

What works in police partnerships?

12 May 2021

Chaired by **Professor Joanna Shapland**, Edward Bramley Professor of Criminal Justice, University of Sheffield

Session 1: Police-police partnerships

The Hard Yards: case studies in inter-police collaboration - Matt Parr CB, HMICFRS

Geography, demand and capability - Inspector Richard Reeves, North West Marine Search Unit

Session 2: Police-academic partnerships

Research partnerships in the time of COVID and declining trust in the police: a view from the USA – Prof Geoff Alpert, University of South Carolina, USA and Griffith University, Australia; Prof Jeffrey Rojek, Michigan State University, USA; and Prof Kyle Mclean, Clemson University, USA

Fragile alliances: sustaining police-academic partnerships - Prof Joanna Shapland, University of Sheffield

Session 3: Partnerships in the context of vulnerability

Vulnerability in police custody and partnerships responses: mapping the contours of a changing terrain –

Dr Layla Skinns, University of Sheffield

Report

‘What Works in Police Partnerships?’ was session was chaired by Professor Joanna Shapland, Edward Bramley Professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Sheffield, and moderated by Dr Geoff Pearson, Academic Co-Director of N8 PRP.

The programme, with speakers from HMICFRS, North West Policing Divers Unit, and US and UK academia, attracted plenty of attention with 77 people logging onto the event, with c.50 attendees from UK police forces. The high level of engagement from UK police is a testament to the commitment to developing evidence-based policing and effective partnerships across the UK, and to the ability of N8 PRP to create networks that enable that development.

Aligning purpose and possibility

In the first session, on inter-police partnerships, HMI Matt Parr discussed The Hard Yards project, an examination of 6 inter-police collaborations covering over 50% of forces in England and Wales. The report identified good practice and areas for improvement on the themes of purpose, cost/benefits, governance, and capability, concluding that collaboration shouldn’t be pursued for its own sake but only when it will help to achieve clear goals. The criteria for success was illustrated to great effect in Inspector Richard Reeves’ subsequent overview of the North West Underwater Search & Marine

Unit. Insp Reeves discussed how the team effectively maintain capability for diving operations across the region, responding to demand and geography to shape the aims and operation of the team, effectively maintaining capability for diving operations across the region.

In the Q&A session, the comparative merits of collaborations and mergers were discussed. HMI Parr agreed that collaborations could be more fragile, but protected local accountability. He also discussed HMICFRS's Network Code as a means of formalising partnerships by 'pooling' sovereignty to better enable the sharing of resources, which he thought had the potential to deliver substantial improvements service to the public. Inadequate IT resources were also discussed and identified as a major obstacle and time-drain for creating inter-force partnerships, with the new Police Digital Service sited as a potential reformer in this area.

Forging resilience across divergent communities

In the second session, the fragility of police-academic partnerships were discussed, beginning with three leading US academics. Professors Geoffrey Alpert, Jeff Rojek and Kyle McLean examined how highly-publicised instances of police brutality in the US, and the subsequent protests, has exacerbated tensions in the alliance of police and police researchers that had grown up 4 or 5 decades. Notably, colleges now see any kind of collaborative work with the police as reputational risk. This upheaval, coupled with the shock of the Covid shutdown, has created a dramatic shift internally within the two communities. To sustain partnerships between these divergent communities, there needs to be understanding of how structural characteristics (such as financial support) and participant's values, and investment in building interpersonal relationships that created trust between partners, so relationships can be renegotiated in response to significant changes.

Prof Shapland also discussed the fragility of partnerships. As partnerships were usually formed in response to a specific project, there was little on-going contact and so partnerships could be erased by changes in personnel. This could make collaboration an afterthought – for example with academic evaluation of a project tacked on at the end rather than included in the design from the start. Prof Shapland concluded that academic-police partnerships were inevitably fragile because the aims, timescales and incentives of the two groups was fundamentally divergent. However, regular contact and discussion could create advocates for the partnership at their respective institutions, creating better possibilities for more effective research.

