



POLICING
RESEARCH
PARTNERSHIP

POLICING INNOVATION FORUM 2025

***Neurodiversity
in the
Criminal Justice System***

26 June | York Hilton

Hilton York



There is no fire alarm planned

In case of evacuation, exit through the double doors in the conservatory bar and meet on the green in front of the hotel

Lunch will be served in the Tower Restaurant

Entrance opposite the hotel reception

The room will be locked at lunch, so you can leave your belongings here

Promotional wifi code

HiltonYork



*Champion, enable and support
policing research and its impact
on policy and practice.*

N8 universities + 11 police forces



What we do

Our strategy to increase and improve collaborative working between police and academics

N8 PRP brings together...



...the skills, structures, and independence of academic research...

...with the knowledge, experience, and data of police.



Police Research Priorities



Research

Funding for N8 academics for innovative, impact-focused, collaborative policing research



Knowledge Exchange

Conferences, Webinars, Website and the Policing Innovation Forum



CPD

NRiPN - PGR and ECR support to cultivate excellence in policing research



Where to find us

Website

Learn more about N8 PRP and stay up to date with new events, research, annual reports and funding opportunities at www.n8prp.org.uk

Your organisational lead

Each N8 PRP partner university and police force has a SPOC or Lead – find your local contact on the People page of the N8 PRP website

Social Media

Bluesky – [@n8prp.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/n8prp.social)

Twitter – [@N8PRP](https://twitter.com/N8PRP)

LinkedIn – [N8 Policing Research Partnership](https://www.linkedin.com/company/n8-prp)



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Policing Innovation Forum 2025



Quiet Room

The Poster Exhibition Room is also the 'Quiet Room' for the conference.

Please use this room if you want to take a minute away from the networking and forum spaces, and enjoy the NRiPN poster exhibition!

Ideas & Actions

What action will you take as a result of today's Forum?

Please take this home with you!



Routledge



Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

20%
Book
Discount

Evaluation

Link also available on the printed and digital programme.



Policing Innovation Forum 2025



Morning Session

09:40 Keynote – ACC Matt Welsted, NPCC

10:25 'Not Naughty, Stupid, or Bad' –
Sean Campbell, User Voice

11:10 coffee break

11:30 'Effective Participation' Panel –
Chaired by Dr Tom Smith

12:15 Lunch and NRiPN Poster Exhibition

Afternoon Session

13:00 NRiPN Poster Exhibition Prize
Judged by ACC Matt Welsted and Dr Tom Smith

13:10 Innovation in Action Roundtables

Youth Justice - Dr Anne-Marie Day
Custody Toolkit – Dr Chloe Holloway-George,
Custody Screening Pilot – Peter Aiston and Leesa
Edwards, Cumbria Constabulary
Staff Support – Jake Harrison and Jack Fitzpatrick

15:25 Wrap Up – Dr Geoff Page

Full Digital Programme available via QR code on printed agenda



Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System

By Assistant Chief Constable - Matt Welsted



West Midlands
POLICE





I have **great** news...
All problems are solvable!





West Midlands
POLICE

ID Card



Matt Welsted
Assistant Chief Constable

Matt Welsted



Let's play a **game** of
guess who...



Can you guess who?



- Gained global attention for skipping school to protest outside parliament.
- Addressed world leaders at the United Nations.
- Inspired millions of young people to join climate strikes.
- She is open about being diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, (OCD), and selective mutism.
- **Greta has described her Asperger's as a "superpower", emphasizing that it helps her see the world differently and stay focused on her mission without being easily swayed by social pressures.**

Asperger's syndrome, OCD & selective mutism

Can you guess who?



- She has won over 30 Olympic and World Championship medals.
- Known for performing moves no other athlete even attempts.
- Has four gymnastics moves named after them.
- **Simone Biles' openness has made her a role model for many young people with ADHD, showing that neurodivergence doesn't have to be a barrier to excellence.**

Can you guess who?



