



Institute for
**Public Safety
Crime and Justice**

The Representation of Special Constables

Headline Findings from the National Survey

Dr Iain Britton

May 2017



Introduction

This report sets out the headline findings and key recommendations from a national survey of Special Constables, to seek their views about the representation of Specials. The survey ran from February to March 2017, and had almost 1,100 responses, including responses from every force in England and Wales.

The survey is intended to inform future consultation and decisions about models for Special Constable representation. The survey was commissioned and designed under the leadership of ACC Debicki, National Police Chiefs' Council lead for the Special Constabulary, in collaboration with the Home Office and the College of Policing. The survey was developed, managed and analysed by the Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice at the University of Northampton.

The survey was a long and detailed survey, and there were a large volume of responses. This report of headline findings provides a summary of the key findings across the survey analysis.

Summary of key findings

Survey sample

- There were 1,096 completed responses, including Special Constables from every force in England and Wales. The survey sample is broadly reflective of the Specials population as a whole. There are slightly more male respondents to the survey than would be expected, and Specials who are 'career' Specials (without ambitions to join the Regulars), older, in supervisory ranks and longer-serving may also be over-represented to some degree.

The current picture – Specials having a 'voice'

- A majority of Specials do not feel that the 'voice' of Specials is heard as much as it should be, and is heard far less than that of Regulars. Two thirds of Specials do not feel that they have opportunities to input or influence the future direction of their forces. They do however feel more positive about being able to give feedback and voice concerns;
- Specials have concerns that the national 'voice' for Specials is presently limited and does not necessarily speak for all Specials; resulting in perceptions of limited input and influence on behalf of Specials at national level.
-

The current picture – Specials receiving support

- Most Specials do not feel that their force would 'have their back' if something went wrong;
- There is a mixed picture in terms of perspectives on current support available for Specials in the context of traumatic experiences, injury and complaint. Within this mixed picture, there are sizeable numbers of Specials who have concerns about the current level of support and uncertainties about accessing it, and there are many examples given within the survey where support has clearly been very poor;

- The vast majority of Specials feel that Regulars are better supported than Specials.

Views on whether new models of representation should be separate or with others

- Many Specials see advantages that would come from a model that represented Specials and Regulars together. Thinking that it could help 'integrate' across warranted officers (volunteer and paid). Feeling that there is already a scale and infrastructure in terms of the Police Federation current provision for Regulars that is perceived as having a track record of capably supporting those Regular officers. Arguing that Specials don't wish to be "treated differently" to Regulars. And recognising that often issues of representation around injury or complaints occur in scenarios which involve both Regulars and Specials in terms of the same incidents;
- Balancing that, many Specials also have concerns with joint representation models. There are arguments that Specials are unique and that they have different needs and different circumstances to Regulars. There are concerns that Specials' needs might be "clouded" or "overlooked" if representation were to be achieved through a model of adding volunteer Specials to an organisational model of representation that is primarily structured towards representing paid Regular officers;
- Specials are on the whole not supportive of being represented alongside other police volunteers, such as Police Support Volunteers, feeling that the roles, needs and issues are very different.

Views on priorities for representation

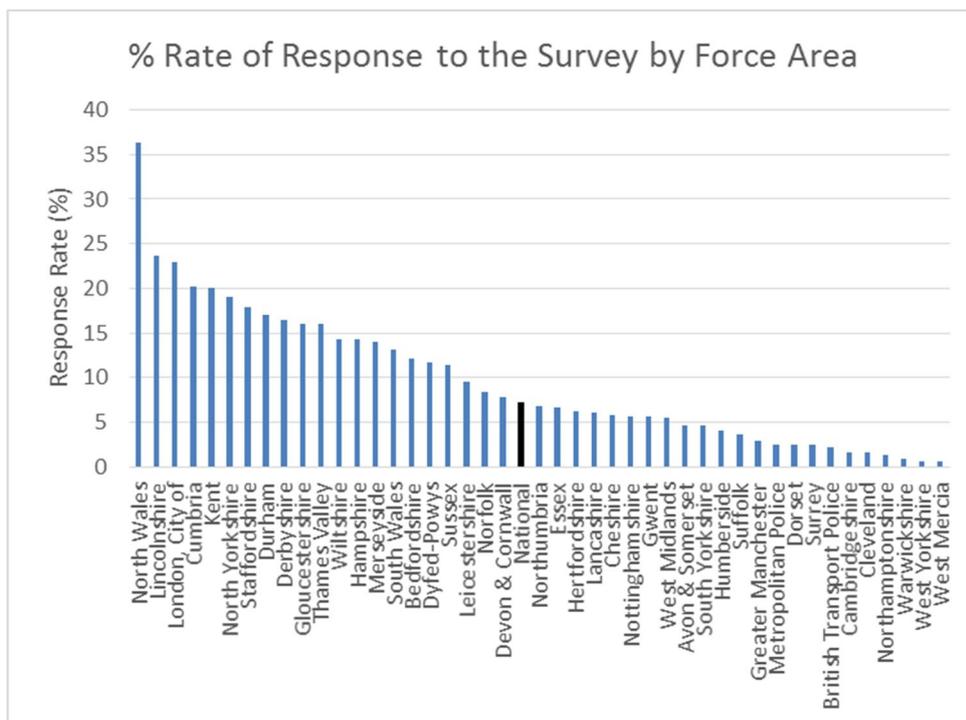
- Specials see the issue of representation as being an important one that needs to be tackled;
- Specials give their highest levels of prioritisation for new models of representation as being on the provision of practical elements of representation, such as advice and support when injured on duty, providing advice and support when complaints are made, providing legal cover and providing insurance;
- Having said that, whilst elements such as helping to shape strategy, representing Specials in force-level and national discussions, raising the profile of Specials, and championing contribution show as being less prioritised in the survey, they still achieved quite a high level of overall prioritisation from Specials and remain important to them;
- Specials would like to see a model of representation which is democratic, which represents all Specials together, and which has Specials involved in representing Specials (the latter being much more the case in terms of 'voice' than in respect of practical support, where in the case of the latter, the substance of the practical support is what matters most).

