

The First Two Years of the Policing Research Partnership

Evaluation & Monitoring

Interim Report

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March 2018

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Executive summary

Key points

This is the interim report of Evaluation and Monitoring strand of the N8 Policing Research Partnership (N8 PRP). The N8 PRP is a collaboration between 8 research-intensive universities, 11 police force areas (with representation from both Police and Police and Crime Commissioners), and 1 third sector partner. In 2015, the N8 PRP secured funding for a five year programme of activities, research and knowledge exchange work through a Catalyst Grant from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Under the terms of the funding, the the programme of work is organised around a number of activity strands, each led by one of the N8 universities which is funded to manage and deliver against set objectives.¹This report draws on 26 semi-structured interviews with policing and academic partners (mostly conducted between September 2016 and January 2017, though with some delivered over the subsequent year), focusing on the ways in which coproduction has been embedded within the governance and operations of the N8 PRP over the first two years of the Catalyst Grant (2015-17).

- The first two years of the Catalyst Grant were felt to have supported the development of trusting relationships between key partners, despite considerable turnover in both academic and police representation. This period was acknowledged to have required significant investment in building relationships, establishing trust and mutual understanding, developing procedures and, to a certain degree, a renegotiation of the framework and aims of the partnership.
- The purpose of the N8 PRP was widely seen as driving change in policing. Police partners understood this in terms of impact: aligning research with police priorities, creating practice guidance that could deliver swift results. Academic partners framed the N8 PRP in terms of processes – building capacities and relationships that could support ongoing change.
- Few of the N8 universities had strong pre-existing relationships with their local forces, and there was a concern that the N8 PRP should not replicate nor replace existing programmes, networks and structures between police partners and other academic institutions.
- N8 universities were felt to be particularly well-positioned to support quantitative research training, and to deliver programmes of applied research. Developing stronger partnerships with non-N8 universities was also seen as beneficial.
- Several police force areas found it hard to commit resources to the N8 PRP, due to ongoing organisational change or the need to manage multiple competing priorities.
- As the principal funding for the N8 PRP takes the form of a Catalyst Grant from HEFCE, this is allocated in the first instance to academic partners. Several police partners felt that this

¹ See: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/funding/catalyst/projects/leeds/>

led to inequitable ownership of the N8 PRP's operations and processes, particularly when compared to other collaborations that could fund both police and academic time.

- Quarterly Steering Group meetings comprise the 'decision-making engine of the [N8 PRP] partnership²'. All academic, policing, and third sector partners are invited to attend.
- In bringing together all key partners, the Steering Group accentuated some of the challenges of partnership work. Tensions over ownership of the N8 PRP's operations and processes were particularly apparent, leading to several changes in the structure of the Steering Group over the first two years of the Catalyst Grant.
- All such changes to the Steering Group were attempts to ensure that academic and policing partners had an equitable say in proceedings. However, when all partners met together, police representatives felt disadvantaged by academics' language and their apparent familiarity with one another. When police partners met separately (and before the main Steering Group), academic partners felt unable to change key decisions which had effectively already been made.
- At the start of 2017, Steering Group meetings began to be co-chaired by police and academic partners. In ongoing work, the Evaluation strand will identify if this has supported a more equitable sense of ownership in N8 PRP partners.
- Very few academic or police interviewees felt that they had a clear idea of the N8 PRP's structure, or of progress across all strands. Policing partners wanted more regular, brief updates.
- Multiple new partnerships had been formed through the N8 PRP's events, facilities, and processes. Several police partners had drawn on the N8 PRP's online register of experts³ to identify academics working in specific fields.
- The annual round of Small Grant awards was a particularly effective catalyst for new collaborations. Bids have to include at least one N8 University and one policing partner. Over half of our interviewees had formed new partnerships to bid for the first or second round of these awards.
- Genuine coproduction was seen as a worthwhile goal, but one that was hard to realise in full. Police partners widely viewed research as a product to be commissioned, with the N8 PRP providing a possible commissioning structure. Similarly, some interviewees thought the constraints of HEFCE funding implicitly steered academic strands towards independently creating products for passive police consumers.
- The extent to which information about the N8 PRP had been disseminated within partner organisations varied. Some Steering Group representatives had established robust systems for ensuring information was collated and disseminated within their organisation. However,

² N8 Policing Research Partnership (2017) *N8 PRP Annual Report 2016-17*. Available at: https://n8prp.org.uk/about_us/annual-report-2017/ [last accessed 23rd December 2017]

³ <https://n8prp.org.uk/experts/>

several interviewees found it more difficult to ‘sell’ the N8 PRP to their colleagues, or to articulate clearly what the collaboration could offer.

- Cultural tensions were apparent in three main areas. Firstly, academic language was felt to inhibit police participation. Secondly, police partners expressed a strong desire for regular, succinct updates, with short-term turnarounds on all N8 PRP projects. Finally, police partners widely appreciated quantitative research, but were less clear about the benefits or role of qualitative studies.

Introduction

The N8 Policing Research Programme.

The N8 Research Partnership is a collaboration of eight research-intensive universities in the North of England. It seeks to...

1. Promote deeper collaboration between universities, business & society;
2. Establish innovative research capabilities & programmes of national and international prominence; and
3. Drive economic growth by generating income, supporting jobs and new businesses.

Early N8 programmes focused primarily on science, technology and engineering. However, in early 2013, a growing desire for a programme of social sciences research became apparent. This initially led to an ESRC-funded programme of work centred on coproduction (Campbell and Vanderhoeven 2016). Separately, the creation of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in late 2012 offered an opportunity to explore the possibilities of developing a collaboration centred on policing. Initial discussions among N8 researchers led to the development of working principles, purpose and rationale for collaboration across the N8 universities in the field of policing research and the establishment of the N8 PRP at an inaugural meeting with Police and Crime Commissioners and police partners in late 2013. Arising from this eight policing priorities were identified as a basis for collaborative work. This was followed by a successful bid for a College of Policing small grant then supported the production of eight evidence reviews, accompanied by a series of meetings and events across the North of England in early 2014. This was the first substantive undertaking of the N8 Policing Research Partnership (N8 PRP).

Supported by limited pump-priming funds from the N8 institutions, the Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) Catalyst Fund was targeted as a potential source of continuing support for the N8 PRP. The Catalyst Fund supports innovative work in Higher Education institutions with the potential for long-term sustainability (HEFCE 2017); and offered a potential route to establishing a large-scale, enduring partnership between policing partners and academics. A £3m bid was consequently developed in mid-2014, with matched funding agreements from eleven force areas and one non-police partner (Your Homes, Newcastle) as well as from the eight participating universities.⁴ The success of the bid was announced in February 2015, and the Catalyst-funded work of the N8 PRP began on 1st May 2015. The start of Catalyst funding marks the beginning of the work reviewed in this report.