In the Q&A session, research 'on' rather than 'with' police was discussed. The speakers agreed there was still appetite for this in the academy, but the burden on police time without a clear benefit made it difficult to get access. Networks like N8 PRP were cited as very useful for increasing the profile and value of research among forces, and it was agreed that it was good practice to let subjects of research to have site of the work before publication. This gave an opportunity for discussion and clarification, and meant subjects wouldn't feel 'ambushed' by critical findings.

The speakers were asked whether they thought the UK universities could start to draw back from wanting to support research with the police, as has happened in the US. Prof Shapland gave the view that the problems of racism and violence towards protestors were not new, so were unlikely to be the catalyst for such a shift in the UK. However, if the new powers granted to police Covid lockdown compliance continued, this could create difficulties for researchers who might find themselves targeted after writing critically about the police.

From guests to partners

In the final session of the day, Dr Layla Skinns looked at partnership working in response to vulnerability in police custody. Dr Skinns discussed the changing concept of vulnerability from lists of 'protected characteristics' to a model of universal vulnerability, the growing role of Healthcare Partners (HCPs) and Liaison and Diversion (L&D). HCPs and L&D could be seen as 'guests' on the police 'territory' of custody, but decision-making was effectively delegated to them even though the official responsibility remained with the custody officer. Dr Skinns suggested there consideration of moving to a universal concept of vulnerability, creating an 'opt out' approach. However, this would be more resource-intensive. Finally, Dr Skinns suggested that formal responsibility for decision-making should be divested to HCPs and L&D, so that codes of practice matched the on-the-ground reality.

In the discussion, the opinion was given that the automation of custody procedures wasn't fit for purpose, and was hampering the ability of custody officers to respond to specific circumstances. One attendee asked if the police were ambitious enough in the partnerships with support services, and thought there should be more interventions. Dr Skinns replied that changing the conception of vulnerability would better capture the need for services, and both the law and codes of practice should be brought into line with actual practice.

Flexibility without fragility?

Prof Shapland wrapped up the day, highlighting common themes of the talks. Firstly, it's clear that working together is essential, but is currently ad hoc. The HMICFRS approach of more formalised networks could be a way of addressing this. Secondly, how to resource partnerships was a common point of contest. Thirdly, how can the effectiveness of partnerships be measured? For inter-police partnerships this could be primarily about cost, but where different communities worked together, aims become more diffuse and need to be more clearly acknowledged.

Speaker Biographies

Professor Geoffrey Alpert, University of South Carolina, USA

Geoffrey P. Alpert is a Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of South Carolina and has an appointment at Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia. He has taught at the FBI National Academy, the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center and The Senior Management Institute for Police. He is currently a Federal Monitor for the New Orleans Police Department and on the compliance team for the Portland, Oregon Police Bureau. He has testified to Congress, several state legislatures, and the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, and is a member of the International Association of Chiefs of Police Research Advisory Committee and the PERF Research Advisory Board. For the past forty years, his research interests have focused on police use of force, emergency driving and the linkages between researchers and practitioners.

Dr Matthew Bacon, University of Sheffield, UK

Dr Matthew Bacon is a Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Sheffield. Before joining Sheffield, he worked as a Research Associate at the University of Manchester on a project examining the contractual governance of drug users in treatment. Matthew is the author of *Taking Care of Business* (OUP, 2016), an ethnography of police detectives, drug law enforcement and proactive investigation. His work has been published in journals such as *British Journal of Criminology*, *Evidence & Policy*, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, and *Policing & Society*. His current research focuses on innovation and reform in drugs policing, especially alternatives to criminalisation and other harm reduction measures.

Professor Kyle McLean, Clemson University, USA

Kyle McLean is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Criminal Justice at Clemson University and a National Institute of Justice (NIJ) Law Enforcement Advancing Data and Sciences (LEADS) Academic. Dr. McLean's research interests focus on understanding police-community relations and evaluating efforts to reform the police to better reflect community demands of policing. Accordingly, Dr. McLean has conducted research in the areas of police legitimacy, police training, police culture, police use of force, and body-worn cameras. His recent work has been published in *Justice Quarterly*, *Journal of Research in Crime & Delinquency*, *Criminology & Public Policy*, and *the Journal of Experimental Criminology*.

