

## INTRODUCTION

The research project « Savoir et savoir-faire des policiers et des magistrats en matière de drogues » (Knowledge and know-how of police and magistrates in drug-related questions), ordered by the Federal Science Policy Office, was carried out in 2005 by the criminology services of Universiteit Gent (Professors P. Ponsaers et B. De Ruyver) and Université de Liège (Professors A. Lemaître, M. Born and C. Macquet). It was done in the context of the research programme to support the Federal Policy Note on the problem of drugs.

This research gave an opportunity to do a thorough study of the articulation between theory and practice, training and the field. In the daily life of various professionals, knowledge and know-how are often mixed but no one knows the exact proportion of the combination – it is not even certain that those proportions could be determined. The two concepts are often mentioned, often opposed, but too rarely are they integrated. Here they are the heart of our study. We will apply them to the problem of drug addiction. We will be considering training of various agents, police and magistrates, and the articulation of training with the practice of those professionals in drug-related questions.

## HYPOTHESIS

A recent research project that we have done highlighted the need for an integrated policy on drugs<sup>1</sup>. This integrated vision of the relationship between the various dimensions of the problem (security, welfare, public health) still seem insufficiently present in the practice of police and magistrates. Consequently, our hypothesis in this study was that socialization in the field prevailed over more theoretical and more formal training given in schools. To test this hypothesis, we also wanted to understand to what extent the training programmes offered to police and magistrates correspond to the implementation of an integrated approach, and how they could contribute to bringing practice and policy closer to this approach. In other words, we wanted to look at the capacity or the power of training to change or adapt current practice.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology we chose for this research project enables us to envisage the problem from as broad a standpoint as possible. In the first quantitative phase of the project, we used written questions, sent to a large sample of policemen and magistrates in training at the time of the survey or recently operational. Because we went directly to the various police academies in the country, we were able to question all of the cadet inspectors in training at the time of the survey. Out of 822 cadets in basic training, 754 filled in the questionnaire (response rate: 91.7%). We also sent out a questionnaire by post to a series of police inspectors who had been working for several years. The response rate for the second category of respondents (638 persons were asked to return the questionnaire to us) was 61.3 %. Finally, we also sent a questionnaire to a large sample of young magistrates and judicial trainees. Out of 264 persons surveyed, 151 returned the questionnaire after filling it out (response rate: 57.2%).

The questionnaire considered three main themes: (1) the respondents' attitude with regard to the problem of drug addiction, (2) their general opinion with regard to the training they received and their particular opinion as concerns training on drugs, and (3) self-assessment of skills in daily work. A few variables of a general nature (age, sex, level of instruction ...) rounded off the questionnaire.

---

<sup>1</sup> PONSAERS P., DE RUYVER B., LEMAITRE A., MACQUET C., PIETERS T., VAEREWYCK W., FINCOEUR B., VANDER LAENEN F., *Nuisances liées à la drogue dans le contexte local de huit communes wallonnes et flamandes*, final report, Politique scientifique fédérale, 2004.

In the second phase of the research project which was qualitative, a series of **focus groups** were organized (six on the police training, two on training of magistrates) with a few members of the police or judicial institutions active in or particularly aware of the drug issue. The first phase was meant to obtain a broad vision of the appreciation of training programmes, skills identified by the respondents themselves, and the respondents' attitude with regard to the drug question; the objective of the second phase was to put the initial results in perspective, to have a series of professionals react to those results and, at the bottom line, to make a few recommendations on how to fill the gaps or correct the paths where needed.

The high level of participation in this survey is proof of the interest in this theme that clearly does not leave anyone indifferent. Throughout the study, the research teams observed that there is a whole field with multifaceted potential behind the formal material in the training programme. We received many expressions of interest from a good number of people contacted, which consequently shows a real desire to improve the quality of the training programme within the police and judicial institutions.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

For a complete description of the results of the study, we refer interested readers to the final report of the project. This summary simply mentions the main conclusions and recommendations presented in the report.

### **Satisfaction with regard to the training programme on the whole, dissatisfaction with the part of the programme devoted to the problem of drugs.**

An analysis of the quantitative results indicates that respondents on the whole are generally satisfied with the overall training programme. A majority of both the cadet police officers in training at the time of the survey and the young magistrates and judicial trainees considered that the training programme is adapted to current society and they had a positive judgment of the work of the trainers and teachers they met. They are more critical, however, with regard to the section on drugs in the training programme they attended. Participants agreed in expressing their discontent, considering that they are insufficiently trained with regard to the drug problem and problems that may arise in this context.