- Knighted by Queen Elizabeth II for his services to drama.
- Has two Oscars, the second aged 83.
- Won an Academy Award for his portrayal as a flesh eating doctor.
- **Sir Anthony Hopkins credits his extraordinary memory and deep focus on characters—to traits linked with autism.**

Can you guess who?



- He received an honorary doctorate from the University of Bath in 2000.
- He was knighted as a Knight Bachelor by the British Monarchy at the 2006/2007 New Year Honours.
- He is the fifth-richest person in the United Kingdom, with an estimated family net worth of £23 billion.
- **Sir James Dyson describes how dyslexia shaped his thinking and creativity, helping him approach problems from unique angles.**



The Story of Sir James Dyson



Situation



Task



Action



Result

He followed a process of imagining a solution, testing his theory, failing, learning and then imagining again.

What is Neurodiversity?





Terms to consider

Neurodiversity

The concept of different brain types in the human population.

Neurodivergent

A person with a condition such as autism, dyslexia etc.

Neurotypical

A person with a 'majority brain', i.e. one who is not neurodivergent.

Types of Neurodivergent Conditions



Autism



ADHD



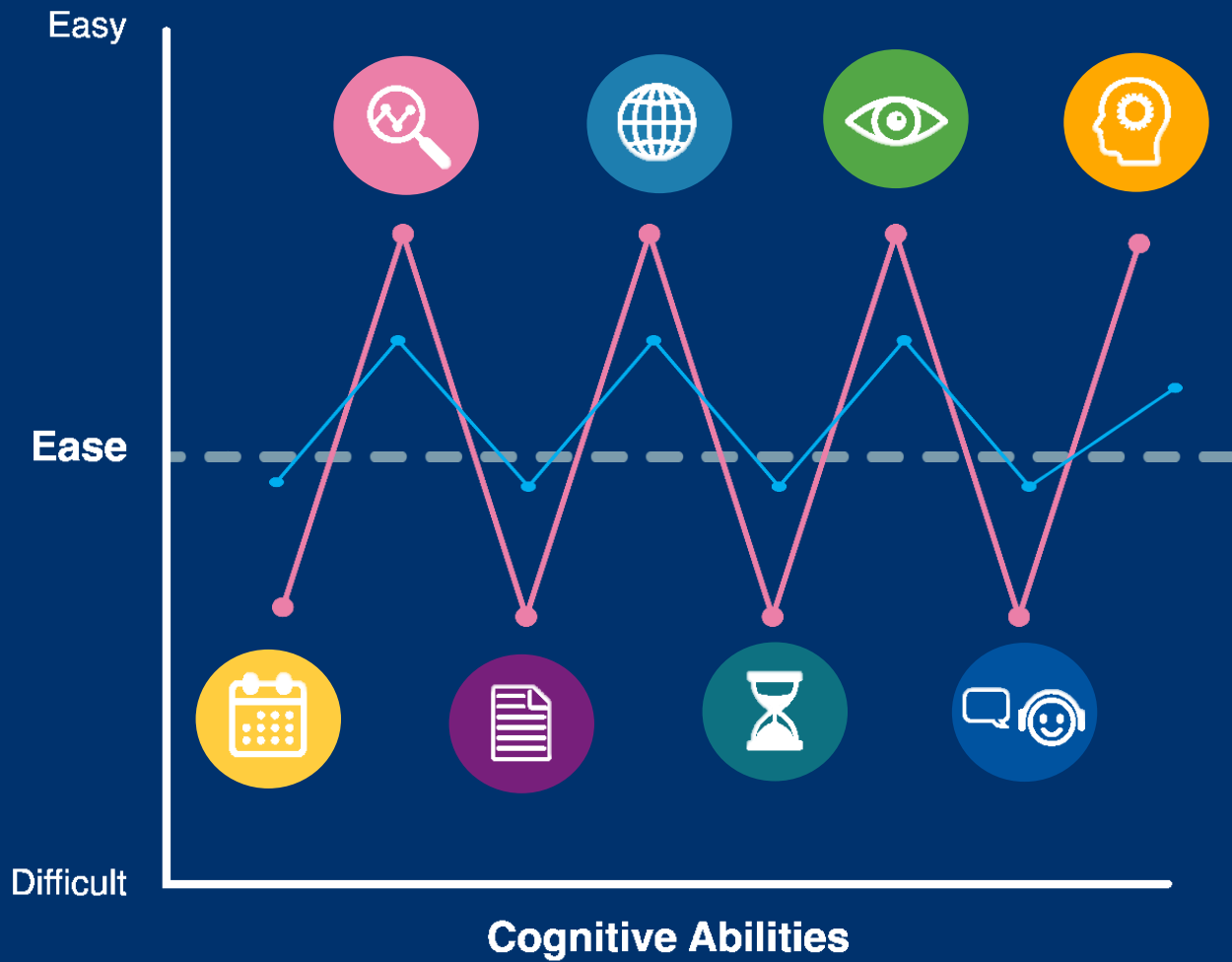
Dyslexia



Dyspraxia



SPD





Disability or **Superpower?**

*We believe in the **game-changing power**
of Dyslexic Thinking.*



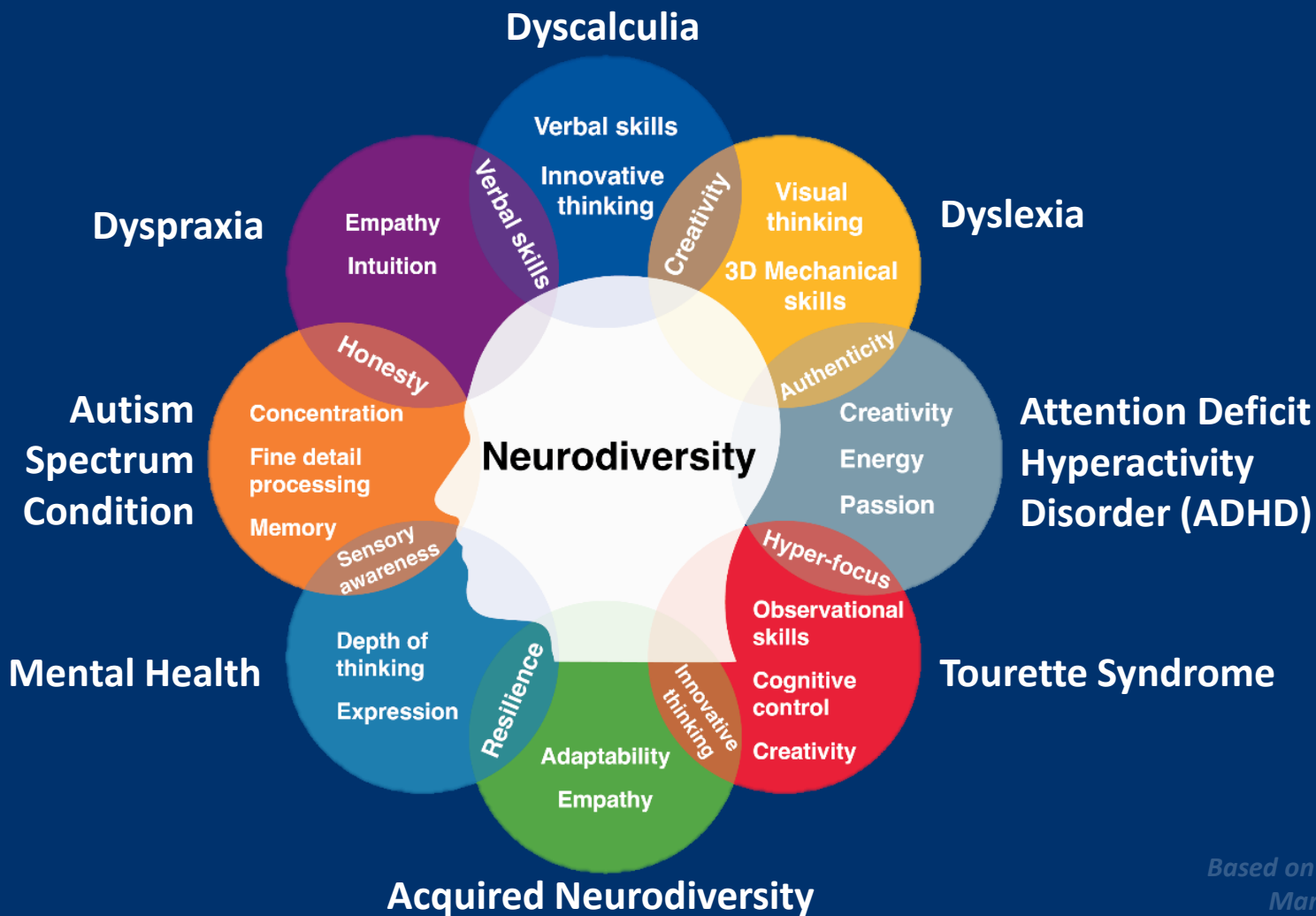
MADE BY
DYSLEXIA





Neurodiversity in Policing





*Based on work by
Mary Colley.*



GCHQ

LinkedIn

Other organisations are realising the **potential** of Neurodivergent thinkers.



All problems **are**
indeed solvable!

Our NeuroDivergent people