Views on the financing of representation

- There is a strength of feeling within the survey that asking Specials to pay would be 'unfair', and a strong preference that forces and/or central government should foot the bill;
- If asked to pay, 42% said that they would, 24% said they would not, and 34% were 'not sure'.

The Response to the Survey

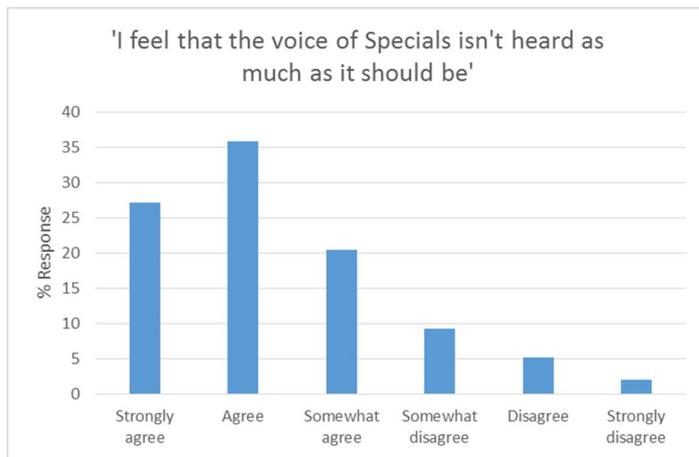
In total, there were completed responses from 1,096 Specials nationally. There were responses from every force, with varying response rates which are summarised in the graph below.



Broadly speaking, the sample within the survey responses is similar in demographics and characteristics to the wider Specials population. There were slightly more male and fewer female respondents to the survey than one would have expected if the response had mirrored the latest official statistics on the gender balance of the Specials population as a whole. The proportion of BME responses broadly mirrored national official figures for the Specials population as a whole. Whilst there are no official figures to benchmark against, the survey sample appears likely to have a larger than whole population representation of 'career' Specials (those who are not seeking a paid career as a 'Regular'), as well as potentially greater proportion of promoted Specials, of longer-serving and of older Specials.

The Current Picture - Having a 'Voice' and Influence?

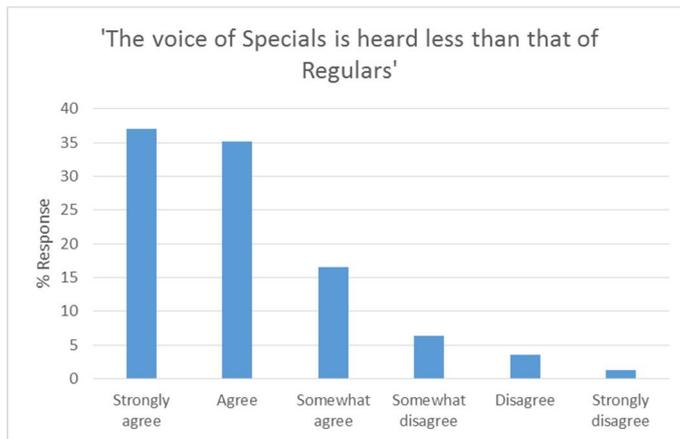
One key aspect of representation relates to Specials having 'voice', 'being heard', and 'having influence' at team, force and national levels. Broadly speaking, the survey reflects that the majority of Specials do not feel presently that Special Constables on the whole have a sufficient 'voice' and influence.



Resonant with this, over two thirds of Specials disagree that they have opportunities to input and influence the future direction of their force. A greater proportion of Specials feel that they have opportunities for input and influence specifically in respect of the Special Constabulary. However, even in this case, only one in twelve Specials 'strongly agree' they have that input and influence, whilst a larger one in eight 'strongly disagree'. On a more positive note, a sizeable majority of Specials feel that if they have concerns they can effectively voice them, albeit approximately a quarter did not think this was the case for them.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
'I feel that I have opportunities to input and influence the future direction of the force'	2.7	9.5	17.4	23.9	23.4	23.1
'I feel that I have the opportunities to input and influence the future direction of the Specials'	8.2	18.3	24.5	20.4	17.3	11.1
'I feel that if I have concerns I can effectively voice them'	14.7	35.0	27.5	10.2	8.4	4.2

The majority of Specials responding to the survey felt that the 'voice' of Specials is heard less than that of Regulars. Over a third of Specials 'strongly agreed' that this was the case.



