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Professionalisation Journeys: Institutions and Agents in Change

INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT AND PURPOSE

This developmental paper sets out to learn from occupations that have shifted from craft to research-evidence based professions in order to draw on understand the interactions which can take place between institutions and agents theoretically, and secondly to apply that learning to a profession which is aiming to transform itself in this way: policing, as it aims to meet the aspirations of a national ambition: Policing Vision 2025 (NPCC, 2016).

This developmental paper is organised in five main sections; first, the aims of the study and the research questions that guided this research; second, the theoretical underpinnings; third, the research design and methodology of the research, fourth, a brief presentation of the findings; and finally, reflections on the theory and practice of professionalisation journeys relevant to policing.

THE RESEARCH AIMS

This developmental paper focuses on two professions that have undergone transforming changes in the last two decades: paramedics and nursing. Additionally, it draws on the evidence from other professions (teaching and law) which have shifted from craft-based to research evidence based. We undertook a series of 10 interviews with elite actors in relevant professions, with the aims of:

- learning from other relevant occupations' trajectories and participants' experiences and perceptions regarding the core leverages and main challenges in the professionalising process so as to help the research team locate potential focuses in the research within the police;
- transferring knowledge about good and promising practices from other professions to the police to facilitate implementation of organisational changes across forces.

Drawing upon our existing knowledge of professionalisation in relevant occupations and of the acute issues policing faces, we sought in-depth exploration with two research questions:

1. How was the process of professionalisation initiated, proceeded and matured? What were the milestones and key phases of evolution? What were the main positive and unexpected outcomes?
2. Along this journey what were the driving forces and enabling elements? What were the pitfalls, conflicts or restraining forces and how were they managed?

Theoretical underpinnings

This developmental paper draws on several key frameworks for understanding change and development in L and D functions in policing.

First, through a substantial literature review, Green and Gate's (2014) integrated framework of 'key characteristics of professions' (see figure 1) emerged as a pertinent and comprehensive tool to underpin and examine the current status of a profession. According to Green and Gate (2014) for an occupation to transform into a profession, the key elements are: Self-organising membership, registration and system of rewards; Social movement, socialisation into the profession, 'exclusive' membership; Autonomy; Service to the community; Self-regulated, Code of ethics and accountability; Higher education, lifelong commitment to learning; creating a relevant Body of knowledge. In this study, the seven characteristics outlined in this framework resonated with what stakeholders deem as essential to occupations over time to establish themselves as proper professions.



Figure 1 Framework of key characteristics of professions (Green and Gates, 2014)

Second, our investigation into achieving these characteristics comes from the macro institutional level and the local organisation level. Firstly, we follow Nigma and Dokko (2018)'s study of profession emergence by focusing on the two broad dimensions core to the institutional change. Those are organisational and instrumental infrastructure and a community with distinctive identity. Therefore, we pay particular attention to what infrastructure has been put into place and how the occupational community changed alongside the professionalisation process such as regulatory bodies and relationship with higher education institutions.

Third, there is the literature on organizational design, organizational change and the processes of organization development. We use Hartley's (2002) model of organisational change and development (see figure 2), which aided us systematically to capture the key challenges of bringing about organisational and cultural change encountered by organisations in the studied professions. Additionally, we draw on Hartley and Rashman (2002) which is a synthesis of the academic literature on organization development through design, with four

key elements: Strategic aims and purpose (goals for performance, leadership approach); Culture of the organisation (norms, values, styles, behaviours); Capacity and capabilities of the organization (skills, critical tasks); Formal organisational arrangements (internal structure of units, work tasks and work flows, physical location, procedures, rewards. Tushman and O'Reilly (1996), Golembiewski et al (1976), Cameron and Green (2015) are also valuable in identifying organizational structures and processes which may affect readiness to change and processes of change.

