

Online Survey of People Living in the North of England

From 2nd to 4th May 2017 an online survey of 1072 adults living in the North of England was carried out to capture their views on police and universities working together. The issues highlighted by this survey will be probed in more detail in further research to be carried out during 2017 and 2018. This will include a street survey in locations across the North of England and a series of citizens’ jury-type events. This latest update from the public engagement strand provides an overview of the top-line findings from the online survey.

Police and universities: who knows best?

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements. Figure 1 below provides an overview of the percentage of respondents who tended to or strongly agreed or disagreed with the statements.

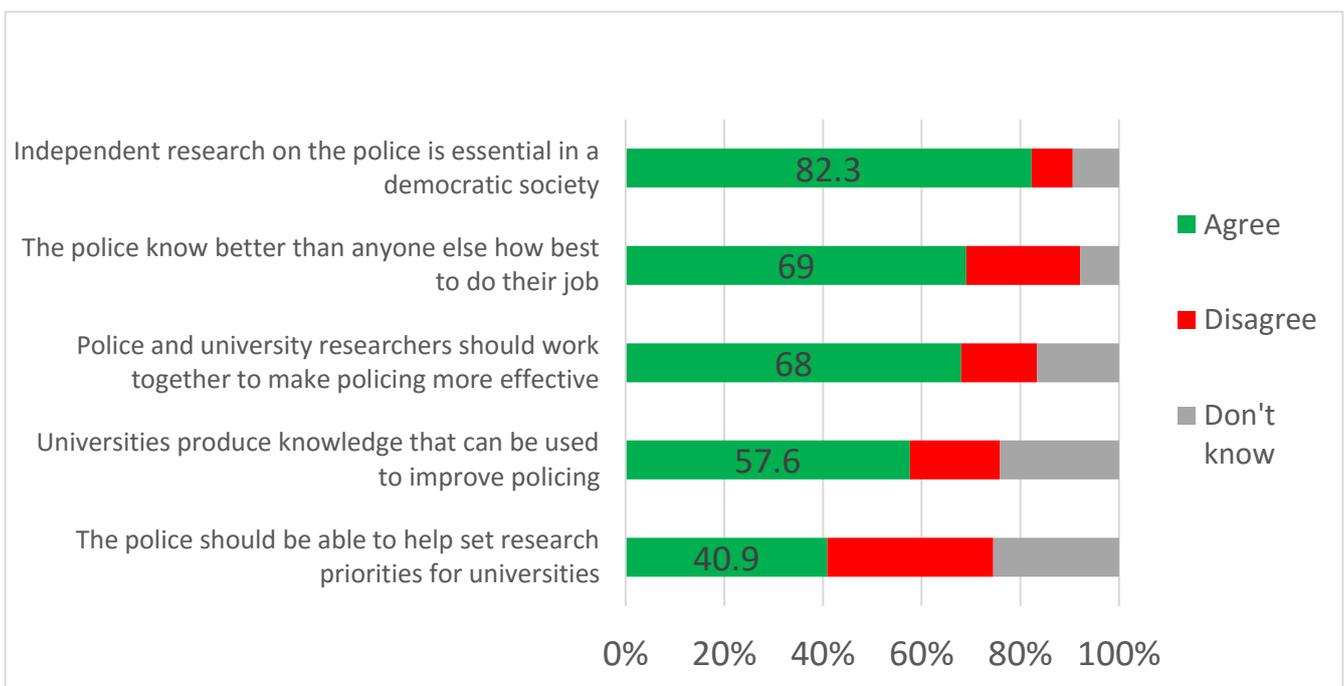


Figure 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree that....?