The aim of the N8 PRP is...

‘...[t]o encourage policing institutions to become learning organisations with reflexive cultures

⁴ With a combined value of over £7.2 million across the five years of the project.

and practices that value the generation, mobilisation and application of knowledge as well as to transform the ways in which researchers engage and communicate with policing partners in research production and dissemination’ (N8 PRP 2017:7)

With an emphasis on driving change in both policing and academic communities, coproduction is positioned at the heart of the N8 PRP’s processes and operations. To this end, the N8 PRP has nine activity strands. Each is led by an N8 higher education institution:

1. Governance and management (University of Leeds)
2. Policing Innovation Forum (University of Manchester)
3. Data analytics (University of Leeds)
4. People and knowledge exchange (University of Durham)
5. Research co-production (University of Newcastle)
6. Public engagement (University of Liverpool)
7. International programme (University of Sheffield)
8. Training and learning (University of Lancaster); and
9. Evaluation and monitoring (University of York)

Strand 1 includes the N8 PRP’s Steering Group, which engages key stakeholders in the N8 PRP’s decision-making processes, ensuring accountability and oversight. Strand 9 centres on evaluating the impact and monitoring the processes of the N8 PRP. Strands 2-8 are designed to ‘catalyse’ enduring relationships between policing and research partners through events, programmes of coproduced research and knowledge exchange, and the development of products and systems with the capacity to facilitate real-world change. Many of these are interlinked. For example, the theme of the annual Policing Innovation Forum (Strand 2) is also the primary focus of the annual round of Small Grants (delivered by Strand 5). Similarly, Data Analytics (Strand 3) and Training and Learning (Strand 8) have collaborated on programmes of work designed to upskill police data analysts. Full details of the strands can be found in the N8 PRP’s annual reports⁵, with regular updates, links to publications, and a calendar of events provided on the N8 PRP’s website⁶.

Methodology

The leadership of Strand 9 changed in July 2016. The strand’s deliverables had originally centred on commissioning external evaluations of the N8 PRP’s operations and processes. However, a decision was then made to make best use of resources and embrace opportunities for flexibility by taking initial evaluation and monitoring work in-house. To this end, a part-time research fellow started evaluation and monitoring work in August 2016.

⁵ Annual reports are hosted on the N8 PRP’s website: www.n8prp.org.uk

⁶ www.n8prp.org.uk

This report draws on a round of semi-structured interviews, conducted with members of the N8 PRP's Steering Group. This included 11 interviews with N8 university partners, covering all strand leads; 12 interviews with police partners from 8 force areas; two with representatives of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner; and one with a College of Policing representative. Most interviews were completed between September 2016 and January 2017.

Interviews focused on the evolution of the N8 PRP over the first two years of Catalyst funding, and the ways in which coproduction has been embedded within its governance and operations.

Interviews lasted between half an hour and 90 minutes. All interviews were digitally recorded, and fully transcribed. Transcripts were then manually coded.

Overview. The first two years of the N8 PRP Catalyst Grant

Events, opportunities and challenges

The first two years of the N8 PRP presented both opportunities and challenges.

In terms of opportunities, the first two rounds of small grants acted as a catalyst for the formation of multiple small partnerships, whilst several one-day events (including two Policing Innovation Forums and the first Knowledge Exchange Conference) were widely identified as exemplary opportunities for sharing best practice and networking. Sheffield also completed the International strand's main event, a three-day conference entitled *Working with the Police on Policing*. Across other strands, eight N8 PRP-funded PhD studentships were advertised, and commenced; and a People Exchange partnership between Durham Constabulary and Sheffield University saw the completion of *The Feasibility of Undertaking Restorative Approaches with Serious and Organised Crime Offending*. (The police staff member who participated in this project subsequently started a PhD.)

For police partners, there was also a strong sense that the N8 PRP arrived at a serendipitous time. Several force areas had little prior experience of academic partnership, and had been looking for opportunities when the invitation to participate arrived:

'I think [the N8] has been the most influential of all of the work that we've done. But I think what's happened is, it's almost like right place right time. We were looking for something. N8 came along' (Police).

The sheer size of the venture also offered benefits. As one interviewee commented, the N8 PRP had triggered 'a paradigm shift' in their ways of working 'because of the scale of things' (Researcher).

In terms of challenges, whilst considerable churn had been anticipated amongst police partners, high turnover amongst academics was unexpected. Three strands had partial changes to leadership teams or temporary changes of strand lead. Three further strands changed hands entirely (in one case, experiencing five strand leads in 18 months), and new strand leads were not necessarily familiar with

their predecessor's plans or with the objectives set out within the Catalyst grant:

'I became aware from [the N8 PRP management team] that there were certain things that they saw as deliverables. And my sort of response to that was "well, this is news to me. And I've not seen the strand going in this direction since I was the lead..." So now I am the lead I'm going to have to work that out' (Researcher).

Each such change led to a period of readjustment before progress could continue. Some deliverables had to be rescheduled.

In broad terms, the first two years of the N8 PRP also proved to be a time of growth and development. As one academic partner reflected...

'It's taken about a year for people to trust people, to establish a relationship with people, to know what we're talking about, to know what we're thinking about' (Researcher).

Leadership structures changed and evolved, as ways of meeting the needs of both police and academic partners were sought. Several key, senior force representatives withdrew following promotion, or retired; and the N8 PRP's only third sector policing partner (Your Homes Newcastle) appeared to withdraw, attending no events or meetings in 2016-17. Levels of attendance from the Offices of Police and Crime Commissioners at Steering Group meetings have also remained low. Nonetheless, interviewees generally thought that the N8 PRP had done well in its first two years, in the face of huge organisational complexity:

'I hope you've got a pretty positive picture. With a few critical edges. Because that's what we were trying to give you anyway. It is a remarkable achievement to have set up the N8 policing research partnership. You know, looking at where it came from to where it is now, in a short space of time, it is remarkable that it's happened' (Researcher).

'I don't think we've probably got where [the N8 PRP director] would like to be as fast as [he] would like. But I think anything where you're bringing such a huge number of organisations together and you've had all these different people, it is going to take a bit of time for people to sort of feel comfortable with each other and say what they think and what they don't think and get the right people round the table' (Police).

