflect the considerable importance to volunteer officers in both settings of having the confidence, trust and respect of regular, paid officer colleagues. The identity of being a Constable or Deputy is important to them, and developing relationships with regulars in which their service as a volunteer officer is respected and seen as of value seems highly salient.

“The greatest compliment a reserve can be given by a full-time officer is when you respond to a dangerous call and instead of having a back-up come, the officer you’re riding with will call them off and say ‘I’m a two-man unit, don’t worry about that’.” (F1)

Overall, the volunteer officers in both settings felt frustration that debates in their respective policing organisations about capability and training tended to be framed only in terms of perceived deficits on the volunteer officer side in comparison to regular paid officers. This was felt to insufficiently engage the considerable policing experience of some volunteers, the advantages in terms of building a more reflective practice of having to ‘learn slower’ for part-time volunteers, and the skills and experience volunteers bring from their professional lives.

**Roles, career development and specialisms**

There was an importance attached by volunteer officers in both contexts of being recognised as having authentic front-line officer roles; “seen as proper police officers” (S8), “doing the same job” (F7) and “being the real thing” (S10):

“We don’t do fetes and fairs any more, we used to be jokingly brought in 10, 15 years ago to do those things, we don’t any more, we are literally frontline. You are as much frontline as a Special Constable today as anybody else.” (S8)

In both settings there was something of a tension in interviews between the desire for ‘equivalency’ whilst also recognising the challenges of that, given the part-time nature of volunteer roles and the increasing complexity of policing operational contexts. The Florida context exercised a two-tier approach, with an accompanied patrol ‘Auxiliary Deputy’ model alongside the ‘Reserve [part-time] Deputy’ role, whereas the model in the UK Special Constables setting was that all the volunteer officers would attain ‘independent patrol status’ and, in effect, be able to operate in a ‘regular’-like manner.

“It works for me doing what I do [Auxiliary Deputy], I don’t want to go out on my own… I contribute doing what I do.” (F8)

“I don’t really want it [Independent Patrol Status], it suits me not to be. I don’t feel I’m ready and I don’t have that level of confidence. The problem is I have my Inspector on my back all the time, trying to force me through my portfolio and get me signed off.” (S6)

Volunteer officers in the Florida context felt that there were real advantages in having this differentiated approach, whilst some Specials Constables reflected on what they saw as a ‘one size fits all’, singular model for Special Constables which was insufficiently flexible to differentiate experience, aspirations, capability and pathways through the Special Constabulary.

“Some of us have been in two minutes, others over forty years. Some want to be driving blues-and-twos, many do not. Some want to be in the Regs, others do not. I know lots of people who don’t get IPS [Independent Patrol Status] because they just don’t want it, being independent. The problem is no-one listens or asks them what they do want.” (S19)

“Stop treating every Special as if we are all the same person, we’re actually all very different.” (S8)

“We have such a variety of people, it’s amazing. So many walks of life, professions, ex-military. There is a lot of flexibility in how they run things, and I think that’s a good thing” (F10)

There has been some recognition in the literature of the heterogeneity of Special Constables (cf. Bullock and Leeney, 2014, p. 493), but options for policy and practice in terms of developing greater flexibility and differentiation have been littler explored. The Florida example of having two ‘tiers’ of volunteer police officer may present one blueprint for future consideration. The frustrations evident within this study that Special Constables feel current models of management and development are insufficiently engaging of, and responsive to, differences in their individual needs, experiences and ambitions may well be pointing to an important consideration in terms of addressing concerns over retention.

There were, particularly for the Special Constables, some key concerns in respect of the support and management of longer-serving, ‘independent patrol status’ volunteer officers. Some independent Special Constables talked of “neglect” (S13), “being abandoned” (S17), and of being “left to your own devices” (S14) once they had reached independent status. A Special Constable commented that rather than having had ten years of experience as a Special, it “feels like I have had one year, ten times over” (S7). In contrast, several of the Florida interviews reflect on there being what seems to be a better structure to ongoing development, and ongoing models of support.

“It keeps changing for me, but in a good way, I keep being able to develop new things. We have regular meetings. We have good talks, good supervision, about what I do and don’t want to do.” (F7)

In contrast, there were disappointments for Special Constables at what they perceived as the limited opportunities for further specialisation.

“Lots of us want to specialise but there are just very limited opportunities to do so.” (S14)

In the Florida case study, it was not only evident that there was a more structured approach to supporting and training the experienced Reserve Deputy cohort, but also a more pro-active, encouraging, enabling and funded approach towards Reserves being able to develop into specialist policing functions and teams.