Looking across the 'open answer' questions of the survey, there are some clear gaps in what Specials responding to the survey felt was the current position on representation for the Specials in terms of 'voice' and 'influence'.

It is likely that for many of the respondents to the survey, they will have had limited direct experience and contact with the current arrangements and activities that are in place in respect of Specials 'voice' and 'influence', and this will be particularly the case at national level. The survey responses reflect perceptions that the current 'voice' of Specials is seen by some Specials as being "weak", and sometimes as being primarily representative of more senior ranking Specials. There is felt to be "an absence of national presence", reflecting a "lack of strategic input at national level" and an "absence of a voice on the national stage". Specials seem to seek a "stronger" style of representation - "a voice with teeth to represent us and stop us being taken for granted." Specials want representation with "the same level of standing" as other organisations that represent other groups of officers and staff within policing, providing "one voice for all Specials" which is "respected" and is "standing up for Specials"; "a voice that is listened to by Chiefs and by the Home Office."

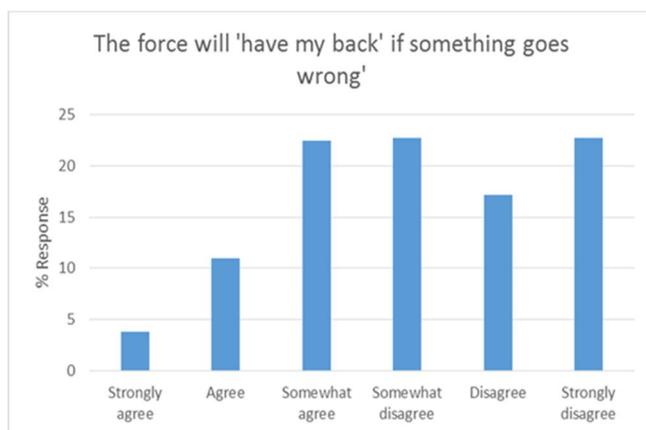
In terms of representation specifically of their 'voice' and 'influence', responses in the survey reflect that Specials value those aspects of the representation role being delivered by other Specials, on the basis that it is only other Specials who they perceive would directly and first-hand understand the issues and experiences of being a Special Constable, which they do not feel would not be the case if others who are not Specials seek to represent the 'voice' of Specials.

The Current Picture - Accessing Practical Support

Do Specials currently feel practically supported?

Looking across the survey responses for what issues matter most to Specials in terms of being represented (which will be discussed later in this report), the provision of practical support when they experience traumatic or distressing situations, when they have a complaint made against them, or when they are injured in the course of their duty is the most salient issue for Specials in terms of being represented.

The sentiment in terms of support seems relatively poor for Specials, with over half disagreeing that their force would ‘have their back’ if something goes wrong.



Having said that, overall two thirds of Specials ‘agree’ that there is adequate support when Specials experience distressing experiences, albeit a third did ‘disagree’. The response pattern is similar, but slightly less positive when asked whether adequate support was provided currently for Specials injured in the line of duty. A majority still agreed that there was adequate support, but just under half disagree that there is. Looking at the question of whether Specials receive adequate support when they are facing a complaint, the response pattern was a little more negative again compared to the other two elements of support. Half of Specials disagreed with the statement, and of those almost 15% ‘strongly disagreed’.

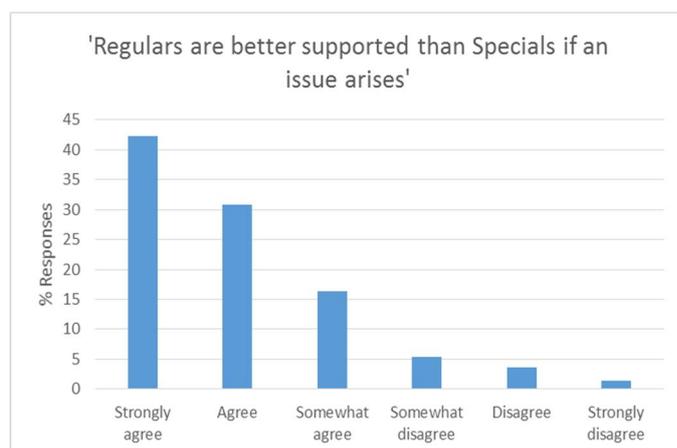
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
‘Adequate support is provided to Specials who have had distressing experiences’	9.2	25.6	30.6	13.4	12.6	8.6
‘Adequate support is provided to Specials who are injured in the line of duty’	5.2	20.3	29.9	18	15.6	10.9
‘Adequate support is provided to Specials who are facing a complaint’	3.9	16.0	29.3	20.8	15.7	14.3