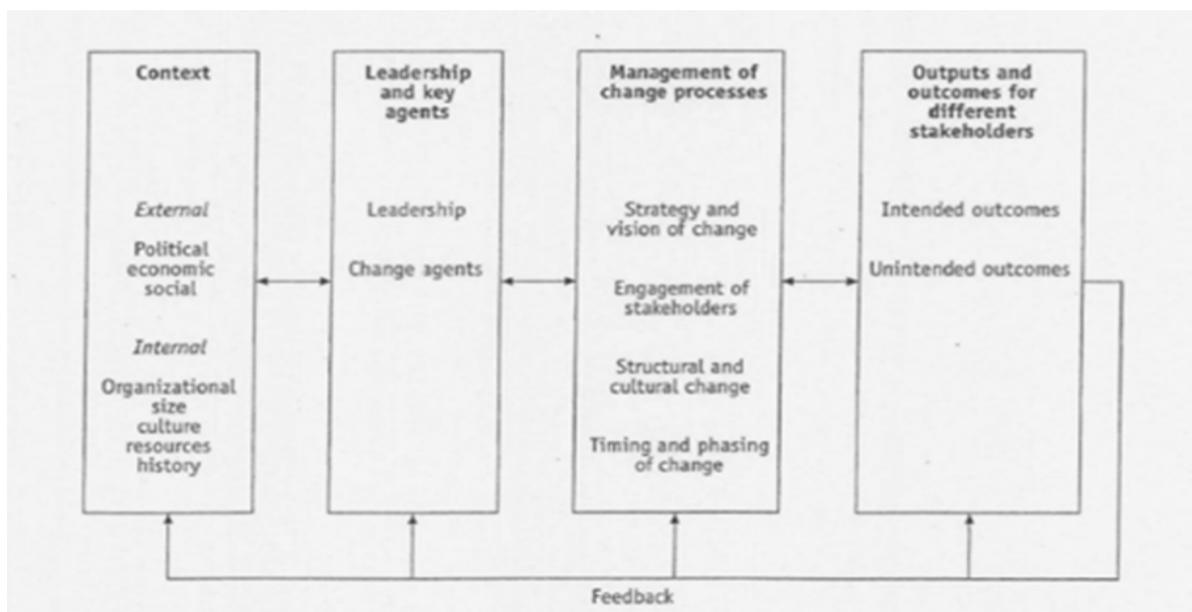


Figure 2 Framework of organisational change and development (Hartley, 2002)

Fourth, we draw on the literature about sharing good and promising practice as a way to achieve innovation and improvement in public services (Hartley and Rashman, 2018; Hartley and Benington, 2006; Crossan et al, 2011).

Research design, methods, methodology

This research draws on 10 elite interviews with individuals who had been widely recognised as influential in the professionalisation of the two focal professions. A recent literature review (Fernie et al, 2019) shows that most professions have a tripartite governance structure, including a regulatory body that regulates and oversees the conduct of the profession at a national level; a professional body that protects the interests of the professionals and supports the development of the profession; and organisations which

employ professionals (i.e. employers). In addition to these stakeholders, trade unions also play a crucial role in the governance of the profession and represent the perspective of individual professionals whose career and life could be directly influenced by professionalisation. With this in mind, we strived to include as many different roles in the professions as possible in our interview study. Ultimately, we interviewed 10 key actors from 5 different professions.

We employed a semi-structured interview strategy, using a bank of interview questions to guide topics, but at the same time encouraging participants to go deeper on particularly interesting points emerging from the interview. The interviews lasted from 80 minutes to 150 minutes and were all audio recorded with the consent of the participants. All the participants' identities from the interviews are kept confidential and anonymous. All the recorded interviews were transcribed and analysed systematically.

In addition, we undertook documentary analysis of policy documents to complement the interview study. Finally, this developmental paper builds greatly on the evidence collected in (Ferne et al, 2018)'s systematic literature review of different professionalisation aspects.

FINDINGS

This developmental paper is constituted by in-depth investigations of two different professions along with an integrative discussion of the professionalisation journeys and the influence of institutions and agents. To respond to research question 1, we analysed the data thematically and used the analysis to draw out a map of the professionalisation process for two professions, which teases out the main temporal phases and the primary driving/enabling forces and the restraining/conflicting forces in every phase of development (figure 3 and 4).

