
**‘Innovation and the Application of Knowledge for More Effective Policing’
N8 Policing Research Partnership Catalyst Project**

Strand 9. Monitoring and Evaluation.

Strand 9 of the N8 Policing Research Partnership (N8 PRP) focuses on monitoring the processes and evaluating the impact of the partnership.

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 academic partners, covering all strand leads; 11 with police partners from 8 force areas; two with OPCC representatives; and one with a College of Policing representative. Most interviews were completed between September 2016 and January 2017, though some were conducted later in the year.

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

Key Points

Overview

- Despite several changes in academic and police representation, the first two years of the N8 PRP were widely seen as a success.
- Interviewees felt that the N8 PRP’s purpose was clarified; relationships developed; and trust grew between key partners.

Key gains

- Interviewees saw the development of new research partnerships as one of the N8 PRP’s main benefits.
- Over half of all interviewees had formed collaborations in order to bid for the first round of the N8 PRP’s Small Grants awards programme.
- Several such collaborations had progressed to develop bids for new research projects.

Key challenges

- Ensuring inclusive ownership of the N8 PRP was identified as a key challenge.
- The development of a police pre-meet provided policing partners with a collaborative voice; but academic interviewees felt this left them with little input into key decisions.
- Police partners also felt a need for clear, visible outputs; and more concise, regular updates on progress within the N8 PRP’s strands.

Introduction

This report presents summarises early key findings from the Monitoring and Evaluation Strand of the N8 Policing Research Partnership (N8 PRP).

The findings are drawn from semi-structured qualitative interviews with academic strand leads and police representatives at the N8 PRP's steering group. The focus is on the N8 PRP's core business and governance arrangements.

Qualitative data offers detailed insights into complex phenomena. To support accessible communication, the findings presented here contain distilled summaries of three key themes.

The Evolution of the N8 PRP

The onset of the N8 PRP was characterised by steady progress in the face of considerable disruption. Four strands experienced changes in leadership. Several committed and senior police representatives moved into other posts, or retired.

Despite this difficult context, establishing trust between steering group members and clarifying the N8 PRP's purpose were seen as key achievements of the first 18 months:

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

Major milestones were also delivered: conferences, events, and small grants were highlighted as visible signs of the N8 PRP's progress. Academics were particularly positive about the scale and pace of developments:

It is a remarkable achievement to have set up the N8 policing research partnership... Looking at where it came from to where it is now, in a short space of time, it is remarkable that it's happened (Academic).

The benefits of N8 PRP programmes and events were sometimes enduring, supporting (or requiring) the creation of new individual and institutional research partnerships.

Steering group processes also changed over the N8 PRP's first two years. Steering groups with no structured police leadership led to the creation of a police 'pre-meet'...

...to ensure that we were pointing the research in the direction of what our current problems were (Police).

With trust more clearly established between partners, this ended in April 2017. Concurrently, a decision was made to share the chairing of meetings between police and academic partners.

Substantive benefit: Catalyst for partnerships

We do act as a bit of a dating agency, sort of thing (Academic).

For a large group of interviewees, N8 PRP events and processes had supported the formation of new partnerships. Several such partnerships had progressed to develop new research projects, securing funding from outside the N8 PRP.

The first round of N8 PRP Small Grants appeared to be a particularly successful catalyst for collaboration. Over half of all interviewees formed new partnerships to bid for a Small Grant.

Even when interviewees had not formed structured partnerships, there was a sense that the PRP had opened doors to collaboration. Sometimes, this was in person, and through events:

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 (Police).

Others had used the N8 PRP's list of experts to seek partners in specific fields:

[The Governance team] were able to identify people within the N8 who I could then approach and that was amazing... That's like gold, isn't it? (Police).

Substantive challenge: Bridging the organisational divide

All policing and most academic interviewees saw the N8 PRP's purpose as informing and changing police practice:

If we don't have anything coming out of the research that allows us to do things differently then... it's difficult to see the value (Police).

The main reason for doing it is to try and change policing (Academic).

However, persistent tensions were apparent over the ownership of N8 PRP processes, and the timing and nature of N8 PRP outputs.

Ownership

In terms of ownership, 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...

You can get picked off a little bit sitting around the steering group table (Police).

A police pre-meet was therefore set up, with police partners meeting for a couple of hours before the steering group to clarify...

Have we got a view? [And] can we drive some of that forward? (Police).

However, the pre-meet was itself experienced as problematic by academic partners, who felt a loss of ownership. Key decisions were made by the pre-meet and without academic input:

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 Academics on those topics, or the findings of research. And those conclusions have been presented as, "and this is what's going to happen" (Academic).

By April 2017, several policing and academic partners felt the pre-meet was no longer necessary. Following a discussion at the full steering group, the pre-meet came to an end.

Contemporaneously, joint chairing of steering group meetings was established, providing a visible leadership role for police partners within the steering group.

Outputs

In terms of N8 PRP outputs, police partners felt a particular need for outputs that could evidence the N8 PRP's value to their forces:

We need to see some outputs. What's actually there that we can pick up and take back to force? We... need a couple of easy show-mes from the N8 (Police).

The emphasis was on concise and regular – rather than comprehensive – updates:

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).

One force had developed a response to this. Individual officers were tasked with following a strand and providing brief, internal summaries of developments.

To an extent, police requirements for updates resonated with academics, few of whom felt fully informed about the N8 PRP or developments across the strands:

[The Governance team] might have a good understanding [of the strands]. I don't know, but it's not disseminated across the partners. (Academic).

Suggested remedies included more regular updates, extended breaks at events to allow conversations, and full relationship-building N8 PRP away-days.

Conclusion

Despite a challenging first 18 months, the N8 PRP was widely seen as a success. Key milestones were delivered, and trust grew in both institutional and individual relationships. Across the N8 PRP, multiple research collaborations were formed.

Two key challenges facing the N8 PRP centred on clarifying that governance structures and communication processes meet both academic and police requirements.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Next steps

Interviews with Police and Crime Commissioners' representatives are underway. In 2018, we will re-interview police partners and strand leads to identify progress and key changes.

Interviews will be supplemented by case studies, focused on specific strands (data analytics; small grants; the Policing Innovation Forum 2017); and police staff not directly involved in the N8 PRP (data analysts; innovation and evidence hubs).

Separately, we will commission an external evaluation N8 PRP's impact. The brief for this will be coproduced, with an intention to look 'beyond the commonplace' in identifying coproductive impacts and institutional change.