may just be the **key**





Criminal Justice challenges for Neurodivergent Individuals

Neurodivergent individuals are often not identified early in the justice process, leading to missed support opportunities. - **Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2021**

Behaviours linked to neurodivergence are frequently misinterpreted, such as being seen as defiance or lack of remorse. - **Revolving Doors, 2022**

Criminal justice professionals often lack adequate training to recognise and support neurodivergent needs. - **The Brain Charity, 2024**



Criminal Justice challenges for Neurodivergent Individuals

Communication barriers hinder fair participation, as many ND individuals struggle with legal language and procedures. - [The Brain Charity, 2024](#)

Reasonable adjustments are inconsistently applied, despite legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010. - [Autism.org.uk, 2023](#)

ND individuals are overrepresented in prisons, with estimates suggesting up to 50% of prisoners may be neurodivergent. - [Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2021](#)



NPCC Working Group for Neurodiversity in **Policing**





Our Approach



**Connect
with People**



**Define
Success**



**Develop
Solutions**



**Evaluate
and Share**

Developing solutions should be seen as a way of creating knowledge and evidence designed to influence new ways of working and problem solving.



8 Workstreams

1

Improved services for ND victims, witness, suspects and residents

2

Connecting people together to share insights faced by ND People

3

Improved data and information relating to ND people

4

Improved welfare and wellbeing relating to ND people

5