“There are so many things you can do… There is just so much opportunity and so many things you can learn… We’ve got a great skills set within our unit. So our guys are able to go out and do a lot of different things with different people.” (F6)

There has been little engagement across the literature of issues of volunteer police officer ongoing career development and specialisation. There have to date been no published studies with a focus on the experience of volunteer police officers in specialised roles within policing. The findings of this study point to a significant importance being attached by volunteer police officers to their opportunities (or lack of opportunity) to specialise. Models of supporting and managing volunteers which support skills development and specialisation may well associate with improved patterns of retention for longer-serving volunteer officers. Bullock and Leeney (2014, p. 497) use a language of being ‘confined’’ in terms of police organisational thinking of the roles that Special Constables are able to undertake. Britton and Callender (2017) discuss the need to step beyond traditional thinking for the role of Special Constables, recognising and embracing skills, as part of a process of “embracing genuinely transformational perspectives”. Looking across international examples of practice, and learning from innovative approaches in different sites in different countries in respect of roles, may well form an important part of stimulating new and more specialised roles for volunteer police officers in the future.

**Leadership**

For the participants in both the UK and Florida settings, there was a significant focus on issues of leadership. In both contexts, there was an emphasis on “the importance of that leadership right at the top getting what we do and what we can bring to policing” (S9); “your sheriff, or your police chief, will make or break the reserve programme” (F1)**.** In the Sheriff’s Office setting, both the present and previous Sheriff had experience of being in the Reserves. There was less of a ‘direct’ sense of connection of police leaders to the Special Constabulary in the UK case study setting. Perspectives on the extent of strategic leadership and support for volunteer officers differed quite markedly between the two sites.

“I don’t get the impression anyone much cares, to be brutally honest. I don’t think the Special Constabulary is that important to them [senior ranked Regular officers]” (S11)

“The Sheriff himself talks about us and engages with us, and was one of us. I think there is a genuine commitment, a personal commitment.” (F8)

Both settings had a volunteer rank structure, with volunteer officers serving at more senior ranks in supervisory roles. In both settings, the rank titles broadly mirrored the rank structure of the ‘regular’, paid officer structure within the organisation. The Special Constables tended to problematise issues of Specials’ ranks and related issues of support, supervision, tasking, coordination, competence and communication, more than was the case in the Florida Reserve Deputy interviews.

“You’ve got people going into the roles [of Special Sergeant] who’ve literally just got five minutes of service… and you’re thinking, you don’t have the credentials, you don’t have the reputation or the rapport or the respect. The force is devaluing that role because it’s almost dished out to someone, anyone, because they’ve got to have one.” (S12)

“I think we get it about right [in terms of promoted volunteer officers]. There is a lot of mutual respect and experience across that leadership.” (F6)

In both settings, virtually all participants favoured the current model where volunteer officer ranks were not seen as equivalent nor inter-operable to regular, paid officer ranks. The arguments against seeking equality of status and operation tended to hinge around time availability, the ability for a part-time volunteer to develop sufficient training and expertise.

“I don’t agree with the argument that a sergeant is a sergeant, that’s just never gonna work with the time we have, or more accurately don’t have, as part-time volunteers. I think the Special Sergeant role is special, if you pardon the pun. It’s different, leading volunteers is hard, its complicated, there is a lot to do. It doesn’t make me equivalent to a Reg. Sergeant, and I for one wouldn’t want it to be.” (S18)

The opportunity to hold rank was seen in several interviews both of Special Constables and of Reserve Deputies as being of importance for them. It was perceived as “an enjoyable and rewarding part of what I do” (F3) and “one of the things, being promoted, that has made me want to stay.” (S14)

Whilst the limitations of supervision and support models for Special Constables are identified in several of the previous studies of Special Constable experience ((Bullock & Leeney, 2014; Gill & Mawby, 1990; Leon, 1991), there has been only very limited engagement in the literature in respect of approaches to ranks and leadership within volunteer police models (c.f. Leon, 1993). It is clear from this study that being promoted is seen as a positive experience by some of those interviewed in both settings, and should be considered, alongside opportunities to specialise and develop new skills, as a key consideration in terms of supporting longer-term volunteering careers and retention. Some of the interviews, in particular for the Special Constables, also identify problems with current models of volunteer rank structure; this feels like it represents an important but largely neglected aspect of volunteer police officer models that warrants further research.