Asked the slightly different question of whether they would personally know where to go for advice, guidance and support, a majority of Specials currently say that they would, albeit also a sizeable

minority of Specials would not. Asked whether they understood what insurance cover was available in respect of their role as a Special, a majority of Specials disagreed and said that they did not.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
'If a complaint was made against me, I would have somewhere to go for advice and guidance'	8.6	21.2	28.6	15.1	14.0	12.6
'If I was injured on duty, I would have somewhere to go for advice and guidance'	8	21.1	28.6	16.7	14.3	11.3
'If I needed legal advice in relation to my Special role, I would have somewhere to go for it'	6.4	20.7	27.6	18.2	14.4	12.6
'I understand what insurance cover is available in respect of my role as a Special'	5.7	16.8	18.5	20.0	17.9	21.1

Overall, benchmarking their perspectives of the support available for Special Constables against their views of the support which Regulars receive, a huge majority of Specials felt that Regulars are better supported than Specials when issues arise.



Perspectives on current experiences of Specials support

Reading across the volume of responses in respect of Specials' experiences of support, it is striking the range and seriousness of issues experienced. There are numerous narratives of injury, exposure to traumatic contexts, and life-impacting complaint scenarios (and sometimes also criminal charges) relating to their activity as Specials. Looking across the responses, it is impossible not to conclude that the practical support available (or not) to Specials in respect of the issues that they face in the course of their duties is a very serious issue.

There is much positive material across the survey of positive support experiences – where Specials feel that they have been supported actively and well. Typically, looking across the range of scenarios discussed, the features of these positive experiences are twofold. Firstly, in terms of the nature of organisational response, in which supervisors (both Regular supervisors and within the Special Constabulary) “have time”, “follow it through” in a sustained way, and have the “personal touch”. And secondly, in the practical accessibility of good quality expert advice when needed. In many of these instances, the practical support has actually been provided via the Police Federation, even though it

falls outside of formal agreements to do so. In terms of positive support experiences, a “pro-active”, “owning” and “interested” approach from supervisors and the wider organisation seems key, and leaves the Specials concerned feeling valued:

“I felt that I mattered to the organization and that they were there to help.”

Sadly, in contrast, there are also very many instances cited across the survey responses of negative experiences of support. Specials point to there simply being a lack of “national, auditable standards of what support can be expected, from where, and how forces are required to operate”.

In these more negative scenarios, the principle features that made the experiences of support a negative one seem to be in essence the reverse of the positive experiences: a lack of access to good quality expert advice when needed, and a lack of pro-active interest and ownership from the organisation. There are very many stark and dismal stories of lack of adequate support for Specials told across the survey responses. In many cases what is missing seems to be the ‘basics’ of communication, and of managerial and organisational good practice. There are many responses in the survey which highlight views that Specials do not feel that they are supported as well as Regulars.

Some key elements that feature across a number of the more negative support experiences discussed by Specials include:

- The particular challenge of support for Specials relating to the fact that they are around less within the police organisation;
- Key elements of police organisations, such as PSD and disciplinary procedures, welfare services, HR support, etc. are often primarily 9-5 Monday to Friday in their operation, which poorly maps against the times that many Specials are present;
- There is poor briefing, and very little written down, about what support is available and how to access it;
- There is a specific gap in support for Specials subject to complaint contexts of a less serious nature, which do not typically trigger any representational support or insurance mechanisms currently;
- A sense of different organisational approaches and culture in respect of Specials to Regulars in terms of complaints: “The force seems very fast to criticize and discipline rather than backing us up and offering reassurance”. This includes views that complaint cases involving Specials are sometimes de-prioritised, and often take much longer than those relating to Regulars to reach resolution;
- Experiences in some forces that basic policy and procedural aspects (e.g. in respect of grievance) are not viewed as applying for Specials;
- A sense that sometimes support is provided to Specials just because it is also supportive to Regulars involved in the same incidents;
- There are often very basic communication gaps, for example that Specials’ supervisors do not know that incidents have taken place or that issues have arisen;
- Gaps in training for Specials, which they worry may expose them to risk in respect of complaints;
- Perspectives of lack of managerial and people skills in respect of supervisory rank Specials, and linked to that just the limitations relating to the fact that the supervisory ranks within the Special Constabulary are also part-time and volunteers and therefore have limited availability to provide support.

Being represented with others or separately

Should Specials be represented alongside Regulars, or distinctly from them?

There were a range of views evident across the survey 'open answer' responses in respect of whether Specials should be represented alongside Regulars, or distinctly from them.

