

Innovation and the Application of Knowledge for More Effective Policing

International Strand Summary Report – July 2018

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SUMMARY

Beginning in May 2015, International Strand team members have undertaken a range of activities to develop a detailed understanding of police-academic collaborations in international context. They first participated in roundtables at three international conferences (CEPOL, ASC, Stockholm Criminology Symposium) to lay the foundations for a two-day N8 PRP international conference ‘Working with the Police on Policing’ in Sheffield during October 2016. At this conference, practitioners and academics gave joint presentations on their shared experiences of collaborative projects which were subsequently turned into eight articles in a *European Journal of Policing Studies* special issue published in April 2018. These activities were then combined with a review of the English-language international literature on police-academic collaborations so as to identify six key themes for further study: concepts and typologies, context and history, culture, money and resources, sustainability and policy transfer. The team drafted working papers on each theme which were in turn subject to debate and critique at a further two-day N8 PRP international seminar held in Sheffield during May 2018. In Spring 2018, team members also embarked on research trips to the US, Norway and Sweden to interview police practitioners and academics engaged in partnership work in order to further investigate these themes. This report summarises the team’s headline findings and is organised in accordance with these six themes.

KEY POINTS

Concepts and typologies

- After decades of research *on, for* and *by* the police, there has recently been a growing recognition of the need for police and academics to work together in collaborative partnerships (i.e. research *with* the police) in order to advance knowledge exchange, translation and use.
- Multi-site collaborations in which academics from a range of universities work directly with police are potentially the most effective at advancing evidence-based practices because they offer greater scope, breadth of expertise and opportunities for police to become more fully engaged in the research process through training at universities. However, multi-site collaborations are rare and need to be built up over time.

Context and history

- Overall, there has been a growing alignment between police forces and universities as a result of broader shifts within and outside them, linked to the wider socio-political climate.
- This alignment has been driven by the growing status of criminology and police studies and the need for impactful research which engages directly with practitioners. It has also been facilitated by a narrowing of the cultural divide between police and academics, growing police professionalisation and recognition by police that they need external input on their work, in light of an ever more complex role in 21st century societies.

KEY POINTS *(CONTINUED)*

- The literature on police-academic partnerships stems from a few Western countries (primarily the US, UK, Australia), with little evidence of flourishing partnerships in other countries.

Culture

- While collaborative partnerships have long been understood as being hampered by a cultural divide between police and academics, there have been signs of convergence over recent decades owing to broad political and institutional trends, as well as a variety of local factors, appropriate training and positive experiences of research partnerships.
- To some extent, however, cultural differences need to exist so as to prevent the blurring of occupational boundaries and the undermining of the interdependent independent relationship that is necessary in order to sustain effective police-academic partnerships.

Money and resources

- Joint research between police and academics does not necessarily need specific funding – it can tap into money for PhD studentships, into police resources and be done within government. However, lack of funding is a key reason from the literature for police not starting partnerships or them ending: many partnerships are short-term.
- Police forces have not often invested in R&D themselves internally, so evaluation and major initiatives need external funding. National ‘What Works’ initiatives are valuable but cannot be the only answer, because there is insufficient research on all relevant aspects of policing.

Sustainability

- Much partnership working by the police is driven by statutory requirements, but there is no such requirement for research, so its existence and scope depend on the value put on research and evaluation. There needs to be sustained commitment and at least small resourcing from all sides to get over funding ‘droughts’, as well as good dissemination plans.
- Most partnerships have been valued, but have been one project only, or short-term, which means initial difficulties of ‘getting to know one another’ take up significant time. Sustained multi-project, multi-party partnerships are rare. They normally need a formal agreement to cement engagement.

Policy Transfer

- Scholarship on and evaluations of police-academic collaborations have primarily focused on stand-alone case studies rather than lesson-drawing between case studies. This emphasis could either be a normalised scholarly omission or a reflection of the fact that most collaborations are indeed highly localized initiatives.
- Where there is a focus on policy transfer, it tends to reproduce the biases of the broader policing scholarship on policy transfer – it is dominated by Anglo-American case studies and highlights the importance of cultural commonalities between different policing systems.

FINDINGS

Concepts and typologies

After decades of research *on, for and by* the police, there has recently been a growing recognition of the need for police and academics to work together in collaborative partnerships (i.e. research *with* the police) in order to advance knowledge exchange, translation and use. It is important that such partnerships use a range of research aims and methods, which reach beyond narrow considerations of whether a policing initiative works. They should also invest in mechanisms for turning research into outputs that can be utilised by policymakers and practitioners. This requires an understanding of the factors that influence how research is used in policy and practice and various types of utilisation (e.g. instrumental, conceptual and symbolic use).

Central to all partnerships are mutual areas of interest, trust and communication. Whilst existing police-academic collaborations differ in structure, duration, scope, activities and funding, leading commentators argue that collaborations of academics across universities working directly with police are the most effective at advancing evidence-based practices because they offer greater scope, breadth of expertise and opportunities for police officers to become fully engaged in the research process through training at universities.