**DISCUSSION**

This research project represents a single, small and exploratory comparative case study, engaging with the experiences of volunteer officers in only two settings. It is important not to seek to over-generalise from a single organisational setting for volunteer officers in each country. This is the case for the Special Constabulary in the UK force, given variations in practice across Special Constabularies in England and Wales, but it is particularly the case in the United States context, given the much more considerable scale of variation in that national setting.

Looking across the findings, the comparative study identifies three broad areas for further discussion:

*Practical insights and learning*

One of the advantages of studying across different and distinct sites is the insight that can be generated by exploring different practices in different contexts. This is particularly the case from an international comparative research project within a research field, such as volunteer police officer research, where the bulk of fieldwork-based published studies to date has been undertaken within just one national setting.

The study has found markedly different approaches to initial training, and to field training and competency training, between the two sites. The US setting had a training model that had greater ‘equivalence’ to that of Regular officers, with initial training that closely mirrored that of Regular Deputies, that involved joint training of Reserves alongside Regular Deputies, and that also involved field training and practice development which was more structured, involved more active supervision, and again which closely reflected the provision for Regular officers. There could be merit in Special Constabulary training and development models in the UK considering the implementation of some of these aspects of the Florida setting.

There was also a more positive, structured, enabling and encouraging approach to skills development and specialisation for the US Reserve Deputies than was the case for the UK Special Constables in the study. Lessons could be learnt from the practical application of a much greater degree of specialisation in the Florida setting, particularly given the enthusiasm expressed by Special Constables in this study to specialise.

*Cultural challenges*

Cultural challenges have long been identified as having significance in shaping the experience of Special Constables in UK settings (Bullock & Leeney, 2014; Gaston & Alexander, 2001; Gill & Mawby, 1990; Leon, 1991, Mirrlees-Black & Byron, 1994; NPIA, 2010, Whittle, 2014). What is interesting within this study, with respect to these long-recognised cultural contexts, are the similarities in cultural challenges that the volunteer police officer reflected upon within the two sites, which transcend the very different and distant two local contexts.

Similar themes emerge across interviews in both the US and UK settings in terms of Regular officers often not understanding the motivations of their volunteer colleagues, and sometimes not spending the time to ‘get to know them’. Across both sites, despite the evident differences in context, a tendency towards cultural negativity was experienced within both policing organisations towards volunteer police officers. This tends to foreground and articulate what is seen as different and lesser about volunteer officers’ training, capability and contribution, such as perceptions of being less trained or experienced, but is largely silent on more appreciative aspects of difference. Aspects such as bringing experience from outside of policing, volunteers learning more slowly allowing more space for reflective learning, and that in many cases volunteers themselves have a considerable depth of policing experience, are not felt to receive the appreciative attention that they deserve.

These tendencies towards a cultural negativity in organisational discourses in respect of volunteer police officers perhaps reflect a collision between the concept of volunteer officers one the one hand, and of a “Regular-centric” (Britton & Callender, 2017, 150) dominant cultural typology of what it means to be a police officer on the other (Cosgrove, 2016). Despite a prominent international drive for pluralisation of policing that places greater emphasis and importance on volunteers, significant fractures remain within the extended policing family that suggest the need for significant further cultural attention. These findings suggest a need for an organisational theory of change through which future ambitions for police volunteerism are explicitly defined alongside the related need for cultural change.

*Leadership*

In both the US and UK settings, there was a strong emphasis across the interviews on the importance of leadership, and much related discussion both of rank structures and leadership models within the volunteer police officer model, and also about how strategic leaders within the policing organisation engaged with the Reserve Unit or the Special Constabulary. This is an aspect almost entirely absent from the research literature on volunteer policing (a notable exception being Leon, 1993).

The importance that the volunteer police officers within this study attached to rank arrangements suggests that this is an aspect which merits both more policy and research attention. One aspect that is drawn out within this study, in both sites, is that some longer-serving volunteer police officers experience having a ranked, leadership role as a key aspect of their fulfilment in role, and associated with their decisions to continue volunteering. This is an aspect which is typically not engaged in debates about volunteer police officer retention. There is little research into ‘what works’ in respect of rank arrangements for volunteer officers, or specifically into the experiences of those occupying promoted roles as volunteers; this could be a useful focus for future research.

The importance of leadership engagement from senior officers is also seen across the interviews for both sites. Again, strategic culture and strategic leadership in respect of volunteer police officers has not been a particular focus of previous studies of volunteer police officers and could represent an area for development of the research field in the future. In policy and practice terms, it is clear that volunteer police officers are sensitive to what they perceive as the engagement and interest, or otherwise, of senior leaders. How such visible leadership is developed and articulated more effectively in the future is thus a question that deserves further consideration.