Improved HR Processes for ND people, including attraction, recruitment and progression

6

Improved provision of reasonable adjustments for ND people

7

Unlock opportunities for ND people in specialist policing roles

8

Improved misconduct and performance processes relating to ND people



Next Steps

Alignment on Effort

Research & Evidence

Recommendations

Interested? Get in touch



matt.welsted@westmidlands.police.uk



“In my experience, if you ‘see’ the person, their potential and support them, they will show you levels of outstanding commitment”.



Any Questions?





Working in partnership, making communities safer

west-midlands.police.uk

Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System



26th June 2025

Sean James Campbell, Head of Policy, Communication
and Impact

USER VOICE



- A Charity led and delivered by people with lived experience of crime and addiction
- Given a **voice** to over **160,000** people
- Engagement has driven sector leading research such as **Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System, IPP, and Women on Probation**
- **Employed over 300 people** with lived experience



CrimRxiv •

Evaluation of the User Voice Prison and Community Councils

Monica Barry, Beth Weaver, Mark Liddle, Bethany Schmidt, Shadd Maruna, Rosie Meek, Judy Renshaw

Published on: Apr 01, 2016



Co-production, governance and practice: The dynamics and effects of User Voice Prison Councils

Beth Weaver

User Voice and the Prison Council Model:

A Summary of Key Findings from an Ethnographic Exploration of Participatory Governance in Three English Prisons

Bethany E. Schmidt is a PhD candidate at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge.