The data indicate that there was strong support for the importance of having independent research on the police. However, they also reveal a level of doubt and uncertainty about the extent to which universities can help to improve policing. More than 40% of respondents indicated that they either disagreed or did not know whether universities produce knowledge that can be used to improve policing and almost 70% of respondents agreed that ‘the police know better than anyone else how best to do their job’. But there was support for police and universities working together to make policing more effective, although only 41% agreed that police should be able to set research priorities for universities. Overall the data suggest openness to the idea that universities might be able to help improve policing, coupled with a commitment from most respondents to the importance of maintaining the independence of research.

Does trust and confidence in the police affect views about their relationship with universities?

All respondents were asked whether they trusted the police in their area to treat people fairly, and whether they thought the police in their area were doing a good job. 78% of respondents indicated that they trusted the police in their area 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' to treat people fairly. 50% indicated that they thought the police in their area were doing a 'good' or 'excellent' job. There were some significant differences between those respondents expressing trust and confidence in the police and those expressing a lack of trust or confidence when it came to expressing a view on the role of police and universities in improving policing.

Those respondents who indicated that they trusted the police 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' to treat people fairly, or who thought their local police were doing a 'good' or 'excellent' job were significantly more likely to agree that 'the police know best how to do their job'.

- 80% of those who trusted their local police 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' agreed with this statement, compared to 31% of those who trusted the police 'not very much' or 'not at all'.
- 82% of those who thought their local police were doing a 'good' or 'excellent' job agreed with this statement, compared to 56% of those who thought they were doing a 'fair', 'poor' or 'very poor' job.

Those respondents who indicated that they trusted their local police 'not very much' or 'not at all' to treat people fairly, or who thought they were doing a 'fair', 'poor' or 'very poor' job were significantly more likely to disagree that 'the police should be able to help set research priorities for universities'.

- 53% of those who trusted their local police 'not very much' or 'not at all' disagreed with this statement, compared to 29% of those who trusted the police 'a fair amount' or 'a lot'.
- 42% of those who thought their local police were doing a 'fair', 'poor' or 'very poor' job disagreed with this statement, as compared to 26% of those who thought they were doing a 'good' or 'excellent' job.

Interestingly, trust and confidence made little difference to whether respondents agreed that universities produce knowledge that can improve policing, police and university researchers should work together, and independent research on the police is essential in a democratic society. The last of these is particularly interesting as it indicates high support for independent research on police even amongst those members of the public who trust the police to be fair and believe they are doing a good job.

Do personal characteristics affect views about the relationship between police and universities?

Initial analysis suggests that gender, age and educational background all affected respondents' views on the relationship between police and universities. However, these factors are likely to interact with one another, and with issues of trust and confidence. As such, further multivariate analysis will be necessary to untangle the relationships between these variables. Initial observations though are as follows.

Gender

Women were more likely to agree that the police know best and less likely to agree that universities can produce knowledge to improve policing. However, it was not that women were less likely to explicitly disagree with these statements, but rather that they were more likely to say they did not know.

Age

Respondents in the 18-24 age bracket were less likely to agree that the police know better than anyone how best to do their job, but also less likely to agree that independent research on the police is essential in a democratic society. Under 45s were more likely to agree that universities can produce knowledge to improve policing but this is likely associated with the fact that they are much more likely to have attended university.

Education

Unsurprisingly, respondents whose highest qualification was *at least* a teaching or nursing qualification or university diploma were much more likely to agree that universities can produce knowledge to improve policing and that police and university researchers should work together to make policing more effective. Those with this level of qualification were also less likely to answer 'don't know' to any of the questions.

Conclusion

This update offers just a brief overview of the data from this online survey. Further analysis will be carried out to disentangle the associations between different variables and views about the relationship between police and university research. Further research will probe these issues in more detail. The key messages from this initial analysis though are:

- A significant minority of people are uncertain about the role that universities can and should play in improving policing.
- There is some scepticism about the idea that police should be able to help set research priorities for universities, particularly amongst those who lack trust and confidence in the police.
- Regardless of their level of trust and confidence in police, the majority of people think that independent research on the police is essential in a democratic society.

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