Findings

The purpose and role of the N8 PRP

Partners' understandings

Interviewees largely agreed that...

'The main reason for [the N8 PRP] is to try and change policing' (Researcher).

However, police and academic partners held differing views on the nature of desired change and the means by which it was to be achieved.

Policing partners widely framed research as an unproblematic enterprise, capable of delivering clear evidence that could be harvested to improve policing practice. Within this understanding, the central purpose of the N8 PRP was to identify...

‘...how we could exploit academia to help us deliver policing, a more evidence-based approach’ (Police).

More succinctly, the purpose of the N8 PRP was envisioned as aligning research with policing priorities, and ensuring that findings were communicated effectively to police partners:

‘You have to find a way to ask the police forces: “what is it that’s keeping you awake at night at the moment? What is it?”’ (Police).

‘You’ve got your 8 or 9 strands of work, N8 are trying hard to ensure that those are directed towards policing priorities’ (Police).

For a handful of interviewees, a focus on swift delivery and immediate priorities was connected to a broader recognition that the N8 PRP might be well-suited to targeting ‘the very long-term strategic pieces of work’ (Police). However, at the heart of every police interview was an emphasis that any and all aspects of the N8 PRP must be oriented towards providing real-world, deliverable outputs and impacts:

‘We want to ensure that when we do the work we use it in force, so we don’t go on an odyssey of learning and then just put the paper on top of a desk and it never gets used in policing’ (Police).

‘If we don’t nail this... gap between research and implementation into practice, you’re in danger of just writing things which are interesting and on the periphery’ (Police).

Theoretical research, or research without direct practical implications, were not seen as valuable.

Notably, no police interviewees talked about changing academic culture, and few described research or evidence as complex, problematic, or potentially contradictory. Rather, the emphasis tended to be on securing the right products or the right focus from academics who were sometimes prone to engaging in ‘odysseys of learning’; but who nonetheless had clear potential to ‘deliver the goods’.

Contrastingly, academic partners described the N8 PRP’s purpose and goals primarily in process-oriented terms. Accounts most commonly centred on relationship and capacity building:

‘[The N8 PRP] is a developing of networks and partnerships to exchange knowledge and skills and presumably, well hopefully, go forwards into the future’ (Researcher).

‘I see the programme about starting to standardise academics’ relationships with the police as well and doing research that is important and relevant to them that we can get embedded into

practice more clearly. So really it's about bringing them together and beginning to speak each other's languages a bit better and things' (Researcher).

Closer working relationships were seen as central to driving organisational change and harmonising academic and police processes and goals. This, in turn, could facilitate better-targeted research questions, and streamline investigations:

'It is about the translating of these services in practice, a set of better research questions, more involvement, much closer working relationships, standardised practices, standardised policies across universities and across policing' (Researcher).

Thus, although academics widely understood the N8 PRP's goal to be 'actually improv[ing] policing in the broadest possible sense' (Researcher), few tied this to the specific outputs that dominated police accounts. Indeed, several academic partners saw the N8 PRP as having an essential role to play in complicating the relationship between evidence and practice. Where police interviewees were generally seeking clearer evidence bases that could drive direct change, from this perspective...

'...if people want hard, certain evidence, that actually means saying 'well we can't necessarily deliver that.' And talking about that, and exploring the reasons' (Researcher).

Within this context, 'improving policing' also involved disrupting the direct link between research and practice that police interviewees identified as their main priority.

Finally, several academic partners were clear that police operational priorities could not and should not steer the N8 PRP's processes. Firstly, because policing priorities often centred on immediate operational concerns or pressing political issues, and so were a poor fit for research timescales:

'The strategic timescales for very senior officers tends to be set by political priorities and government timescales... And those things are where action has to be taken, for example, for the inspectorate, within the next nine months. Whereas that is not the research timetable. That is the knowledge exchange timetable' (Researcher).

Secondly, because academic independence was essential for the N8 PRP's effective functioning:

'We're not an arm of the police, we're not the servants of the police in this... Any kind of notion of our relationship has to be some kind of marrying about what's in our interests and what they're seeking to do. We're just not pursuing what they want to do, which is always a difficulty when you say let's think about what your priorities are' (Researcher).

Whilst police and academic partners saw the N8 PRP's purpose in similar headline terms (changing policing), they understood the nature of desirable change and the means by which it would be delivered differently. These dissonant understandings were arguably reflected in multiple other areas of the N8 PRP's operations.

The role of research-intensive universities

Because of their focus on research, many N8 institutions had no strong pre-existing relationship with their local force area. As one academic partner describes...

‘...the institutions that are involved in N8 are probably those that have the least networks and relationships with practice, ‘cause they’re not the institutions that are doing degrees in policing or nursing or teaching’ (Researcher).

Contrastingly, many forces had pre-existing relationships with non-N8 universities that were heavily involved in training and learning for police practitioners. One force, for example, had...

‘111 active students on different programmes of work [with four universities]’ (Police partner)

Just four were based in N8 institutions.

In this context, there was a real concern that the N8 PRP should ensure that it was neither replicating nor replacing existing programmes, networks and structures:

‘I think it’s difficult, the link into the non-N8 academic partners is difficult... We have to recognise that the police services have got their own relationships there which work well, and the question is, “how do we support those relationships, how do we support what’s there already?”... So it’s not seen as something else, a big machine in the corner which is suddenly a land grab and empire grab by the N8s to try and cut out the rest’ (Researcher).

As such, partners identified potential areas where the N8 PRP could ensure a distinctive contribution. Firstly, by delivering excellence in applied research, preferably in partnership with new universities:

‘I don’t think Russell Group are into or should be into foundation level training development. We should be at the more strategic level, senior leadership, applied research. But we should not do it in a vacuum, and we should be very closely linked to the applied research universities and the teaching universities such as UCLAN, University of Chester, University of Wolverhampton, and others’ (Researcher).

Secondly, the quantitative skills base of research-intensive universities had the potential to support both police forces, and new universities. Two strands – data analytics, and training and learning – were thought to offer particular promise here:

‘I would say there’s an absence of skills in quantitative criminology in general? ... At those more practice focused universities, more so. And I think the biggest wins could be in data analytics... [T]here are [also] some excellent statisticians, geographers that actually could be doing different stuff, stuff that is different to those other universities and what they are doing and that could actually be a unique selling point of the N8’ (Researcher).

Significantly, collaboration beyond the N8 was seen as integral to achieving these ends.

Indeed, a non-restrictive approach to partnership was apparent in several areas of the N8 PRP’s work.