SAGE
journals

Comment

The role of community councils in probation reform



BRIDGING THE GAP. A mixed methods study exploring the impact of the involvement of researchers with lived experience on a multi-site randomised control trial in the National Probation Service in England and Wales

Over 120 peer research projects with over 24,000 participants



METHODOLOGY

- User Voice interviewed neurodivergent people regarding their experiences in the criminal justice system.
- Interviews took place in **11 prisons** across the country, and in the community.
- The service users were identified with the help of Neuro Support Managers in prisons and third sector organisations in the community.
- All the interviewed service users were either **diagnosed or self-diagnosed** neurodivergent.



NUMBERS

In total, **104** neurodivergent people were interviewed.

- 94 in prisons and 10 in the community
- 87 men and 17 women
- 69 one-to-one interviews and 11 focus groups

To provide a more holistic picture, User Voice additionally surveyed **250** neurodivergent people about their experiences in the criminal justice system (222 in prison & 28 in community).



CONDITION	Men	Women
LDD	25%	47%
Dyslexia	34%	41%
Dyscalculia	10%	12%
Dyspraxia	10%	6%
ADHD	49%	24%
ADD	20%	24%
Autism	41%	12%
Developmental language disorder	1%	-
Speech and language disorders	5%	3%
Tic disorders	5%	6%
Acquired brain injury (ABI)	13%	29%
OCD	8%	6%
PTSD	14	-
Paranoid schizophrenia	8%	6%



IDENTIFIED THEMES

- Early life adversity
- Crisis points – entering the criminal justice system
- Police
- Courts
- Prison
- Probation
- Diagnosis or not
- How the CJS needs to change



EARLY LIFE ADVERSITY

- Most come from lower socio-economic backgrounds.
- Over half had experienced abuse and neglect (47% men, **76%** women).
- One third had care experience (men 30%, women 24%).
- 38% of the men and 29% of the women had struggled with alcohol/drug addiction.
- **71%** of the men talked about being labelled 'bad'/'naughty' or 'thick' at school and acting accordingly (47% women)
- Older service users told us horror stories about how they were treated as children when there was no information about neurodiversity.

CRISIS POINTS

- No support or understanding from family, education system, health care system or the care system left many vulnerable.
- Many turned to alcohol and drugs which led to committing crimes.
- Many told us they are easily manipulated, coerced and groomed, or susceptible to peer pressure.
- Women had been in abusive relationships and coerced into committing crimes.
- Often losing their children started a downward spiral for women.

POLICE

- Of the **104** service users who were interviewed for this project only **two** said police had adjusted around their neurodiversity.
- Being criminalised for their condition, especially ADHD as the 'naughty boy syndrome'.
- Sensory overload when approached by police (lights, noise, touching).
- Some confess crimes they haven't committed.
- Lack of training about and understanding of neurodiversity and neurodivergent people's behaviour.

COURTS

- Of the **104** service users who were interviewed for this project only **three** said the courts had adjusted around their neurodiverse condition.
 - Because of their criminal records, service users feel they are looked as 'not deserving' of any support and therefore conditions are ignored in sentencing.
 - Court hearings were stressful for many (sensory overload, not able to move etc.)
 - People with autism feel they come across calculative; some have pleaded guilty because their solicitor had asked them to.
 - Judges and solicitors lack knowledge of and empathy towards neurodiversity and neurodivergent people.