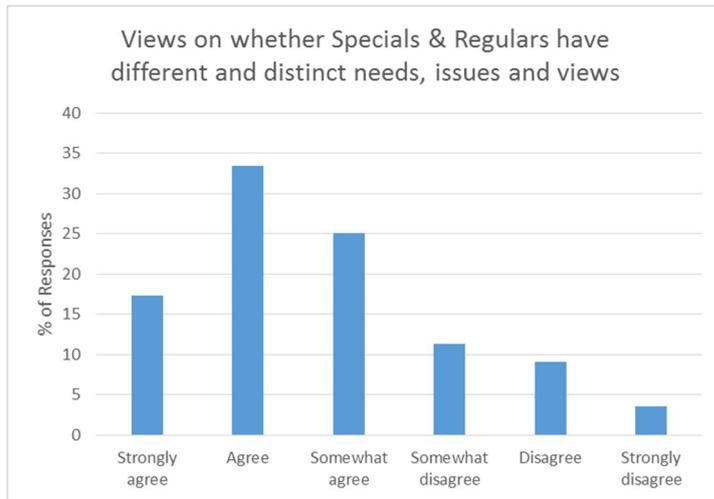
In terms of what Specials were looking for from representation (discussed in more detail in the section below), elements of practical support at times of complaints, injury or similar practical concerns, were uppermost in what the vast bulk of Specials want representation to most importantly deliver for them. These desires are often framed by Specials within the 'open answer' responses in the survey as wanting the equivalent support that Regulars receive via the Police Federation.

Many responses extend that argument that they want support "exactly the same as what the Federation already provides for Regulars" as being that they would simply wish the Police Federation as an existing organisation to extend remit and to support them, with arguments of "why reinvent the wheel". These responses see advantages that this would 'integrate' across warranted officers (volunteer and paid), that they see the Federation as already having a scale and infrastructure to capably support police officers, that Specials don't wish to be "treated differently" to Regulars, and that often issues of representation around injury or complaints occur in scenarios which involve both Regulars and Specials in terms of the same incidents.

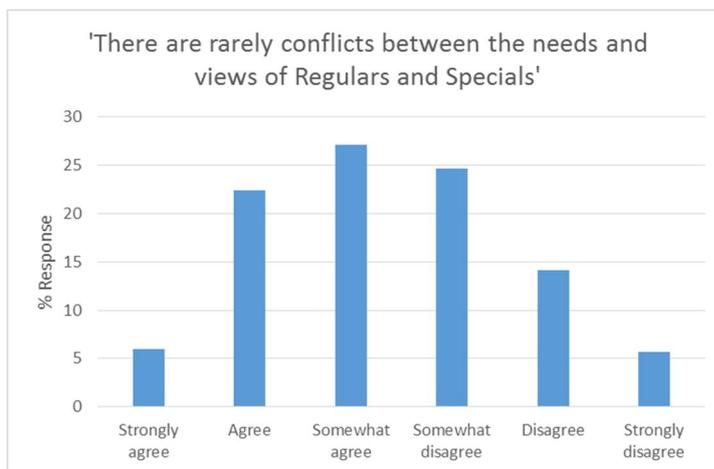
However, balancing this a sizeable number of survey respondents see this differently. There are arguments that Specials are "unique" and "we have different needs and different circumstances to Regulars". There are concerns that Specials needs might be "clouded" or "overlooked" if representation were to be achieved through a model of adding Specials to an organisational model of representation that is primarily structured towards, and has a history of, representing paid officers. Some of these responses reflect that one element of the issues Specials experience can be problems around how Regulars see them and treat them. Responses also reflect that some Specials have a view that the Police Federation has in their perspective had a negative and unsupportive stance towards the Special Constabulary in the past, which concerns them in terms of future models.

In very broad terms, responses seem to point more towards a favouring of 'joint' models for Regulars and Specials for representation in terms of the provision of practical support, but much less favourably for representation in terms of giving 'voice' and 'influence' for Specials; with regard to the latter some responses speak positively of the national presence and role of ASCCO, albeit others temper that with concerns that ASCCO presently represents senior Specials rather than all Specials. There is a desire to see something created which genuinely represents the Specials 'voice' "distinctly", and with some "strength" and "real influence". To provide more of a profile, voice and influence both within forces and nationally specifically for Specials. And the prevailing view in responses about the 'voice' and influence elements of representation is that this requires a distinct and independent voice for Specials to achieve that. Many respondents struggle within their survey responses between these two tensions; a desire for integrated joint models of practical support, but with a distinct representational 'voice'.

Looking at the quantitative responses within the survey, the survey asked two questions specifically relating to the relationship in representation between Specials and Regulars. One question asked about whether Specials and Regulars have different needs, issues and views. The majority of Specials agreed that they did.



A second question asked whether ‘there are rarely conflicts’ between the needs and views of Regulars and Specials. This question received quite a mixed response, with a sizeable proportion of ‘somewhat’ (either agreeing or disagreeing) responses, but the response did tend towards more Specials agreeing that there was rarely conflict between the two.



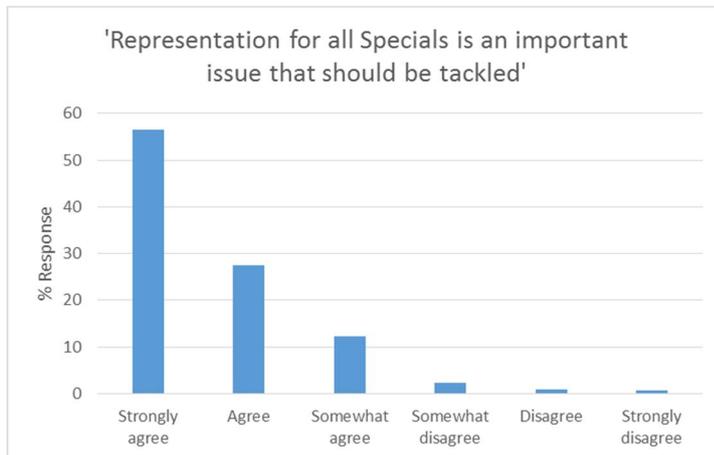
Should Specials be represented alongside other volunteers, such as PSVs?