For example, wide attendance from non-N8 partners (and non-N8 PRP force areas) was secured at N8 events; the small grants process gives ‘strong preference’ to applications that ‘[i]ncorporate Non-N8 HEI partners or policing organisations beyond the members of the N8 PRP’; and robust representation from non-N8 institutions is embedded within the governance arrangements of some strands, and for the N8 PRP as a whole⁷.

Negotiating organisational priorities

For policing partners, one of the major barriers to full engagement with the N8 PRP was organisational change. One force had received a series of negative HMIC inspection reports, and this made it extremely hard to focus on longer-term priorities:

‘[The N8 PRP] is obviously fitting it in amongst a whole host of other priorities. And as a force that’s had some issue with HMIC inspection gradings recently, and has got some genuine operational challenges, it’s been “how do you fit this in amongst everything else?” The biggest challenge is not really about lack of will. It’s about lack of resourcing to do it because everybody is so busy dealing with the day job and the initial priorities’ (Police).

Equally, changes in chief constable (or the imminent arrival of a new chief constable) made it impossible for some forces to confidently commit resources to the N8 PRP:

‘I’ve been trying to initiate and trying to keep [research and training buy-in] ticking over by myself basically and appealing to each new ACC as they come along. We are trying to find the right sponsor, senior sponsor who would actually run with this and give me a bit of support’ (Police).

Academic partners identified a separate set of issues. N8 PRP funding was allocated to N8 institutions, with institutions identifying appropriate staff members as strand leads. This created an unusual situation, wherein nearly half of all academic interviewees did not identify themselves primarily as police researchers.

‘I wouldn’t have put myself forward for it because I don’t think I’m... in fact, I did mention this at the time, I’m not a policing person’ (Researcher).

Often, such interviewees nonetheless described an enthusiastic and committed buy-in to the N8 PRP. However, particularly when time was tight and workloads became unmanageable, there was a risk that the N8 PRP could be deprioritised:

‘If push came to shove, I’d say not this isn’t the research I want to be doing right now because I’ve got this other thing going on’ (Researcher).

For both police and academic partners, some tensions between individual and organisational

⁷ For example, Data Analytics and Training and Learning both have non-N8 HEIs engaged in an advisory capacity, and in the delivery of training; whilst Strand 1 has wide representation from practitioners and academics embedded within its International Advisory Board.

commitment to the N8 PRP were thus apparent.

Leadership

Introduction

The N8 PRP has three governance structures: the international advisory board; the Steering Group; and the management team. We focus here on the project management team and Steering Group⁸.

The project management team

The core project management team consists of:

- Project Director and two Deputy Directors
- Project Manager and Events Assistant
- Academic Strand Leads from each partner institution⁹

A small number of strands – notably, Data Analytics – embedded police partners within their governance arrangements, though the potential extent of shared governance is constrained by HEFCE funding (which only allocates resources to Higher Education institutions). Police interviewees were not necessarily aware of the constraints attached to HEFCE funding, but could see the clear dominance of academics within the N8 PRP's leadership team. This led to some frustrations, and unfavourable comparisons with other collaborations¹⁰ with visible shared leadership structures:

'The Open University¹¹ are a little bit more inclusive with their policing partners. They have very very clear lines of communication. The policing partners and the academics work very very very closely together and that's very demonstrable and you see that at the Steering Group and they have very regular lines of communication and events with the whole' (Police).

Keele's Policing Academic Collaboration¹² was endorsed in similar terms.

Drawing on such experiences, over half of police interviewees wanted clearer representation within the PRP's management team. Not all of these were feasible: for example, a call for N8 PRP-funded police posts:

'If it just took one full time post from a policing perspective from the funding that you've already got, I actually don't think it would make a dent in your funding. And it would free up an awful lot of uncertainty, doubt, feeling of frustration, delay in getting things done properly' (Police).

⁸ We have not attended any advisory board meetings, and no interviewees commented on the role or operations of the advisory board in any substantive depth.

⁹ N8 Policing Research Partnership (2017) *N8 PRP Annual Report 2016-17*. Available at: https://n8prp.org.uk/about_us/annual-report-2017/ [last accessed 23rd December 2017]

¹⁰ For example, those funded by the Police Knowledge Fund.

¹¹ In a collaboration supported by the Police Knowledge Fund

¹² Also funded by the Police Knowledge Fund

However, other suggestions were deliverable. For example, a suggestion for mirroring, with police partners volunteering to support academic strand leads whilst ensuring their police colleagues were informed about any substantive developments:

‘It would be good for me to have a link on [my strand]. So I guess [Research Coproduction Strand lead at Newcastle] would probably think, well, it would be good for me to have a link on research, and [Data Analytics Strand lead] at Leeds would probably think, well, it’s good for me to have a link on data warehousing, for example. So perhaps there’s a need to look at the structures and have it better mirrored... I think there’s a strong argument to consider mirroring from police partners to academic’ (Researcher).

Police interviewees were universally positive about this possibility; though some were concerned that it could have unsustainable resource implications for officers who were already overstretched.

Beyond strand leadership, the central project management team were described in highly positive terms by several strand leads. Support for events was seen as outstanding:

‘The support that I’ve had from the project team at Leeds has been phenomenal, and I pay tribute to both [the project manager] and [the events coordinator] for their enthusiasm and their involvement. There’s absolutely no way we’d have got it to the stage that we have now without their support... That’s been one of the real strengths of the project’ (Researcher)

Nonetheless, some concerns about communications were raised; these are documented below (See Communications).

The Steering Group and police pre-meet

Interviewees for this report were drawn from Steering Group representatives. As such, they were able to offer particular insights into the ‘decision-making engine of the partnership’¹³ as it evolved.

Steering Group membership comprises 11 force representatives, 11 representatives from the Offices of Police and Crime Commissioners, 9 academic partners, and 1 representative from Your Homes Newcastle. At the outset, there was consequently an expectation that academic partners would be in a minority (N8 PRP 2015).

Despite this, police representatives initially felt disadvantaged at Steering Group meetings. They described a strong sense that...

‘The academics obviously have worked together previously... And... had a common agenda and a perception of what the N8 was there to achieve’ (Police).

Contrastingly, forces had few such networks. Consequently...

¹³ N8 Policing Research Partnership (2017) *N8 PRP Annual Report 2016-17*. Available at: https://n8prp.org.uk/about_us/annual-report-2017/ [last accessed 23rd December 2017]

‘You can get picked off a little bit sitting around the Steering Group table’ (Police).