The group of inspectors who have been on the job for several years, on the other hand, adopted a slightly different position. They were also critical of the part of the training programme devoted to drugs, but they referred to dissatisfaction with the police training programme on the whole. On trying to explain this factual observation, the organization of the qualitative phase enabled us to advance that experience acquired makes them more aware of their own weaknesses. Since they have a chance to take an objective look from a distance, they are better able to discern and analyze shortcomings that the training programme did not solve.

In their assessment of the training programme pertaining to drugs, inspectors in the field since 2002 essentially identify weak points with regard to very concrete problems, like the ones they run into in practice. The reason for their dissatisfaction comes from direct contact they had with drug users and the fact that they do not have the appropriate skills in situations they encounter: knowing how to draft a report, knowing how to deal with a user, carrying out a search, recognizing the products. Here, we can also mention a lack of knowledge of specific legislation on the question, due in part to versatility and in part to a lack of clarity of the lawmaker or the government: professionals are looking for benchmarks to better know where they stand. As we mention below, the importance of working with several disciplines really comes to the fore only when these considerations are taken into account.

**There seem to be very different representations of the phenomenon in the research population.**

The analysis of the results showed that there is not a consensus among respondents in the representations of the phenomenon of drugs, whether for members of the police force or of the judicial system. No approach seems to prevail between the perceptions of the problems in terms of security, welfare or public health. If a problem covers several facets, and it is no doubt illusory to think that a single approach can suffice to cope with a particularly complex theme, when we asked respondents which is their primary vision, we observed that no element seems to stand out on a national scale.

On examining the various subgroups that make up a sample, we do see, however, a series of elements of differentiation. Several explanations can be given for this.

Within the sample of policeman, we observed that the group of inspectors who had been working for several years was more inclined to envisage drug addiction from the standpoint of security, whereas their future colleagues, in training at the time of the research project, seemed more to consider it from the standpoint of welfare. The aspect concerning public health, conversely, is emphasized less in the various subgroups.

Various explanations can be imagined. First of all, the culture that prevails in the police organization must be mentioned. This tends, indeed, to frequently redefine social problems as problems of insecurity. We also note the fact that contacts between the police and drug users generally take place in problematic situations of conflict, and this reinforces the phenomenon referred to above.

If we look at the results of the questionnaires sent in by the young magistrates and judicial trainees, we see that they differ from those obtained from the respondents on the police force. Major differences appear, among other things, in the responses from the north and the south of the country. The former consider the problem from the standpoint of welfare ('welzijnsprobleem') first of all, whereas the latter seem to lean more toward a public health approach. French-speaking magistrates are also closer to a vision of security than are their Flemish colleagues.

There are also divergencies by community between the members the judicial institution and their approach to the drug problem. Magistrates from the south of the country are more sensitive to the idea of harm reduction, consequently considering to a large extent that is preferable to reduce the damaging consequence of the use of drugs rather than consumption itself. Those from the north of the country reason differently, giving priority to a traditional approach to drug use and considering the problem as a chain, the links of which are prevention, social aid and, at the end of the line, repression: in this context, it is preferable to intervene preventively rather than wait for the possible consequences of abuse. From this standpoint, the Flemish magistrates prove more critical of their French-speaking colleagues.

The same comments can be made as concerns the results for the police. Three Walloon respondents out of four declare that is preferable to consider the consequences of use rather than the usage itself. Conversely, nearly half of the respondents from Flanders seemed convinced of the contrary.

### **The need for a multidisciplinary approach**

If only a few ideas are to be retained from this study, the need for a multidisciplinary approach expressed by the respondents would certainly be at the top of the list. The survey indeed shows that the persons interviewed want to break down barriers between disciplines and move towards as broad an approach as possible to the phenomenon, taking into account its many dimensions. Consequently, a purely judicial or purely police approach to the problem in the training course does not suffice; most of the people surveyed argue on the contrary for combination of a judicial, psychology, sociological, medical, political approaches. The policemen, and even more particularly the magistrates, testify to their desire to broaden the traditional field of vision. In addition to the usual skills associated with their respective practices (knowledge of legislation, for example), respondents wanted to be more and better trained in managing conflict, stress management, knowledge of products and their effects,

reception of users, Belgian drug policy, etc. The (future) policemen and magistrates surveyed also expressed a desire to encounter professionals from various horizons in their training programme. Magistrates, policeman, doctors, social workers, even (ex-) drug users themselves would be asked to comment on the question in their own light, and all the contributions would converge to achieve an integrated approach that was very often preferred.