There is a clearer picture from the survey ‘open answer’ responses to the question of whether Specials favour being represented distinctly from, or collectively with, other volunteers in policing.

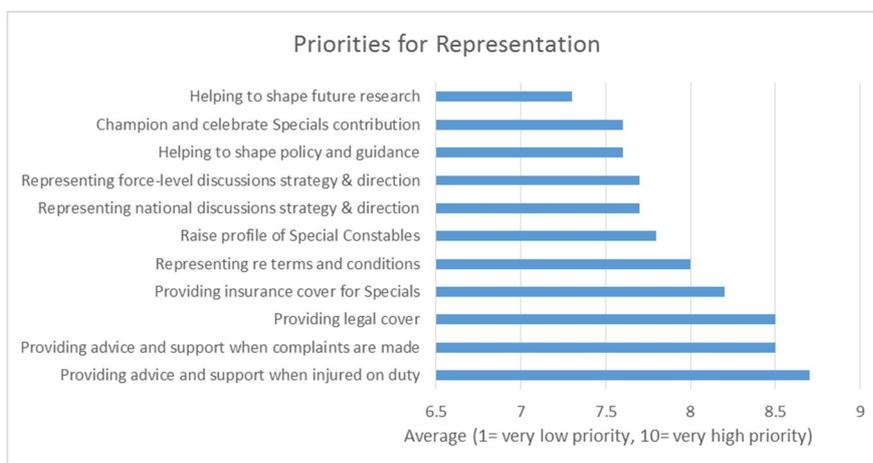
A clear consensus emerges that the Specials responding to the survey felt that the Special Constable role was clearly distinctive and different in their perspective from Police Support Volunteers, and that they would prefer to see representation of Specials separate to wider volunteers, and reflecting the distinct nature of the Specials role as being warranted officers.

Shaping new models of representation

The vast majority of Special Constable respondents to the survey agreed that representation is an important issue that should be tackled.



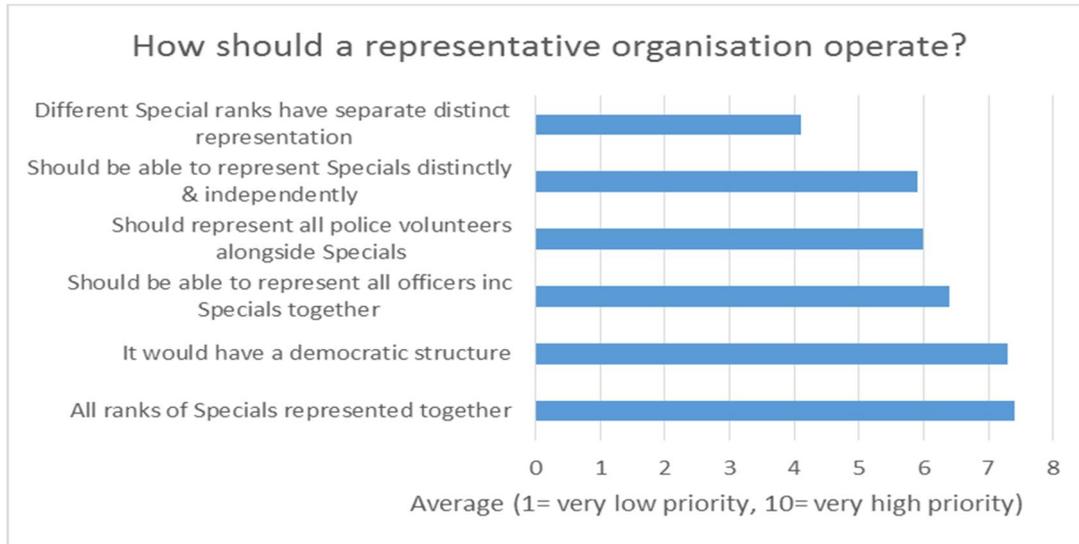
In terms of priorities for representation, Specials overall set quite a high level of priority to all the elements of prioritisation mentioned in the survey. They were asked to rank from 1 (very low priority) to 10 (very high priority) a number of elements of representation. The average responses across all the prioritisation statements are summarised in the graph below.



As can be seen in the graph, the highest levels of prioritisation tended to be given on average to practical elements of representation, such as advice and support when injured on duty, providing advice and support when complaints are made, providing legal cover and providing insurance.

Having said that, whilst elements such as helping to shape strategy, representing Specials in force-level and national discussions, raising the profile of Specials, and championing contribution show as being less prioritised in the above graph, they still achieved quite a high level of overall prioritisation.