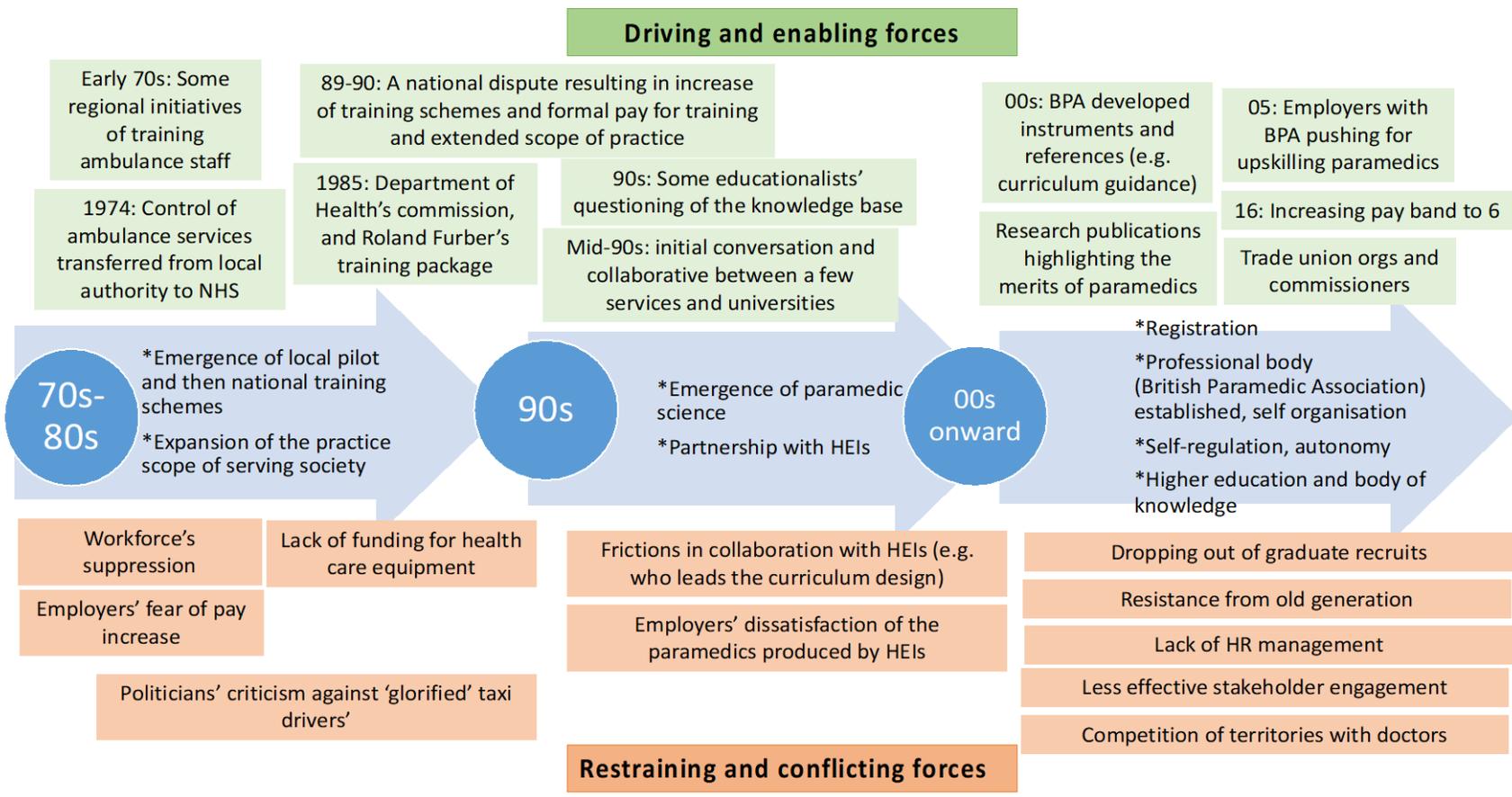


Figure 3 Map of professionalisation of paramedics

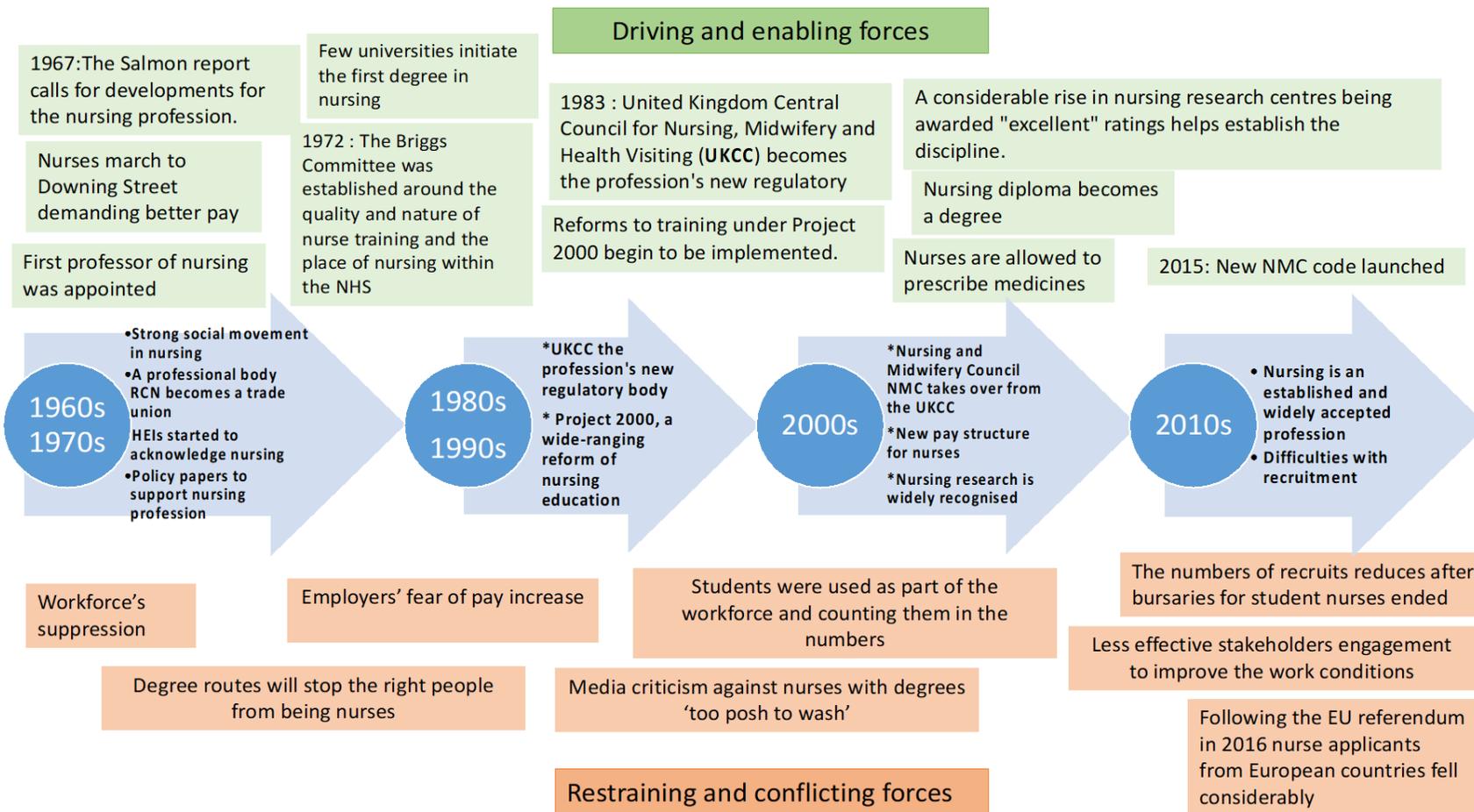


Figure 4 Map of professionalisation of Nursing

Reflecting on both journeys of professionalisation from Paramedics and nursing, a number of analytical insights can be drawn:

Clear institutional roles for different key bodies involved directly in guiding the professionalisation process: both paramedics and nursing adopted tripartite institutional structure for their professions:

- The professional body that leads and synchronises the effort for professionalisation and protects the interests of the profession and the professionals in the process.
- The regulatory body that set the rules of practice and held the professionals accountable for their practice to protect the public and optimise their outcomes.
- The employment bodies that plays a crucial role in realising the professionalisation and maximise the benefits for them as employers and for the public.