Context and history

Focusing on the main drivers of police-academic collaborations as a movement, rather than the drivers of individual partnerships, we have since the 1960s moved from a position in which academic research played a negligible role in police work to one in which it is increasingly acknowledged as central to police work. This growing valorisation of police-academic collaborations is partly rooted in shifts in the academic climate, most notably the growth in status of criminology and police studies, linked to funding, as well as to a growing sense of the importance of university-community engagement, public criminology and impactful research, particularly in the UK.

As for the climate of police work, police-academic collaborations have been partially stimulated by a lessening of the cultural divide between police and academics, which is in part a product of growing police professionalisation. Within the policing world, the growing complexity of the role linked to increasingly complex social conditions has provided further stimulus for police research and associated police-academic collaborations. Overall, there has been growing alignment between police forces and universities as a result of broader shifts within and outside them, linked to the wider socio-political climate.

Culture

Collaborative partnerships have long been understood as being hampered by a cultural divide – the so-called ‘dialogue of the deaf’ – between the police and academics, including in relation to different reward systems, different language and jargon, different interpretations of timeframes for achieving goals, and different definitions of what constitutes useful and relevant research. But there have been signs of convergence in the Anglosphere. While there are a variety of local factors at work here, for instance relating to personalities and problems in specific institutions and geographical localities, there are also three broader factors which are helping to bring about this lessening of the culture divide: the spread of evidence-based policing; the rise of the university impact agenda, and the politics of austerity.

In this context, police-academic collaboration can be a vehicle for bringing about cultural shifts, especially when accompanied by appropriate training, structural change and additional resources. These shifts are perhaps most evident amongst a cadre of highly educated middle and senior managers. To some extent, however, cultural differences need to exist so as to prevent the blurring of occupational boundaries and the undermining of the interdependent independent relationship that is necessary in order to sustain effective police-academic partnerships.

FINDINGS (CONTINUED)

Money and resources

Our evidence on the need for and funding of collaborative partnerships comes primarily from the US, the UK and Australia. In all three countries, research into policing and with the police is valued and has been supported by government initiatives. However, research and partnership do not necessarily need funding external to the partnership. University resources can fund some PhDs and some curiosity-driven research, as well as seminars and conferences. Funding of research by police forces is rarer, because in these countries police do not see themselves as responsible for their own R&D, but dissemination, partnership activities and the work of some ‘pracademics’ are resourced. However, evaluation, particularly multi-site evaluation, does need external funding.

External funding is also a key spur to starting and maintaining partnerships. Lack of funding was, in the US, given by police forces as the main reason for not being in a partnership with academics. Academics are more likely to seek out and acquire competitive grants, the main form of external funding, so police priorities and less ‘topical’ areas may not be being researched. ‘What works’ studies, though valuable, cannot fill this gap, simply because there is an insufficient body of research in many fields of policing.

Sustainability

Most police-academic partnerships have been short-term (in the US, for example, less than 24 months), though welcomed on all sides. It is clearly difficult to create sustainable partnerships, though their value lies in the ability to research different areas and to get over the initial, ‘getting to know you’ phase, whilst building multi-stranded work and encouraging ‘pracademics’. Senior level leadership on all sides is vital, because work to maintain partnerships does not normally promote individual careers, and individual-level alliances tend not to survive changes in personnel.

Strategic partnerships, especially multi-force, multi-university partnerships, need to have underpinning formal joint agreements, setting out their aims, scope and the resourcing being provided, upon which partners can draw when times are hard or there are changes in leadership. This is particularly important given the lack of legal requirements on police forces to do research or evaluate practice (as opposed to the position with other multi-agency partnership working). It can also combat tendencies to follow external funders’ priorities, instead preserving the critical edge of research. All partners need to be prepared to sustain the resourcing of the partnership in lean times for external funding: to ‘smooth the hiccups’.

Policy Transfer

Scholarship on and evaluations of police-academic collaborations have primarily focused on stand-alone case studies, rather than considering the extent to which lessons have been drawn from collaborations in other policing systems. This emphasis could either be a normalised scholarly omission or a reflection of the fact that most collaborations are indeed developed locally without too much thought given over to what is happening beyond their immediate geographical and institutional boundaries.

Where there is a focus on policy transfer, it tends to reproduce the biases of the broader policing scholarship on policy transfer – it is dominated by Anglo-American case studies and highlights the importance of cultural commonalities. The central case study is the emergence of the ‘evidence-based policing’ movement in the United States during the 1980s and its subsequent transfer to other policing systems across the Anglosphere. It is claimed that this trend has led to the establishment of a ‘police science’ epistemic community whose practitioner and academic members are united by a shared belief in the virtues of transforming policing from ‘craft’ based on experience to a ‘science’ based on experimental design.

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