PRISON

- Of the **104** service users who were interviewed for this project **15** said prison (previous or current) had adjusted around their neurodiverse condition.
- The lack of assessments or screening of neurodiverse conditions in prisons > not many were receiving the support they needed.
- Prison staff lack information, have misinformation and sometimes don't believe service users re neurodiversity.
- Single cells most looked after adjustment (cleanliness, routines, avoiding coercion/peer pressure)
- Gym to burn energy (ADHD)

DIAGNOSIS

- **Half** of the service users had been diagnosed before they turned 17 years old. Nine people had been diagnosed between ages 17 – 26, and 17 when they were older than 27 years.
- 29 individuals had been diagnosed while in school, 29 in the community, and **nine** while in prison.
- **Everyone** said diagnosis was a relief but only few had received support after it (except medicine).

HOW THE CJS NEEDS TO CHANGE?

- More neurodiversity qualified health care staff in prison
- Clinical psychologists in prison
- Better management of medication
- More meaningful training and awareness raising within the whole criminal justice system.
- Employment of more staff with lived experience in neurodiversity.
- More peer support and self-learning opportunities for service users

“You get very frustrated trying to explain yourself, so being able to support somebody and say, 'Yes, I understand you. This is what you need to do. This is what we can do together to get you into the place where you need to be.' You know, it's not the NHS doing it, it's volunteers like me or peer mentors. But, you know, it's all helping the NHS.”

(Woman, 29 with ADHD & ABI)

Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System



26th June 2025

Sean James Campbell, Head of Policy, Communication and
Impact



Policing Innovation Forum 2025

Coffee Break

11:10 – 11:30



Policing Innovation Forum 2025

Panel Session

Effective Participation

Developing inclusive criminal justice responses to victims of sexual violence with learning disabilities and/or autism

Dr Alison Jobe, Durham University

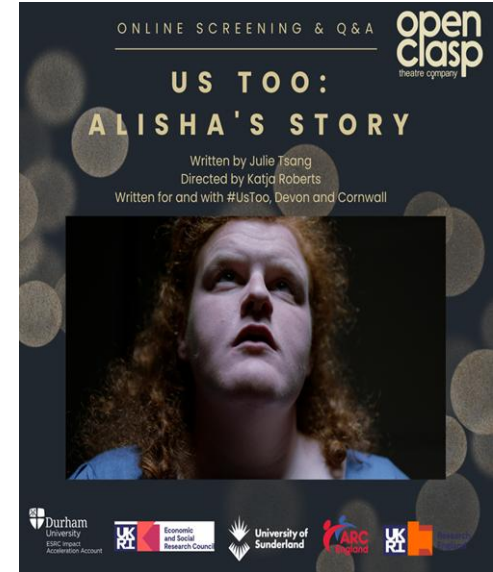
Dr Helen Williams, University of Sunderland



Towards inclusive criminal justice responses to victims of sexual violence: a participatory theatre-based project

Aim: To develop and deliver participatory theatre-based reflective practice workshops for service providers working with people with learning disabilities/ autism who report sexual violence.

Us Too- a group of women with learning disabilities and/or autism who have experienced sexual violence- worked with academics and theatre facilitators to co-write a script for a film.
Us Too were supported by ARC-England.