Police partners consequently established a police pre-meet, taking a couple of hours before each full Steering Group to clarify...

‘Have we got a view? [A]nd can we drive some of that forward?’ (Police).

Police partners felt that this had been a real success. Forces gained a rare opportunity to talk with colleagues from other areas, identifying shared priorities and areas for potential collaboration.

‘I don't think we have in this country easy means for police officers, even senior police officers, to actually learn or meet up with police practitioner researchers or academic researchers on policing elsewhere, at all. That's still not there’ (Police).

They also felt that this was a place where discussions could be held on an equitable basis, without being disempowered by jargon, abstract discussions or concerns of being dismissed:

‘I think [the pre-meet] has been critical, to be honest, because police, the police side don't feel as equipped or as eloquent as the academic side or as we perceive the academic side to be because not everybody is academically trained or experienced’ (Police).

As a result, the pre-meet often became the site of substantive, engaged, and productive discussions:

‘I think it was amazing... I tended to find we'd have really good discussions in the pre-meet. I mean, really excellent discussions. That I would've expected we'd have in the Steering Group’ (Police).

However, these struggled to be carried over into full Steering Group meetings, which police partners widely experienced as less productive, engaging, or purposeful:

‘We'd then come to the Steering Group. And it was almost. It felt a little bit tick-boxey. It felt a little bit like... updating this strand. Here's an update on this strand. Here's an update on [something else]... and the police would have their view that had already been agreed earlier on. But really there was none of this discussion...’ (Police).

As a couple of police partners noted, this may have been partly because key discussions had already been held, with decisions for the full Steering Group effectively already made:

‘I think it probably helped to be a bit more expeditious Steering Group, but I think the academics in the Steering Group probably thought, well there's not much debate about this, whereas we'd had the debate earlier’ (Police).

Substantive decisions were thus made by police partners, which carried considerable weight in the full Steering Group.

This reflected the experience of academic partners, who widely understood that the pre-meet had been of considerable practical benefit to police partners; but found it less constructive in the context of the workings of the full N8 PRP:

‘We found it very unhelpful. Not that they have pre-meetings, which, of course, is very helpful and not a problem at all, but that what's tended to happen when there were the pre-meetings is that the police partners have come to conclusions on what they think are the most important topics, but not necessarily informed by the availability of research or researchers on those topics, or the findings of research. And then those conclusions have been presented as, and “this is what's going to happen”’ (Researcher).

More broadly, there were concerns that decisions made based on police priorities but without academic input had led to N8 PRP resources being inefficiently deployed:

‘That focus on domestic abuse, domestic violence... is now for every meeting this year, the priority¹⁴. And I am not sure, even for the policing partners, if it's the right focus. Actually where there was a desperate need for research and for things to happen now as opposed to knowledge exchange, is on other areas of vulnerability. But we're now stuck with [domestic abuse]... [The pre-meet] is why it's happened’ (Researcher).

This was a viewpoint that few police partners sympathised with. Several police interviewees identified that this decision reflected the clear view of all police forces; and they were deeply frustrated that this decision had been questioned at all:

‘In the pre-meet there was a unanimous agreement that vulnerability, and vulnerability and domestic abuse as a particular theme... I was surprised and colleagues when I spoke to them afterwards were equally surprised when [the N8 PRP director], sort of, dismissed that by saying, well, we've done...there's loads of research about domestic abuse. We've done that. We now need to do something new and innovative and we said: “But if we've got an area of current, present, risk and danger that we're still not doing well, just because the research exists we've got to find out why that research isn't finding its way into practice at the very least”’ (Police).

Again, this reflected a clear and persistent distinction between the way police and academic partners understood the role and purpose of the N8 PRP.

Although these tensions remained substantively unresolved, the unsustainability of a separate police pre-meet in a coproductive partnership programme became increasingly apparent. Police and academic partners began to question its role.

‘The police pre-meet, I think that's changed. The word divisive comes to mind... I think if it's a partnership why do you need a police pre-meet? We academics don't have a pre-meet, we come a couple of hours later and we all get together. But I think that's now been acknowledged, and it does take time in any collaboration to build trust, and that sort of forming, storming,

¹⁴ The focus for the PIF (and subsequent small grants) in 2016-17) was established during the July 2016 Steering Group meeting. The focus on domestic abuse was based on a unanimous decision by police partners, made during the police pre-meet.

norming and performing element' (Researcher).

'Why is there a police pre-meet? As a partnership I found it quite strange that there was a police pre-meet and it appeared to be a – “this is what we want to get out of this collaboration. This is what we want this meeting to be focused on,” and then it would be focused on' (Police).

Alternative structures began to be discussed, and in the July 2016 Steering Group meeting police partners asked for a police Steering Group lead role to be established. By November, Steering Group minutes noted...

'Consolidation of meetings the right way to go, last meeting was a great experience and is an opportunity to iron out tensions and move forward collaboratively' (Police partner; Steering Group minutes)

By early 2017, the pre-meet had been absorbed into a longer Steering Group meeting, with all partners in attendance. This was felt to reflect growth within the collaboration:

'We're at a point now where we actually think that that hour before the steering is best spent together... I think it's interesting that now we've moved, so I think we started very, very, quite separately and now it's much closer, much more integrated' (Researcher).

Reflecting this change in the structure of meetings, Steering Group meetings also began to be jointly chaired by police and academic partners.

However, the abolition of the pre-meet initially caused some disruption. Without the time and space afforded by the pre-meet to establish police priorities, both academic and police partners identified felt the next couple of meetings had been less effective:

'[The first Steering Group after the end of the pre-meet was] [l]ess effective. The person who went on my behalf said it was a waste of time. And he goes to the OU one so he's got a comparison. Which is, which is not good. Because if you have a couple like that then people stop going and it starts not to work' (Police).

'I thought it could have been the first meeting, it could be the last meeting, there didn't seem to be any inputs brought in or any outputs. I wasn't really sure what the meeting's purpose was' (Police).

The project management team then sought recommendations from police partners as to how this might be addressed. Subsequent interviews and informal discussions suggest these early difficulties have been at least partially resolved, and this will be explored in future work.

Communications

One pressing, outstanding issue is that almost none of our interviewees had a clear sense of what was happening across the full partnership. Academics knew about developments in their own strand, and perhaps one or two others:

'I imagine [the PRP management team] might have a good understanding [of the N8 PRP]. I don't know, but it's not disseminated across the partners' (Researcher).