This desire to see a broader training programme should be relativized somewhat as we look into the theme of drugs from a multidisciplinary standpoint. The cadet inspectors in fact showed particular interest in learning about very practical aspects during training on drug-related questions, which are meant to give them the most important skills so they can intervene adequately in the field in the first months of work. These skills correspond to those that they feel are essential: recognizing the products, doing a search, writing a report, etc. This also corresponds to what is expected of a young inspector in practice: being able to cope with various situations that arise, making the first observations and, specifically in drug-related questions, being able to recognize the products found.

As they gain years of experience in the field, there are people who demand a more practical police training programme. Interest in working with multiple disciplines is less present and, for the inspectors, we see a narrowing of the visual field and a less multidisciplinary approach. Given their frequent contacts with the drug addiction problem, inspectors are less attentive to the social context of the phenomenon and are particularly interested in purely police aspects dealing with their repression. Consequently, the police respondents who had a few years of experience particularly want to know more about these aspects and they want the training course to develop them. Interest initially shown in a multidisciplinary approach declines.

The development of each of the approaches referred to above in training on drug-related problems and the intervention of professionals belonging to a variety of complementary disciplines would clearly contribute to setting up training that is more geared to society.

### **The respondents feel that their trade is learned in the field above all, but the training still maintains a large role**

The current training system for policemen and judges is categorized by the principle of alternate training. Knowledge, aptitudes and attitudes are therefore developed by alternating between a more theoretical period spent in the various academies and a more practical phase of internships which are meant to facilitate the application of these skills in the field. This agrees with the basic hypothesis made in the first pages of the report.

A very large majority of the people surveyed in the context of the study considered, as we have seen, that the trade is learned particularly in the field. This seems to confirm the hypothesis that "hands-on" learning takes precedence over additional training in acquiring the various professional skills.

This observation holds both for the police and for the magistrates, but nevertheless it must be interpreted prudently. Can we conclude that some are suspicious of theoretical training? Can the simple fact of considering that a profession is mastered first and foremost in practice, be understood as questioning the very utility of prior training? This is not at all certain. An analysis of other questions indicates, in fact, that despite the preeminence of experience and real situations, and despite the gaps that were identified, training remains an important source of acquiring professional skills in the eyes of the persons surveyed

An additional proof of the importance given to training lies in the desire expressed by the respondents to continue training in the months to come. For participants in the survey, a continuous training programme is considered to be a privileged means of achieving this. Still, this is not the only

possibility envisaged. Personal research (reading, Internet) or participation in days of study or conferences represent alternative possibilities for increasing skills.

In any case, an important place in training policemen and magistrates is reserved for internships, thus recognizing the need to create bridges between theory and practice. The qualitative phase of this study stressed the responsibility entrusted to people in charge of following up and accompanying cadets and trainees, respectively called mentors and supervising teachers. The importance of internships and the role of the mentors is moreover attested by the existence of specific training for mentors within the police organization, acknowledged by a certificate awarded to them and which is required to exercise this function. Training of judges is moving in this direction – a mandatory training course for which a certificate is given is now required for anyone who wants to act as a supervising teacher.

On the other hand, giving more responsibilities to supervising teachers and to mentors means that more possibilities must be created to enable these people to properly accompany the judicial and police trainees. So enough time and room for this kind of accompaniment must be foreseen. In other words, teacher training corresponds to a continuing education approach.

Despite the desire to emphasize practical aspects during training, respondents demand more practice. The respondents themselves strongly request greater use of role-playing and would like to have more practice in the training course. More than four people out of five, both in the police and in the judiciary, considered that the training they received is geared more to theory.

Role-playing is a way of transferring theoretical knowledge into practice. Training of police in Quebec gives a strong example of the use of this kind of learning practice. Simulations are educational in many ways: putting skills and techniques into practice, developing judgment, stressing performance, learning from one's mistakes, active, rather than passive learning process, immediate assessment of the way the role was played ... the limit to this method lies in the environment in which the simulations take place – the protected environment of a police academy or judicial academy. However, the use of role-playing (or, as in Quebec, computer-assisted practice) has many advantages that could be interesting to exploit.

When we consider these conclusions in the light of the subject of our study, we observe that the relationship between theory and practice in the initial training course of policemen and magistrates still takes place in a police or judicial context. The theoretical and practical dimensions taken from psychology, sociology or medicine still seem to be insufficiently exploited. We note here that the trainers who are involved in the training context are by and large policemen or magistrates themselves. Although other professionals outside these institutions, who may come for example from the social assistance or health sectors, may be present and could make a contribution, nevertheless it must be observed that by and large they are absent. The phenomenon is therefore unfortunately deprived of part of its roots. From this standpoint, the training programme has only one purpose – teaching a given profession but not an understanding of the phenomenon in its many dimensions.