The dynamic engagement between these three bodies has served positively the process of professionalisation because it has guaranteed a balanced perspective of what are the key outcomes of the professionalisation.

Clear definition of career pathways effectively encourages the workforce to look favourably towards their future career and also motivates them to engage in CPD. In both paramedicine and nursing, these pathways also set out the scope of practice and qualifications required, providing a concrete definition of what the profession entails and what body of knowledge is involved. The pathways also show that collaboration with HEIs enabled an evidence base, 'new knowledge' that drives the development of CPD.

Standardisation and quality control of practical placements. The role of **practice educators** is well defined (College of paramedics, 2017, pp.30-31) and they are accountable for 'helping the student **understand** their learned knowledge in practice'. All paramedic practice educators are required to have undertaken, or be working towards, a Level 6 practice qualification. In addition, the placement sessions are overseen by **link officers** (from both the employer and HEIs), who have to make sure the training and assessment are performed in a professional and ethical way. This learning point is also stressed by the participants from nursing when reflecting on the role of the **clinical placement facilitator**. The Nursing and

Midwifery Council insists that every placement has what they call “an audit” where they assess the placement’s suitability as an educational environment. The clinical placement facilitators are part of that process. They are responsible for keeping a record of how many supervisors are available to support the students’ learning, and that they know that students are going to be managed properly.

Extended infancy programme. In the 2 years after graduation, paramedics spend up to 24 months working under mentorship, with 300 hours’ work with more experienced paramedics and a reduced workload. At the 2 year point they move to a higher pay band and take on the full role.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This research examined the key elements of professionalisation journeys of both paramedics and nursing including contexts of professionalisation, stockholders and their roles, benefits and challenges of professionalisation, and good practices learned from these journeys. Drawing on all these elements, we are concluding this developmental paper with a summary of the analytical insights institutionally and organisationally.

Institutional change

The professionalisation journeys of paramedics and nursing followed a pattern of spiral progression, going between phases of disparate exploratory initiatives at a regional level, and broader integration and national standardisation. For the former phase, a degree of flexibility is needed. For instance, the moderate level of control over training models allowed the London Ambulance Service (LAS) to initiate their partnership with Hertfordshire University and carry out the first HEI - provided training. For the latter phase, effective tools and standards are needed. It appears that a degree of balance between room for adaptive leeway and innovation in governance, and robust blueprints and standardisation, has been helpful to these professions institutionally.

Changes at organisational level

Professionalisation is not only about establishing infrastructure at an institutional level, such as establishing the professional body and raising entry thresholds for educational qualifications. It is equally, if not more important, to adjust to the advanced changes at organisational and operational levels. The gradual process of the new graduate workforce replacing the existing generations also shifts the characteristics of the workforce, workplace culture and industrial relations. This requires organisational arrangements, including HR management approaches and appropriate mechanisms of control, performance measurement and appraisal, to be relevant for changes in the workforce features. This is especially important for demanding occupations like paramedics and nursing, because degree holders, although interested in joining these occupations, may not always expect the level of workload intensity and all kinds of pressure in the job. In paramedics' professionalisation, an ad hoc lesson is their delayed recognition of the importance of retaining new talent and giving them technical as well as emotional support. Looking at the nursing example, great attention was given to engage and support the existing workforce at the time of transformation. Evidence collected for this developmental paper suggested the importance to provide information to the existing workforce, give them a voice in the process of professionalisation, get them to understand change coming, and what it would mean for them.

The evidence collected from this study strongly supports a better outcome for the public as a result for professionalisation. This translated, for instance, in significantly less mortality rates for patients cared for by graduated nurses (Aiken et al, 2014) and significant increase of treatment conducted by paramedics out of hospitals. It is anticipated that the professionalisation for policing means better safety and security outcomes for public. Moreover, this research adds to the literature about change and neo-institutionalism. Although, the role of institutions is well-defined, the elite interviews show that particular agents of change did make a local difference which spread over the organisation and were able to influence national policy.

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