'How are the deliverables being monitored and evaluated? I don't know. It would be nice ... to see where everybody is. Like, I'm a lover of maps that say, for example, this is where we are, this is what we're going to do for the next year. And I haven't seen that' (Researcher).

'One thing I will say, and this is probably down to me rather than N8, is I don't feel as *au fait* with some of the work streams and some of the strands as perhaps I ought to be. I think it's difficult for each of us to be fully aware of the whole' (Researchers)

Police partners often felt less informed about both current programmes of work, and the N8 PRP's future plans:

'I get the sense that the leadership is there to organise the Steering Groups, have a vague idea of what's happening within the next 12 months and those things are being planned for. I don't get a sense that there's a strong collective understanding that we know where we're going and how we're going to get there in each of the five years' (Police).

Whilst a couple of police partners felt that this was their fault ('I get all the papers circulated and things like that so... there's no reason that I shouldn't be (Police partner)), this experience was very widely shared by interviewees.

Building relationships and networks

Catalyst for relationship-building

Relationship-building was widely seen as one of the 'big wins' to come out of N8 PRP membership.

'I think the networks is brilliant... There's just so many cross collaborative opportunities I think, it's really good' (Researcher).

'It's about cohorts of contacts, isn't it?' (Police).

These relationships came with significant benefits. Through events and the N8 PRP's register of experts, police partners had gained a means of accessing research expertise on a plethora of subjects:

'Based on the themes that we were kind of looking towards, things like new repeat victimisation, predictive policing, she was able to identify people within the N8 who I could then approach and that was amazing... That's like gold, isn't it' (Police).

'The fact that we've now got a list of academics on any sort of given subject, we can go to and say, come and help us and what have you' (Police).

Concomitantly, academics found that the N8 provided a conduit for smooth communication, with readily identified police contacts and the recognised N8 PRP brand name breaking down barriers that could obstruct or slow down research:

‘There definitely seems to be an – this is an [N8 PRP director] word – a conduit for facilitating transactions. I didn’t have any pre-existing relationships with police forces and my first questions actually on this post was, “is there a certain person that I need to go through to request, to do research?”’ (Researcher).

Events

Attendance at N8 PRP events was one significant vector for the formation of relationships, emerging from serendipitous contacts and informal conversations:

‘It has to be investing in relationships, because once you’ve got the relationships right, you do all sorts of other things through it... If you ring someone out the blue just cold, okay, you... But if you know the individual... As I say, I feel I could ring some of those people from the N8 conference and have a chat with them now, and have a different relationship with them even though I’ve only probably talked to them 5, 10, 15, 20 minutes’ (Police).

For a couple of police partners, this had led to the development of training partnerships:

‘[We gained] links to Canterbury University which I realise aren’t part of [the N8 PRP]... But certainly their President... was at the meeting at Sheffield’ (Police).

Whilst for multiple academics, contacts made at events had led to bids for research grants:

‘So someone else came up to me on Friday ... who I must have met briefly [at an event], who then said to me, we’ve just got a new ... project ... this would be a great place for people to be able to come and talk about that project, get some ideas, meet some people. Can we do something with that? I’m going to pass your name onto them’ (Researcher).

‘We have a grant which came from conversations at the N8 conference in the summer [of 2016] at Weetwood Hall’ (Researcher).

Small Grants

The second main vector for relationships came in the form of the annual call for small grants, a process that nearly half of all interviewees had participated in. The requirements of the small grants process¹⁵ meant that individuals often had to develop new partnerships with N8 colleagues in order to submit a bid:

‘Because this was an N8 project it meant that I needed an N8 partner... So that straightaway led to a relationship that never would have happened or isn't likely to have ever happened had it not been for the N8. And it opened the door to us collaborating on something again’ (Researcher).

Several of these nascent partnerships thrived, leading to the establishment of whole new networks

¹⁵ ‘...both a University and an N8 Policing Partner must be identified on the application’ (N8 PRP 2017:3)

based on strings of relationships:

‘I was co-I on one of the N8 small grants and there was a pre-existing relationship between [named] university and [named force area 1]. Who were enabled to set that project up so to speak. And then because the N8 had also included me I now have a relationship with [force area 1], and off the back of that relationship with [force area 1] I’ve been able to forge a relationship with [force area 2]’ (Researcher).

‘We’re now, our research team is now going through level three vetting with [name] Police, having met through this process, and now we’re going to work directly with them on research projects that they’re interested in, and we’re interested in, setting up PhD case studentships with them, Masters, dissertations with them, and then I think there’s just little questions that are really hard to answer as an academic, but so I’ve got a question around the way that coercive control has now been put into the counting rules. But I can go to there, and I can speculate with what I think, and I can ask people if it’s right or wrong, or you know?’ (Researcher).

In this context, a feeling that the N8 PRP had triggered a paradigm shift in relationships was not uncommon. Moreover, a couple of academic partners identified that they had been drawn back to policing research by the N8 PRP after some years working in different fields.

Coproduction

Defining coproduction

All interviewees were asked about their understanding of coproduction and its place within the N8 PRP. Understandings of the term broadly aligned, though with some differences in terminology and emphasis. Notably, police partners defined discrete occupational roles and impact as cornerstones of coproductive work:

‘[Academic and policing partner] get together and work together so we’ve got the academic brains [and] the sort of operational muscle. It comes together to solve a problem using academic research, academic methodology, and practical policing to deliver some recommendations that advance policing’ (Police).

‘The academics come with the theory, we come along with the reality. Put the two together and make recommendations about what could be improved and learning. The academics will take away that understanding of the organisation I guess, we will take that understanding of the theory and how it can be applied in reality’ (Police).

Contrastingly, academic interviewees placed more emphasis on process, shared responsibilities, and blurred organisational boundaries:

‘It’s about working together with no specific lead. It’s a shared and distributed responsibility. Where you’ve got a shared sense of ownership and shared outcomes that you’re moving towards,

and coproduction is working equally in terms of delivering' (Researcher).

And, indeed, this account broadly reflects the (academic) literature¹⁶.

Implementing coproduction

The applied limitations of coproduction in the context of the N8 PRP were noted by several interviewees. Some felt that, in the context of an enterprise designed, initiated, and led by (funded) academics, the term 'coproduction' was inappropriate:

'Co-production isn't the term that I would use. I prefer the knowledge exchange. I don't know, I mean co-production is a continuum, isn't it? And I think we are doing a disservice, I often think if you use the term co-production when you're less along that spectrum' (Researcher).