On concentrating on the exchange between theory and practice, between the school and the field, once again we feel it is helpful to refer the reader to the chapter of our report dealing with the bases and objectives of the research project. In this chapter, we went into various considerations that perhaps we should recall here. Initially, we described the school as a place for innovation. It is in and via schools that new practices and new means of action, alternatives to the traditional ways of doing and thinking in institutions such as the police and justice, can take form and find impetus. From this standpoint, training is undeniably envisaged as a potential driving force for change.

We also described a twofold phenomenon: on one hand, young professionals are led to rapidly assimilate the behaviour and thought patterns that are prevalent in their new professional environment with a view to integrating it optimally, and, on the other, they are under the pressure that the environment exercises on newcomers, which encourages them to adopt a conformist attitude in order to maintain a relatively consistent environment. The police cadet or judicial trainee quickly

understands that assimilation and conformism are effective keys for good integration, and, to better correspond to expectations of the field, they may be tempted to forget what they've learned in the training session. It is interesting to observe this kind of influence, but still we can only conclude that there is a need for the training course to continue and, wherever possible, reinforce its mission of encouraging new schemes, and making it possible for those schemes to have an effective repercussion on a daily practice.

In a previous conclusion, we raised the point that the more the individual advances in the police career, the more he tends to demand an increase in the practical side of basic training. The desire to focus training on the development of practical aspects arises in order to promote the integration process in a professional environment and to encourage compliance with norms and standards that prevail there. This comes back to what certain people expect of a training course: they consider that it should correspond to and reflect existing practices insofar as possible. However, by taking this line, the power of change that lies in training is reduced and traditional channels are reinforced. Consequently there is a danger in allowing practice to be the real guideline by which training is assessed: the training programme's role as a driving force for new impetus would become increasingly difficult.

**In drug-related questions, the respondents feel that they have general skills, essentially associated with know-how, and feel that they do not have specific skills related to the problem.**

The people surveyed had the possibility of expressing themselves spontaneously about their strong points and weak points in their encounters with drug-related problems. Consequently, we looked into the skills that respondents feel they have and those that they feel they are lacking. We asked each of them to mention three skills for each of the situations.

On reading the results of this little exercise, it is interesting to observe that the skills that are most often identified by the respondents are very general skills, but not specific to the drug problem. These skills refer for the most part to attitudes, and possibly character traits: empathy, curiosity, listening, pragmatism, strictness, motivation, easy contact, good sense, patience, calm, etc. These general skills correspond to the profile expected of a police inspector or magistrate. Consequently, they are part of the very essence of the function of these professionals.

Another category of responses, that was found less often, conversely concerned specific skills that are the subject of this study. Here we find the various aspects that have already been mentioned on several occasions during the study: knowledge of legislation, knowledge of products and their effects, technical skills or good management of crisis situations and stress. We know that these results are valid both for the sample of policeman and for the sample of judicial trainees and young magistrates.

After asking participants to list the skills that they feel they have, we asked them to do the same exercise for the skills that they feel they lacked. The results show very concrete elements that are much more specific to the phenomenon in question. It should be noted that in drug-related questions, the respondents feel that they have general skills but they communicate their shortcomings when it comes to specialized skills.

Finally, we note that experience, practice and contacts with peers constitute the solutions given in preference by the members of the police to fill these gaps. The people who belong to judicial institution also referred to this possibility, but they put further training at the top of the list when it comes to the means envisaged to fill the gaps in question. These channels are not mutually exclusive, however, and often, a combination of approaches is the most fruitful.

## **Training rapidly creates an important esprit de corps among members of the institution**

This last conclusion, which is certainly valid for many sectors, is no doubt even stronger for the police. Police cadets and inspectors on the job for several years who were surveyed in this study often repeated that they believed in learning hands-on, in contact with more experienced colleagues. The role and the influence of their peers seems to be crucial in an institution which, moreover, has the monopoly of training its members. The solidarity that develops between the members, although it has many advantages, can nevertheless represent an obstacle to achieving other objectives. Developing an objective opinion about the environment in which one works, as well as the integration of police in society, would no doubt be easier to achieve if this training was more open to the outside. Experiments in Québec and in the Netherlands presented in this report should help decision takers of all kinds develop an active thought process to meet the challenges arising today in one of the institutions that guarantees the rule of law.