**CONCLUSION**

This small-scale comparative research project points to the potential value of undertaking comparative research work with volunteer police officers (Albrecht, 2017; Bullock, 2017, Wolf & Jones, 2018). The comparative case study findings also point to the value of research which explores in-depth the experiences of volunteer police officers, in particular in contexts beyond the primary research focus to date of Special Constabularies in the UK. What is striking, looking across the literature engaging the experiences of volunteer police officers (chiefly Special Constables), is the consistency of findings over a lengthy period of time. In part, what this reflects is a repeated identifying through research of aspects which are problematic, but little effect from the growing research-base of initiating change in policy and practice to address those issues. International comparative research can be one means to help unlock a more practical, impactful research model, by identifying practical differences, solutions and innovation across different settings.

This research calls for a practical focus on learning from the two international sites explored, particularly in terms of training and specialisation. It calls for a recognition and engagement of the underlying cultural negativity which risks constraining the future growth of police voluntarism. And it identifies the need for better understandings, and for a related development and strengthening, of leadership models across volunteer police officers.

**References**

Albrecht, J. (2017). Preface. In J. Albrecht (Ed.), *Police Reserves and Volunteers: Enhancing Organizational Effectiveness and Public Trust* (pp. xiii-xiv)*.* Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.

Berg, B. & Doerner, W. (1988). Volunteer police officers: An unexamined personnel dimension in law enforcement. *American Journal of Police, 7 (1)*, 81-89.

Borland-Jones & Wolf (2017). “Special” Kind of Policing: Volunteer Policing in England and Wales. In Albrecht, J. (Ed.), *Police Reserves and Volunteers: Enhancing Organizational Effectiveness and Public Trust* (pp. 205-212)*.* Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.

Britton, I. & Callender, M. (2017). Strategic direction and leadership of the special constabulary. In K. Bullock & A. Millie (Eds.), *The Special Constabulary: Historical Context, International Comparisons and Contemporary Themes* (149-168). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Britton, I., Callender, M. & Cole, S. (2016a). *National Survey of Special Constables and Police Support Volunteers: Initial Findings Report.* Northampton, UK: Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice, University of Northampton.

Britton, I. & Knight, L. (2016). *2030 Vision: Specials and Police Support Volunteers - At the Heart of Policing Reform.* Northampton, UK: Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice, University of Northampton.

Britton, I., Knight, L. & Moloney, D. (2016b). *Citizens in Policing National Benchmarking Exercise: Phase One Report.* Northampton, UK: Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice, University of Northampton.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3 (2)*, 77-101.

Brudney, J. & Kellough, J. (2000). Volunteers in state government: Involvement, management, and benefits. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 29(1)*, 111-130.

Bullock, K. (2014). *Citizens, Community and Crime Control.* Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bullock, K. (2017). International perspectives: a comparison of reserve and auxiliary programmes in the United Kingdom and the United States. In K. Bullock & A. Millie (Eds.) *The Special Constabulary: Historical Context, International Comparisons and Contemporary Themes*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Bullock, K. & Leeney, D. (2014). On matters of balance: an examination of the deployment, motivation and management of the Special Constabulary. *Police and Society: An International Journal of Research and Policy, 26(5)*, 483-502.

College of Policing (2016). *Proposals for qualifications in policing*. Retrieved from*.* <http://www.college.police.uk/News/College-news/Pages/peqf_consultation.aspx>

Crawford, A. (2008). Plural Policing in the UK: Policing Beyond the Police. In T. Newburn (Ed.), *Handbook of Policing, 2nd Edition* (147-181). Devon, UK: Willan Publishing.

Cosgrove, F. (2016). ‘I wannabe a copper’: the engagement of Police Community Support Officers with the dominant police occupational culture*, Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 16(1), 119-138.

Crossley, M., & Watson, K. (2003). *Comparative and International Research in Education: Globalisation, Context and Difference*. London: Routledge.

Dobrin, A. (2017). State-level estimates of the number of volunteer police in the United States. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, 19, 81-88.

Dobrin, A. (2015). Volunteer Police: History, benefits, costs and current descriptions. *Security Journal*, 8/3/15.

Dobrin, A. & Wolf, R. (2016). What is known and not known about volunteer policing in the United States. *International Journal of Police Science, 18(3)*, 220–227.

Dobrin, A., Wolf, R., Pepper, I. & Fallik, S. (2017). Volunteer Police: What predicts confidence in training? *Criminal Justice Policy Review.*

Friedman, W. (1998). Volunteerism and the Decline of Violent Crime. *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, 88 (4)*, 1453-1474.