Matt Parr CB, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services

Matt Parr was appointed as Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary in August 2016. Brought up in London, he now lives in the West Country. He has responsibility for forces based in the capital, the national special forces as well as those in Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories. In addition, he is temporarily overseeing several Police and Fire & Rescue Services within the north. His background is in the Royal Navy, which he joined straight from Durham University. A submariner by specialisation, he has also commanded above the waves and ashore. Much of his career was spent at sea; but among his shore appointments he was responsible for the Navy's inspection regime and also led a Ministry of Defence-wide team conducting studies for ministers. As a Rear-Admiral he was a member of the Navy Board. He was head of the Submarine Service and was the Navy's Director of Operations. He was appointed a Companion of the Order of the Bath in 2013.

Inspector Richard Reeves, North West Underwater Search & Marine Unit

I joined Cheshire Constabulary in 2000 and my first real collaborative role came in 2003, when I spent two years embedded within the UK Immigration Service. Following a return to response policing my next big partnership role came in 2008 as the Police Inspector for Warrington Town Centre, building close links with Local Authority Enforcement Agencies and the Commercial Sector of the vibrant night time economy in order to tackle alcohol related violence and disorder. In 2012 I moved back into operational policing as a Force Incident Manager. In 2017 I

progressed from this role into Contingency and Event planning, working within the Local Reliance Forum and Safety Advisory Groups, before joining North West Underwater Search and Marine Unit February 2020.

Professor Jeff Rojek, Michigan State University, USA

Dr Jeff Rojek is a tenured associate professor in the School of Criminal Justice and director of the Center for Anti-Counterfeiting and Product Protection at the Michigan State University. He was also a police officer with the Los Angeles Police Department before pursuing an academic career. He has been a principal or co-principal investigator on multiple federal, state, and local funded research grants and contracts. His research efforts primarily focus on issues related to policing, and secondary research interests in the illicit trade in counterfeit goods and organized crime. His publications have appeared in *Criminology*, *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, *Justice Quarterly*, *Crime & Delinquency*, *Policing*, and *Police Quarterly*. He is also an author, with Geoff Alpert and Peter Martin, of *Developing and Maintaining Police-Researcher Partnerships to Facilitate Research Use: A Comparative Analysis* (New York, NY; Springer, 2015).

Professor Joanna Shapland, University of Sheffield, UK

Professor Joanna Shapland is the Edward Bramley Professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Sheffield, UK and the lead for the N8PRP at the University. She has worked in research collaborations with the police in the areas of restorative justice, crime reduction, crime and business, response policing and vulnerability. As part of its work for the N8PRP, researchers at the University considered the strengths, difficulties and sustainability of police-academic partnerships internationally, with the findings published on the N8PRP website and in *Evidence and Policy*.

Dr Layla Skinns, University of Sheffield, UK

Dr Layla Skinns is a Reader in the Centre for Criminological Research, School of Law, University of Sheffield, having formerly worked and studied at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge and the Institute for Criminal Policy Research, King's College London. She has a longstanding interest in police and policing, in particular in how policing agents use their authority. A key focus of her research has been on police detention, in England and Wales, but also in other parts of the Anglophone world. In this setting, she is interested in police powers and their relationship with the law, police cultures and police discretion, and furthermore, how this impacts on equality and on state-citizen relations. She is also interested in how the public – particularly detainees – perceive the police, which links her research to discussions about police legitimacy and 'good' policing.

Dr Adam White, University of Sheffield, UK

Adam White is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology in the Centre for Criminological Research, School of Law, University of Sheffield. Before arriving in Sheffield, he was a Lecturer and Senior Lecturer in Public Policy in the Department of Politics, University of York. He has also spent time as a Visiting Scholar at the University of Washington (Seattle) and as a researcher for Gun Free South Africa (Cape Town) and Demos (London). He has published widely on policing, governance and legitimacy, with a particular focus on state-market relations.