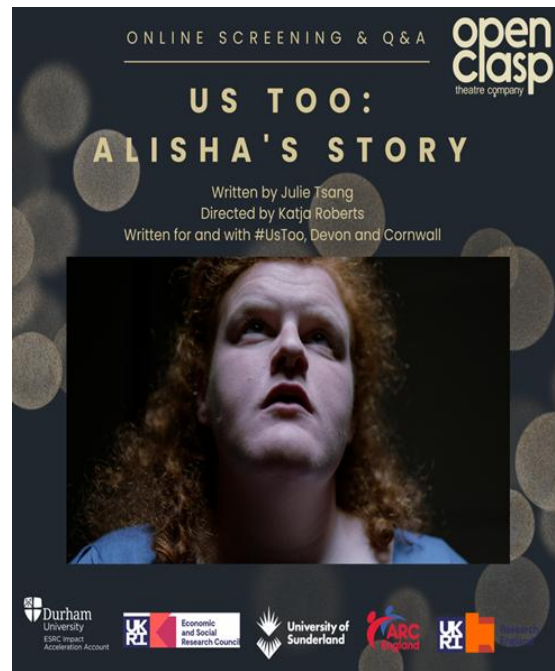
Reflective practice workshops

- The film *Us Too: Alisha's Story* was used in reflective practice workshops with police officers and external practitioners in Durham
- In partnership with Durham Police, RSACC, Open Clasp Theatre Company and Us Too/ ARC England

Some feedback from participants

“Training was a completely new experience of learning which is important. To view the case from Alisha’s perspective in order to provide better service”.

“Very engaging. Opened up thought processes around how we can deal better. Identified massive gaps in LD/ND awareness in the force. Helped me to think of the bigger picture around the victim’s journey”.





***How can the police
better communicate?***

Further info and resources- see our webpages



[Towards Inclusive Responses to Sexual Violence - Towards inclusive criminal justice responses to sexual violence \(durham.ac.uk\)](https://durham.ac.uk)





Effective participation in police custody



Dr John Taggart
N8 Policing Research Partnership
Neurodiversity in the CJS
June 26th 2025

Effective participation: legal framework

Coroners and Justice Act 2009, s.104

The accused should be able to “**participate effectively in the proceedings.**”

Criminal Procedure Rules 2020, Rule 18.23

‘The court must exercise its power to appoint an intermediary to facilitate a defendant’s **effective participation** in the trial where—

(a) the defendant’s ability to participate is likely to be diminished by reason of—

(i) age, if the defendant is **under 18**, or

(ii) **mental disorder** (as defined in section 1(2) of the Mental Health Act 1983), **a significant impairment of intelligence and social functioning**, or a **physical disability or disorder**; and

(b) the appointment is necessary for that purpose.

‘The right of an accused to effective participation in his or her criminal trial generally includes, *inter alia*, not only the **right to be present**, but also to **hear and follow the proceedings.**’ (*Stanford v. the United Kingdom*, judgment of 23 February 1994, Series A no. 282-A, pp. 10-11, § 26)



Beyond the courtroom: EP in police custody

- Effective participation is engaged from the beginning of a criminal investigation and, in particular, ‘during any questioning by the police’ (***Panovits v Cyprus* [2008] 27 BHRC 464 [67]**).
- PACE Code C, which outlines the requirements for the detention, treatment and questioning of suspects, implicitly recognises that suspects are afforded additional safeguards at police investigation (**Dehaghani, 2021**).
- Fairness requires that the accused is properly informed about critical choices and can have his voice heard (**McKeever, 2020**).
- Legal advice, disclosure of evidence and authenticated interview recording as conducive to ‘informed defence participation’ (**Owusu-Bempah, 2018**).



The importance of effective participation at all stages of the CJS



What did the suspect understand in custody?

What did the defendant understand at trial?

82% of young offenders entering young offenders institute have some form of communication difficulty (Knott, 2019)

Intermediary provision and EP

- Intermediaries are neutral and facilitate communication between vulnerable individuals and criminal justice professionals (Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, s.29/Criminal Evidence (NI) Order 1999, Art.17)
- Intermediaries assist suspects in Northern Ireland but **NOT** in England and Wales

	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	Total
Complainant / victim	698	602	721	788	820	3,629 (66%)
Suspect / defendant	204	211	384	388	392	1,579 (29%)
Other witnesses	45	55	50	73	52	275 (5%)
Total	947	868	1,155	1,249	1,264	5,483

Figures provided to Dr John Taggart by Department of Justice (Northern Ireland)