Gaston, K. & Alexander, J. (2001). Effective organisation and management of public sector volunteer workers: Police Special Constables. *The International Journal of Public Sector Management, 14(1)*, 59-74.

Gill, M. & Mawby, R. (1990). *A Special Constable: A Study of the Police Reserve*. Aldershot, UK: Avebury.

Gravelle, J. & Rogers, C. (2009). Your country needs you! The economic viability of volunteers in the police. *Safer Communities, 8*, 34-38.

Greenberg, M. (1984)*. Auxiliary police: the citizen’s approach to public safety*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Greenberg, M. (2015). *American Volunteer Police: Mobilizing for Security*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.

Hargreaves, J., Husband, H., & Linehan, C. (2018). *Police workforce: England and Wales, 31 March 2018*. Retrieved from <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/726401/hosb1118-police-workforce.pdf>

Hilal, S. & Olsen, D. (2010). Police reserve officers: Essential in today’s economy and an opportunity to increase diversity in the law enforcement profession. *Police Chief, 77(10)*, 92-94.

Hieke, G. (2017). General perspectives on volunteer motivation within the special constabulary. In K. Bullock & A. Millie (Eds.) *The Special Constabulary: Historical Context, International Comparisons and Contemporary Themes*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Johnston, L. (2003). From ‘Pluralisation’ to the ‘Police Extended Family’: Discourses on the Governance of Community Policing in Britain. *International Journal of the Sociology of Law, 31,* 185-204.

Leon, C. (1991). *Special Constables: an historical and contemporary survey*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Bath, UK: Bath University.

Leon, C. (1993). "Rank Outsiders. *Policing*, *9(4).*

Lister, S. (2006). Painting the Town Blue: The Pluralisation of Policing. *Criminal Justice Matters, 63 (1)*, 22-23.

Loader, I. (2000). Plural Policing and Democratic Governance. *Social Legal Studies, 9 (3)*, 323-345.

Mirrlees-Black, C. & Byron, C. (1994). *Special Considerations: Issues for the Management and Organisation of the Volunteer Police.* London, UK: Home Office.

Morgan, R. (2012). Crime and Justice in the ‘Big Society’. *Criminology & Criminal Justice, 12 (5)*, 463-481.

NPIA (2010). *Special Constabulary Recruitment, Marketing and Retention Surveys: Report of Findings.* London, UK: NPIA.

Pepper, I. (2014) Do Part-time voluntary Police Officers Aspire to be Regular Police Officers?. *Police Journal, 87(2)*, 105-113.

Pepper, I. & Wolf, R. (2015). Volunteering to serve: An international comparison of volunteer police officers in a UK North East Police Force and a US Florida Sheriff’s Office. *The Police Journal: Theories, Practice and Principles, 88(3)*, 209-219.

President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing (2015). Final Report of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing. Washington, DC.

Ren, L., Zhao, J., Lovrich, N. & Gaffney, M. (2006). Participation in Community Crime Prevention: Who Volunteers for Police Work? *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management, 29 (3)*, 464-481.

Seth, R. (1961). *The Specials: the Story of the Special Constabulary in England, Wales and Scotland.* London, UK: Victor Gollancz.

Steden, R., van Caem, R. & Boutellier, H. (2011). The ‘Hidden Strength’ of Active Citizenship: The Involvement of Local Residents in Public Safety Projects. *Criminology & Criminal Justice, 11 (5)*, 433-450.

Whittle, J. (2014). The Rise of the Special Constabulary: are forces getting value for money from their voluntary officers? An empirical study in Avon and Somerset Police. *The Police Journal, 87 (1)*, 29–40.

Wolf, R., Albrecht, J., & Dobrin, A. (2015a). Reserve Policing in the United States: Citizens Volunteering for Public Service. *The Police Chief, 82(10)*, 38-47.

Wolf, R., Holmes, S. & Jones, C. (2015b). Utilization and satisfaction of volunteer law enforcement officers in the office of the American sheriff: an exploratory nationwide survey. *Police Practice and Research*, *17(5)*, 448-462.

Wolf, R., Pepper, I. & Dobrin, A. (2016) ‘An exploratory international comparison of professional confidence in volunteer policing’. *The Police Journal: Theory, Practice and Principles*, 88(3), 209–219.

Wolf, R., & Jones, C. (2018). *Volunteer Police, Choosing to Serve: Exploring, Comparing and Assessing Volunteer Policing in the United States and the United Kingdom.* New York, NY: Routledge.