Specials were also asked about some elements of how they would like to see a new representational model operate. Again, the results in the graph below reflect the averaged responses, based on a scale of 1 (for very low priority) to 10 (for very high priority). A representative model which has a democratic structure, and which represents all ranks of Specials, was particularly prioritised.



Funding

Should Specials be asked to fund their representation?

The issue of whether Specials *should* be asked to personally financially contribute to new models of representation is one which stimulates some strong feelings in the 'open text' answers on the subject within the survey. A weight of responses within the survey reflect views that it would be "like you are having to pay to volunteer", with some strong language within those responses that it would be "distasteful", "abhorrent" and "utterly ridiculous" to ask Specials to fund it. Many see this as a question of principle, talking about it being "unfair" to ask Specials to pay, and with arguments that this is "a fundamental principle" and "very much a moral question".

Many responses are framed in terms of the considerable value which Specials bring, giving of their time for free, to forces and that supporting the funding to support and represent Specials should be seen as justified in those terms:

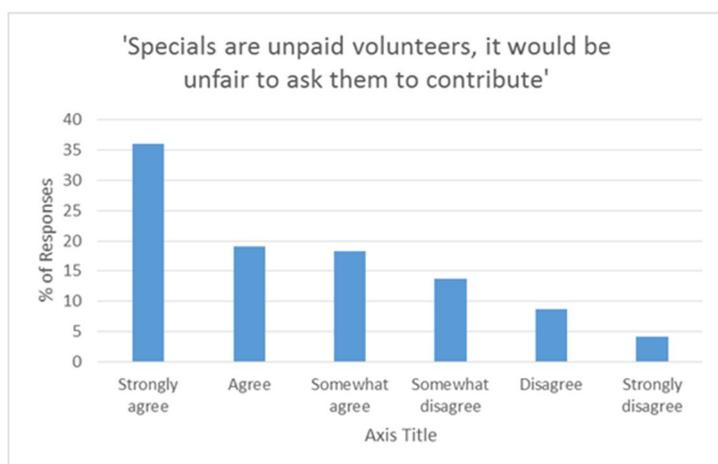
"the least they can do... [Forces to pay for representation]"

"We do an incredibly difficult job for free, we should be supported 100% and not be expected to pay anything!"

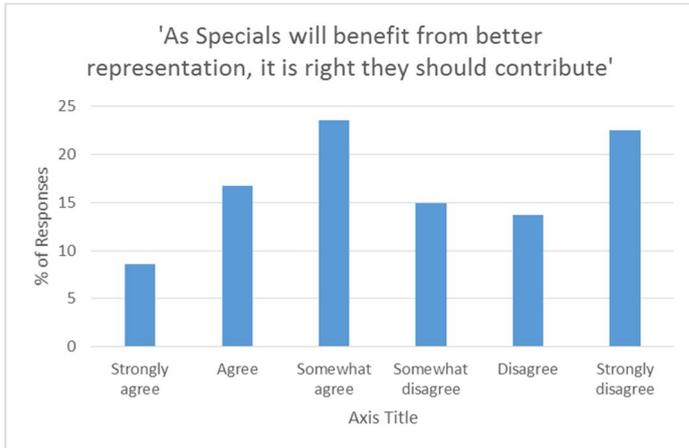
"Specials deliver real tangible savings to forces and contribute an enormous amount to policing."

"Specials give up their time for free so why should they have to pay for help if something goes wrong. The force should be 100% behind them and want to have the help and support in place."

Asked if making a contribution would be "unfair", given that Specials are unpaid volunteers, three quarters of Specials agreed that it would be unfair, with over a third in strong agreement.



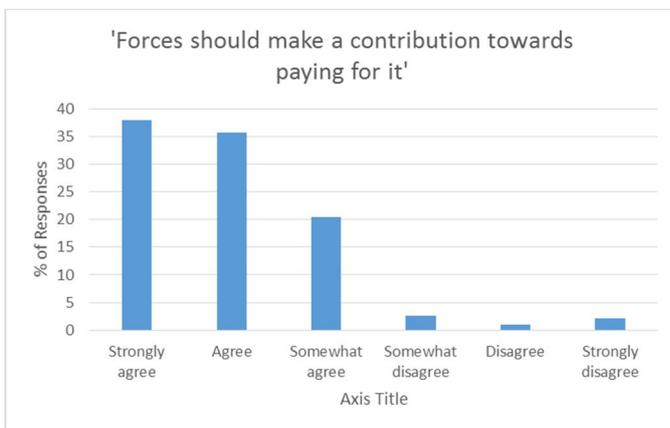
Asked a different question – whether given Specials will benefit from better representation, it is right that they should contribute - the spread of answers overall is more favourable towards the notion that Specials might make a contribution. Whilst half of Specials still disagreed with this statement, and less than 10% strongly agreed with it, half of Specials reflected some level of agreement.



Who should fund representation?

There is a considerable strength of support within the survey that forces should be asked to fund representation. As reflected above, many of the ‘open answer’ responses argued that Specials make a considerable and growing contribution to forces, and by dint of that to policing nationally. Therefore as a reflection of the value of that contribution, funding should be found from Government or forces to support their basic support and representation to the same standard as Regular officers, given that forces are expecting their Specials, voluntarily, to perform equivalent roles and exposing them to equivalent risks.