However, there was a sense that even if full coproduction could not be realised, some areas of the N8 PRP's work were likely to be amenable to elements of coproductive work

'I think my view would be there's no perfect model of co-production and we can't be co-productive at every single stage, it's just unrealistic, but at various points we can work better, and harder, to be more co-productive. Whether that's in the design of a project, in the delivery of a project, or in the way you collect data, or in the way you analyse it. It's just a continuum' (Researcher).

There was, more broadly, strong interest in identifying points of collaboration, even if full coproduction could not be realised:

'I think there is some separation of roles obviously, but there are different points across the project, where we meet and that co-production does take place' (Researcher).

Coproduction vs commissioning

One prominent challenge to realising coproduction was the persistence of commissioning models. Commissioning offered a straightforward framework for understanding the relationship between police and academic partners, and it structured the work of some other collaborations¹⁷. Moreover, the structure of the N8 PRP was felt to invite commissioned research, as the discrete roles of academics and police were enshrined within the Catalyst funding model, within its leadership, and within its delivery structures:

'Customers? Or partners? [The N8 almost has] the academics going away and doing the work that they think the police want. And then the police receiving that. And feeding in and commenting. Which for me is almost a customer-client relationship rather than a coproduction

¹⁶ See, for example, Campbell, H.; Vanderhoven, D. Knowledge That Matters: Realising the Potential of Co-Production. Available online: <http://www.n8research.org.uk/media/Final-Report-Co-Production-2016-01-20.pdf>

¹⁷ The N8 PRP also set out its 'police-led research commissioning process' in a document disseminated in late 2016. It is not clear that this was widely used, and no interviewees described using it.

relationship' (Police).

Nonetheless, several interviewees (predominantly academics, though including a couple of police partners) described being keen to establish processes that blurred organisational boundaries, and gave more weight to shared, iterative, emergent research processes. As the following interviewee suggested, coproduction was seen as one way of moving towards delivering high quality research capable of delivering real-world impact:

'Co-production... gets away from that idea of commissioning. [Which] is something that's easier for us, because you commissioned it, I did what you said you wanted me to do, go away, if you don't want to use it, you don't use it or whatever. [But] it's not very good research, because the confines are so narrow and the questions that it's asking are so narrow... Academics don't often know what the best questions are... so, you know, I think there is something to be said for that kind of moving and trying to break that model of commissioning' (Researcher).

Perhaps more importantly, some steps towards embedding coproduction within research were also clearly apparent – for example, in the calls for small grants, which required the involvement of both police and academic partners from the outset.

Institutional penetration

The long-term sustainability of the N8 PRP relies on relationships gaining an institutional footing. Time and time again, both academic and police partners identified that varied attendance at N8 PRP meetings and turnover within posts presented real challenges to establishing persistent relationships:

'Keeping in touch with the police is incredibly difficult, because of the churn in senior officers and because of the scale of transformation of policing, because of the cuts and so on...'
(Researcher).

'There were a lot of faces around the table that I didn't recognise and... that probably isn't helping' (Police).

'We change people regularly. If you look at attendance at the Steering Group I am now the only one who has been to nearly all the meetings from the beginning. I think everyone else there has been at least one representation or change or more' (Police).

Police partners generally identified that they had sought some means of disseminating N8 PRP information within their forces, and ensuring that training places were well used. One force area had developed a dissemination structure, with individual officers tasked with following the work of specific strands, and providing updates to colleagues. The same force area asked that anyone who attended a N8 PRP event communicated key messages to their colleagues:

'Whenever we send anybody as a force, we always say, can you write a report about it or a few notes about what you've been to? So they give that back to me and then I can give that to the

PCC's office if they request it' (Police).

This tapped into a broader framework; the force's Steering Group representative maintained a spreadsheet of benefits the force had secured from the PRP, so that these could be quickly provided should anyone ask what benefits were being gained from involvement in the programme¹⁸.

From a police perspective, active efforts to engage forces on their own terms were also seen as particularly helpful for establishing the N8 PRP's reputation. Thus, several police interviewees identified that visits by the strand lead for Data Analytics and the N8 PRP director had very effectively communicated and / or 'sold' the value of the N8 PRP to key stakeholders and senior officers.

Academic interviewees were almost invariably clear that they had senior institutional support for their engagement with the N8 PRP, and a small number had also found ways of disseminating information about the N8 PRP around their institutions. In some instances, this had supported the development of relationships between academics, and between faculties:

'In the School, we do report back about goings on in the N8, and also notify them about any events that they may be interested in. We have a mailing list for the super group, and that enables us to do that. And we do get regular questions about them. So that's proved very useful' (Researchers).

However, there was also a broader sense that academic colleagues were uncertain about the N8, and about the N8 PRP more broadly:

'I think there's loads of confusion around N8 generally... if you say, N8 people tend to go, oh do you mean the stuff in Laker? And you say, no, and they say, oh you mean food security? No, policing research partnership. Oh, what's that then?' (Researcher).

'Even within our school I don't know that people know exactly how to engage. I think. Obviously we have [a senior staff member engaged with the PRP]. He'll mention it at every given opportunity and shout it from the rooftops. But even then there's perhaps a lack of understanding about what we do' (Researcher).

Across these accounts was a feeling that clearer deliverables or products might support the N8 PRP in becoming a more visible presence. For example, colleagues in some universities were thought to be waiting for clear, accessible data (or data access systems) from Data Analytics. This resonated with the consistent message from police partners, who routinely emphasised that the routine dissemination of N8 PRP-branded products outputs would greatly assist them in selling the N8 PRP amongst their own colleagues:

'And I think other police partners will say. We're still trying to get a sense of – what's the

¹⁸ Highlighting the fragility of institutional ties, the officer responsible for establishing this dissemination structure moved on, and it appeared to have been discontinued. Despite being one of the most advanced processes we encountered for disseminating N8 PRP information within an institution, it thus appears to have been largely reliant on a single individual.

product? What's coming out at the end of this? What are we seeing? ... I think there's a need to. I use the word market carefully. Because it's not about glossy brochures and websites. Although they are important. I think again it's about marketing the practicalities' (Police).

Negotiating organisational culture

As might have become apparent over the course of this report, most interviewees acknowledged a need to recognise and manage differences between the cultural expectations and needs of police and academic partners. These broadly fell into three categories.

Language

Firstly, a broad selection of interviewee acknowledged that academic language and processes could exclude police partners from accessing research, or engaging in substantive discussions.

'One of the things the police have said to me several times is, we can't access the journals that the research is in, and even if we can, we can't understand it 'cause it's all in jargon, 'cause you've got to write in a certain jargon to be internationally outstanding. So there's these really big tensions in the system that I think are problematic' (Researcher).