Both police training and training of members of the judicial institution should therefore be subject to an open approach, going toward society and its many dimensions and issues. Broadening the training programme would correspond in this context to the desire for an integrated approach, which is mentioned often but not always put into practice.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In these recommendations, we argue for police and judicial training that would be geared more to society and would take greater account of the societal context of the drug addiction phenomenon. The two major institutions to which this study pertains cannot indeed be isolated from the society in which they are organized. A continually broader training course is needed to ensure that magistrates and policemen can fulfill their missions and to enable them to maintain a critical analysis of their own environment.

We observe that the current training course given to magistrates and policemen as concerns drug-related problems is mainly geared to acquiring legal skills and a series of practical aptitudes. The training programmes are organized by the institutions themselves, and consequently the social phenomena are observed and studied on the basis of the habitual references found within the police force or the judiciary. Despite the focus given in the various training courses to the social context in which these phenomena occur, there is a threat that these phenomena are cut off from their context. The problem of drugs, which is hugely complex and consists of many dimensions, could then be reduced to a simple criminal phenomenon. One possible consequence would be that policemen and magistrates would have a partial view of the social context. Organizing training within the institutions themselves therefore has a number of disadvantages, as we see.

We have said earlier that one possibility could be to gear the training more to the social environment of the problem. The results of the quantitative phase of the research project show, what is more, that an approach based exclusively on the law and police work is insufficient. The respondents showed a real concern with working in multiple disciplines. A broader training course would also make it possible to develop an integrated approach to the phenomenon of drug addiction within these two organizations : the police and the judiciary. It would also play its role as a vector of change more fully.

Consequently, the question that must be asked is how to adapt or improve existing training programmes and how to make them more geared to society.

To make current training programmes correspond better to social complexity and reality, we have identified three complementary channels of thought.

The first of these channels consists of including an additional programme, alongside the attention usually given to learning the skills cited in the report, that is specifically geared to the social context around drug addiction. The Higher Council Justice has actually integrated this dimension in the drug-related training that it is organizing at the end of the year 2005. By means of developing this focus on the social context within the training programme, a link can be drawn between the skills that one must have to act effectively in professional activity and the problem on which one is asked to intervene. This integration could be reinforced, in addition, by various components of the training course given on the subject.

On the other hand, we saw on doing this research project, that the police inspectors' field of vision of the problem tends to narrow as they get older in the police organization. Requiring (continuing) training on this question could help counter this tendency. In that case it would be helpful in this context to call on professionals who do not belong to the police or the judiciary. Experience and routine create thought patterns that are often unidirectional and an objective look at the inevitable professional deformation could break down barriers on this question.

The second channel runs along the same lines. In order to open the training course more to the outside, we feel that it would be good to increase the percentage of teachers who come from outside the institutions in question. Although of course members of the police and judiciary have the advantage of knowing the real situation and the workings of their respective institutions, nevertheless for the reasons mentioned above, they have some difficulty in dealing with phenomena from a multidimensional approach. Teachers from the outside, as term indicates, would enable future policemen and magistrates to consider the question from different angles. The approach of the problem, which is essentially focused on what a policeman or magistrate must be able to do, would then be broadened. The contribution of social workers, working in the street or on prevention, who all have a clear role in managing and fighting the drug addiction phenomena, could give a better application of the much desired integrated policy.

As concerns the police, a third channel they could exploit is one that leads to harmonization between regular education and professional training. The integration of police training in society has become indispensable, and harmonization using the model of civil education seems to be needed.

Secondary education in Belgium does not offer any orientation towards the security trades at this time. A series of courses or options could be included on these questions. Either these courses would be part of a more general educational programme, or they could be the subject of an additional year of education or specialization. The recent reforms of higher education did not concern police training either. Still, a large number of graduates of higher education, university or other, find jobs with the police. On the other hand, we also see that a fair number of students (for example, those studying criminology) have enjoyed basic training corresponding to that of the police force. In order to harmonize this, preparatory training for security trades could be given recognition in civil society and could benefit from equivalence, or at least the possibility of transfers into other educational programmes that remain to be determined.

Here we can take inspiration in part from the reforms of police training in the Netherlands. The characteristics of these reforms are advanced integration with regular education which means that graduates can more easily create bridges with the police. The question is therefore one of establishing connections between the different courses.

Finally we want to recall the need for a closer link between training of police and training of magistrates. Today, these two training programmes are separate and do not intersect. A common organization of certain courses could enable the future members of these two institutions to establish more contacts with each other and therefore better understand the work and the role of each.