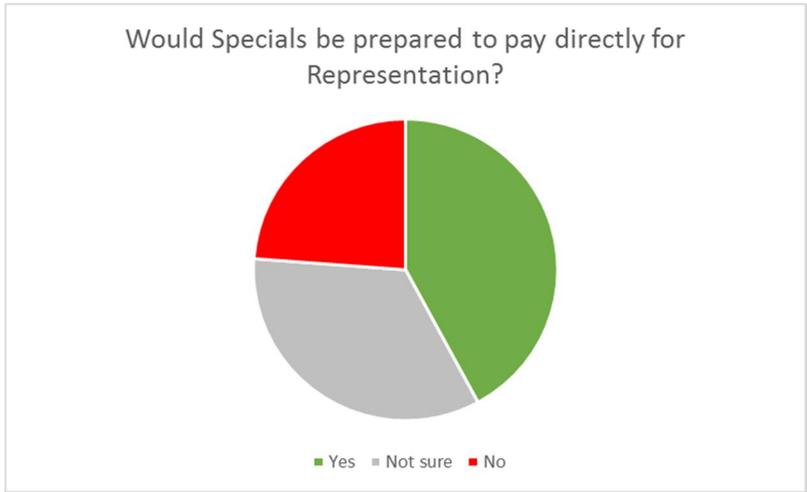
Asked if forces should make a contribution towards funding Specials representation, virtually all Specials agreed that they should.



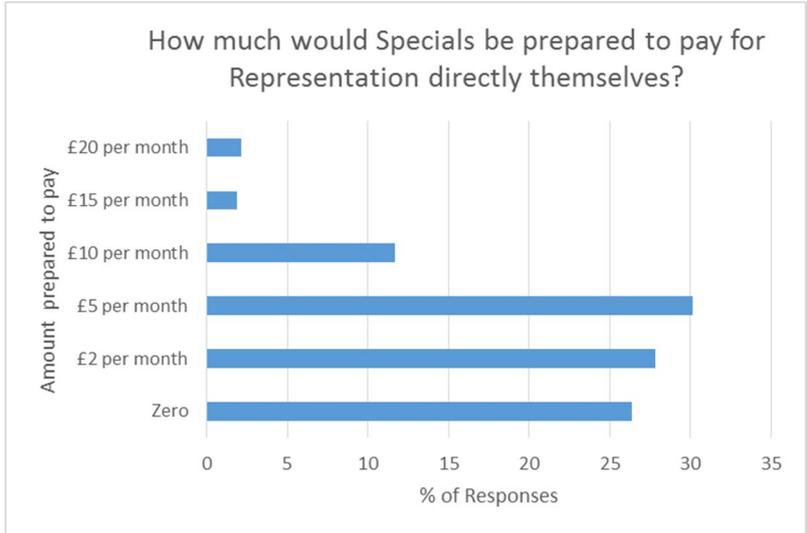
Would Specials be prepared to pay for their representation?

The above sections reflect that a majority of Specials do not support being asked to contribute to their own representation, with the core of that argument being that they are volunteers.

When asked if they would personally be prepared to pay directly for representation if asked to do so, 42% said ‘yes’, 24% said ‘no’, and 34% were ‘not sure’.



Asked how much Specials would be prepared to pay for representation, just over a quarter of Specials said zero, over half said £2 or £5 per month, and the remainder (about a sixth of Specials) said they would be prepared to pay more.



In the ‘open answer’ question, Specials discussed the practicality of being asked to pay. Some had concerns regarding the practical mechanics of being asked to make a contribution; pointing out that the administration of collecting relatively small amounts of subscription from such a large body of Specials, might be disproportionately costly. There were practical suggestions made, the most common being that extracting funding for representation might be made in some manner by making adjustments to the expenses system.

There were also arguments made that given a significant proportion of Specials might decline to pay, that would complicate the operation and limit the comprehensiveness of representation that could be provided across Specials as a whole through a personal subscription based model.

Some respondents reflected that it was difficult to fully engage with these questions of funding, until there was a properly costed model for representation, as until that point it was difficult to judge realistically the scale of likely costs which required to be funded, either from personal subscription or from other sources. Some respondents in the survey pointed out that subscribed membership of organisations can often come with associated ‘benefits’ packages, and that perhaps that might shift the ‘offer’ being made to Specials in regard to them being asked to play a role in directly funding a new representative model.

This report was produced by the **Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice**, University of Northampton. A key part of the Institute's work programme is its focus on Citizens in Policing. The Institute is committed to working strategically with forces nationally and internationally to develop the evidence-base across police volunteering and wider citizen direct involvement, to translate the evidence-base into real improvements in experience and impact, and to support and stimulate the debate about the future for citizen involvement in policing and public safety.

Report authors:

Dr Iain Britton, Head of the Centre for Citizens in Policing, IPSCJ, iain.britton@ipscj.org



www.ipscj.org