'Because most of us in policing don't use academic terminology or we don't necessarily speak the same language all the time and I think that can be a real challenge. That can sometimes, you know, from one side or the other create a sense of dismissal, that, well, I've not understood what you've said as an academic so therefore you're not in touch with reality so therefore you haven't got anything to say to me or you've said something in a rather cack-handed way, it's not particularly elegant or structured so therefore you might be a bit thick' (Police).

The police pre-meet had been one means of ensuring that police felt able to participate fully in discussions amongst people they knew to be their peers. The extent to which this has been overcome more broadly (and perhaps within this report) is not yet clear. Certainly, police interviewees have continued to voice concerns about academic language and jargon.

Timescales and updates

Secondly, there was a clear recognition that academics and police partners worked to different timescales.

'We tend to because of the nature of who we are and what we do, we tend to have to do things very quickly and tend to be emergencies or urgencies at the very least and we have to focus on that which look to cause the most harm and not necessarily that which is the most interesting' (Police).

The impact of this could be seen in nearly every area of the N8 PRP's work. For example, police partners with large workloads and oversight for multiple complex programmes felt a real need for clear, succinct communications and updates:

‘We deal typically we communicate in the headline terms, it’s headlines all the time, we don’t have the time to get beneath it’ (Police).

‘I like to see things on one page... I don’t see how it’s so difficult to put what everything that’s happening in N8 on one page’ (Police).

For the most part, N8 PRP communications were not felt to be meeting this need.

Secondly, timescales shaped police partners’ research priorities, and research needs. As documented repeatedly in this report, this led to a requirement for research to provide evidence that could lead to clear operational guidance:

‘Police forces historically are interested not in the why but the what. So there’s a fight in the car park I don’t need to know why there’s a fight I just need to know what to do about it’ (Police).

It could also lead to police partners responding to immediate organisational priorities that, from the perspective of academic interviewees, were not well-suited to research. Time and time again, police partners highlighted the need for impact, or closing the ‘implementation gap’ to ensure real-world change:

‘If we don’t nail this or begin to understand that this gap between research and implementation into practice, you’re in danger of just writing things which are interesting and on the periphery. It’s when you can identify something that then has a tangible, sustainable difference which is why we’re all challenging DASH¹⁹ because DASH is being brought in on the basis of little or no evidence and some of us believe it’s actually causing more harm than good’ (Police).

For academics, this was widely seen as a suboptimal or potentially inappropriate use of research resources

‘I think what’s going on is what typically goes on, which is timescales. The strategic timescales for very senior officers tends to be set by political priorities and government timescales, and scandals and all those sorts of things. Nationally, I don’t mean in their force. And those things are where action has to be taken, for example, for the inspectorate, within the next nine months. Whereas that is not the research timetable. That is the knowledge exchange timetable’ (Researcher).

Differing cultural timescales were thus seen to have a wide-reaching impact on all aspects of the PRP.

Outputs

Finally, as noted, police partners repeatedly emphasised a need for clear, visible outputs. Without exception, police interviewees stated that research was of little or no value to them if it did not have an operational impact:

¹⁹ The Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment risk assessment tool.

‘We need to see some of the outputs. What’s actually there that we can pick up and take back to force. And it needn’t be huge massive things. I talk about things I brought into this force... but again it’s just something quite simple, quite easy to show us well here’s 5 minute PowerPoints to show us the kind of things we’re working on with the OU. We almost need a couple of easy show-mes from the N8’ (Police).

‘If we don’t have anything coming out of the research that allows us to do things differently, then from a practitioner perspective it’s difficult to see the value’ (Police).

Based on this primary goal, police and academic partners described different approaches towards evidence. Police partners clearly saw evident benefits to conducting large-scale, quantitative research – preferably in the form of randomised control trials (RCTs).

‘It appeals to me that the focus is on RCT’s from a policing perspective because you ultimately want to make decisions about the way you do things in the organisation. You need really robust research that says actually, you know, this is real, you’ve met all of the variables, made the change. Whereas the more qualitative side I really see the value of that, absolutely it’s necessary and you really need that understanding of concepts to scale up to organisational change, but it doesn’t necessarily help do things differently’ (Police).

‘I think everyone has been told that RCT’s are the gold standard. And that they’re at the top of the evaluation triangle, and that’s what you should be aiming for’ (Researcher).

The purpose and benefits of qualitative research were less clear. There was a widespread sense that it was hard to draw on qualitative research to drive direct (or generalisable) changes in practice, and this limited both its utility and its value. This, perhaps, reflected a broader difference in understandings of evidence. Police partners tended to see quantitative evidence as relatively unproblematic, and such research as something that could provide clear guidance for changes to operational policing. Academic partners described a more nuanced view of the ease with which research could translate into practice, based on the acknowledged limitations of research, the commonplace nature of small effect sizes, and routinely contradictory findings.

Concluding thoughts

Across multiple areas of this report, two themes persistently reappeared. The first centred on a tension between process and outcomes. Broadly speaking, academic interviewees framed many aspects of the N8 PRP in terms of processes. The purpose of the N8 PRP was to establish and develop relationships and capacities; ‘coproduction’ was understood as a process of coming together; policing was to be changed by enhancing awareness of methodological complexity; research was conceived of as an iterative and ongoing process, with a complicated relationship to practice. Contrastingly, police partners tended to frame answers more in terms of outcomes. The purpose of the N8 PRP was to

deliver products that could make manifest changes to frontline practice; ‘coproduction’ was understood in terms of coming together ‘to deliver some recommendations that advance policing’; policing was to be changed through clearer guidance, established by a research base that was more clearly aligned with policing priorities; and research was conceived of as a fundamentally unproblematic enterprise capable of delivering clear answers to real-world questions.

Secondly, questions of ownership also persisted across multiple domains. Police partners felt that the N8 PRP should clearly align itself (and any emergent research) with police priorities, whilst academics often argued for clearer independence. The Steering Group served to focus some of these tensions. Police partners described isolated, excluded, or ‘picked off’ in mixed meetings with academics (who they widely saw as more cohesive), and so set up a discrete ‘police pre-meet.’ This, in turn, was seen as divisive by academic partners, giving a unified police voice too much influence over N8 PRP processes. This, then, was replaced by a system in which Steering Group meetings were joint-chaired by an academic and police partner. Nonetheless, some concerns persisted amongst police partners who noted that both the leadership of activity strands and the directorship of the N8 PRP lay exclusively in academic hands.