Northern Ireland: intermediary referrals by need

Vulnerabilities	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24
ADD/ADHD	94	123	132	133
Aspergers	4	16	23	15
Asphasia	4	3	5	1
ASD	131	144	169	175
Brain/head injury	27	32	29	28
Cerebral Palsy	3	4	6	2
Deafness/Hearing impairment	7	14	10	12
Dementia	5	8	17	18
Downs syndrome	3	7	4	5
Dysarthia/dyspraxia	1	3	2	1
Fluency difficulties	1	5	4	5
Language delay disorder	14	17	17	12
Mental Health	47	91	123	145
Mild/moderate learning disabilities	233	307	271	280
Neurological	5	3	4	2
Physical disability	4	3	6	4
Severe learning disabilities	47	50	67	69
Young age	238	324	358	355
Voice disorders		1	2	2
Total	868	1155	1249	1264

(Figures provided by the Department of Justice (NI), July 2024)

Neuroinclusive policing through effective participation



2017

The amount of times police practitioners came into contact with neurodivergent people was “probably daily..., we [the police] probably deal with more people that come under that heading than possibly anybody else”

“No, there’s no input whatsoever.”

2024

“I think almost every individual that we’ve interviewed in the last certainly year, if not longer... They are neurodivergent, primarily autistic or ADHD”

“There’s very little training that is made available to anyone”



Dr Alice Siberry

Specialist Criminal Justice
Neurodiversity Consultant and
Academic Lead



My work

- Training in police organisations
- Specialist training – CT, cyber, hostage negotiation, interviewing (and more!)
- Consultancy, audits and policy advice
- Workplace Needs Assessments

Academic Work

- “Diversity, Difference or Disorder: Neurodiversity in British Policing”
BOOK COMING SOON!
- Conducting research
- Research consultancy
- Conferences

The importance of effective participation

“Before attending I thought I had a general understanding and appreciation of neurodiversity, now I realise I was rather ignorant!! The course has lifted the lid on some of my misconceptions and opened my mind”

“For professional and personal reasons this course has been totally life changing and has given me an understanding of a subject, which unknowingly was very close to my heart”



Policing Innovation Forum 2025

Lunch Break & Poster Exhibition

12:15 – 13:00



Policing Innovation Forum 2025

NRiPN Poster Exhibition Prize Announcement



Policing Innovation Forum 2025

Innovation in Action

Roundtables

Innovation in Action

Roundtables



Youth Justice

Dr Anne-Marie Day, MMU

Custody Toolkit

Chloe Holloway-George,
Nottingham University

Staff Support

Jake Harrison, SYP, and
Jack Fitzpatrick, LJMU

Custody Screening Pilot

Leesa Edwards and Peter Aiston,
Cumbria Constabulary



Policing Innovation Forum
2025

Coffee Break

14:10 – 14:30

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Policing Innovation Forum
2025

Wrap Up

New & Next



N8 PRP & SPRITE +

**AI and Policing: Trust, Identity, Privacy, and
Security Innovation Forum**
25 September 2025, Manchester



NRiPN

Methodologies Webinar: Ethnography
14 July



Research Away Day
16 September, Sheffield



Upcoming Research Projects

**Understanding the impact of Outcome 16 on
racially minoritised women and girls'
participation in DV investigations.**

Dr Hayley Alderson, Newcastle

**Illuminating the experiences of autistic people
during arrest and custody**

Dr Laura Naegler, Liverpool

**Investigating the link between emotional
demands and resources, sickness absence and
turnover intention amongst call handlers in a
Force Control Room**

Dr Sarah Brooks, Sheffield



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Policing Innovation Forum 2025

Thanks for coming!

Stay in Touch

Website – n8prp.org.uk

Bluesky – [@n8prp.bsky.social](https://bsky.social/@n8prp)

Twitter – [@N8PRP](https://twitter.com/N8PRP)

LinkedIn – [N8 Policing
Research Partnership](https://www.linkedin.com/company/n8prp)

Evaluation



*Link also available on the
printed and digital programme.*