

Fragile alliances: sustaining police-academic partnerships

N8PRP Innovation Forum on ‘What works in partnerships?’
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Police-academic partnerships: useful?

Partnership working is now key to modern policing:

- Bringing in other agencies' skills and resources, e.g. on
 - Child protection and vulnerability generally
 - Mental health
 - Drug workers
 - Forensics
- Working with academics can be the same, e.g.
 - Evaluation of initiatives
 - What's known about what works
 - Analysing crime data and the problem at hand

But all partnership working is hard and takes continuing effort. So what can we learn from the research on police-academic partnerships?



Research *on, by, with* and *for* the police

There is a considerable literature, but only for Western countries:

- Has moved from researchers ‘doing their own thing’ (*‘on’*)
- To police doing research themselves (*‘by’*)
- To police commissioning research from academics (*‘for’*)
- And now, to longer-term partnerships (*‘with’*)

All have value, but if one wants to bring in all the literature, insights and skills – then it means both working together, preferably from the start of the project

- England & Wales have a bad history of do first, then think about evaluation and potential results

How to find out about how police-academic partnerships proceed?



We're academics, so we reviewed the literature, and ran joint events through the N8PRP, including academic + police presenting the tale of their partnership together.

In the last century, there was mutual misunderstanding (the 'dialogue of the deaf'):

Police value:

Certainty in results

Digestible presentations

Shortish time scales for today's problems

Academics value:

Nuancing

Academic articles (REF etc.)

Critiques (sometimes painful)

More recently, a miscellany of experiences

- A very small number of successful long-term, multi-project partnerships between universities and individual police forces, often reliant upon individual contacts at senior level
- A very small number of police ‘pracademics’, mostly in the US
- ‘Instrumental’ joining up to respond to funding opportunities
- Some 2-4 year projects supported by both sides – on strategic policing priorities
- PhD (2-3 years), Masters (a few months) and UG (a few weeks) projects which range from research *on*, to responding to immediate needs (research *for*)
- In England & Wales, there used to be policy-oriented evaluation and research by and funded by Home Office/MoJ, but that has nearly ceased.

Why this dispiriting picture?

It's not about lack of keenness:

- The Evidence Based Policing movement is growing
- Police professionalism includes valuing research and making business cases (including building in evaluation)
- Police forces now routinely create research 'wish-lists' and priorities
- Academics are rewarded for 'impact' as well as academic articles

So what's standing in the way?

- Rapid 'churn' in senior police positions means changing priorities (and churn in more junior ones makes evaluation more difficult)
- Funding responsibilities (see below)
- Keeping partnerships going is work, but a partnership (of any kind) has to be able to weather the lean years

Police-academic partnerships need:

Like all partnerships:



– Commitment (including in the lean times)

– Stable structures



– Funding



– People



Commitment



The literature shows partnerships are often short, project-specific, and start better than they end

Instrumental working together needs to be bolstered by personal contacts, for both police and researchers, so churn can be a problem

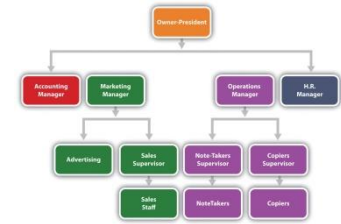
- It's about learning and appreciating each other's culture
- Senior- level support is key

Partnerships often end at the project end

So need to think what are the long-term goals?

- e.g. moving to evidence-based practice
- or skilling new police officers
- or having a better evaluation or analytic capacity

Stable structures



Essentially, successful police-academic partnerships involve a dance with multiple people:

- Knowing how to approach each other with research needs and new ideas
- Keeping in touch regularly
- Working out what's helpful
- And how to disseminate it to others



Individual research projects can also involve many people (researchers, senior staff, participants, data protection, analysts, communications)

So it's worth setting up a 'formal' structure for liaison, not dependent on individual interests/projects (70% in the US lasted less than one year)

And which can survive the lean times, when funding bids are turned down (e.g. the Queensland Alliance)

Funding (the money)



Resources to do research can be **in kind** (time, data) or **monetary**

- In kind time (of officers, researchers) is limited by the aims and generosity of the institutions
- Usually linked to specific projects

Police-funded research

- The literature shows that in most countries, police forces themselves do not see the funding of policing research as their responsibility (though they do do research on their own force)
 - They look to government and research councils to fund anything major, or multi-force

Government funded research

- In the US, government has been the major funder of evaluations of innovation
 - but in England & Wales, government funding has fallen (closure of external research budgets and reduction in personnel in research units)
 - What Works centres are really helpful – but systematic reviews only work with developed initiatives

University and research council funded research



Universities/research councils fund student research

Just need to match the student needs in time (PhDs – 3yrs, Masters – few months)

Most of the important research on policing worldwide has been funded by research bodies linked to government (e.g. National Institute of Justice in the US)

National research funding is essential for evaluations in several sites and for longer projects

International research funding for transnational comparison, cybercrime etc.

Which bodies might do this for the UK?

The future is people – and partnerships!



- Partnerships are – and will be – fragile alliances
 - And so they should be – because this is about taking the best from two cultures
- We have moved away from the times of the ‘dialogue of the deaf’ and complete mutual suspicion
 - But police will still need immediate solutions, and academics to make critical arguments in journals (and sometimes say critical things about policing)
- The key is to keep in touch, with known contact points and regular meetings under a long-term structure, so that funding can be obtained

Questions?

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References:

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