THE HOME OFFICE:
Is Mobile Phone Data Needed for a Conviction?

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Introduction

The Home Office is a ministerial department in charge of immigration, security, and law and order. Over the summer I worked for 8 weeks in the Crime and Policing Analysis Unit, which feeds back to ministers on the results of analysis of policies relating to crime and policing. I worked on two significant projects including looking at how relevant digital data is for a conviction. The title suggests that we looked solely at mobile phone data, but in reality, we were interested in all portable devices (e.g. iPads, laptops, etc).

Objectives

The aim of the project was to investigate to what extent digital data contributes to a conviction or acquittal.

The world today is focussed around technology. In order to advise law enforcement and the Criminal Justice System (CJS) in how best to deal with this influx of cases involving digital data, more research needs to be conducted.

Key Findings

After completing the Excel-based analysis, we found that mobile phones were the most common type of device, SMS was the most frequent type of evidence and sexual offences were the most common offence type in terms of containing digital data.

Due to unforeseen circumstances, we only completed one of the five years of cases (2018). This meant that the intended temporal trends could not be analysed.

Methodology

We used data scraped from three data bases containing publicly available appeals cases: LexisNexis, Westlaw and BAILII. We read through the case transcripts and 'coded' the data in a programme called 'Cloud Nine Discovery' in order to make it quantitative. It was 'coded' by age and gender of the defendant, date of offence, appeal outcome, device type, type of evidence, offence type, and relevance of digital data (high, medium and low). It was then exported to an Excel spreadsheet for analysis.

Key Skills Learnt

Through the other project I worked on (biometrics data of police forces) I learned many advanced Excel skills and it was a much more quantitative-based project. This project was very much qualitative skills based and through this I learned how to code text in order to make it quantitative by working with certain parameters. I also developed many softer skills, most notably asking for help when I need it. I have never been very good at this but through my time at the Home Office I learned that it is OK not to know exactly what to do and people would rather you ask for help than be completely stuck and overwhelmed. Furthermore, I learned how to manage

my time better, determination in the face of difficulty and fatigue, adaptability and flexibility when projects didn't go to plan, and proactiveness in finding another project when I didn't have much to do.

Conclusion

Although the findings were limited in terms of temporal trends, they gave a good insight into the comparisons that could be drawn from our study and the original, template study that our project was based upon. This was conducted in 2010 and the comparison analysis was made after we finished at the Home Office, hence these findings cannot be reported here. In terms of wider policy, we found that there needs to be more of a focus on assisting law enforcement with the burden that comes with the ever-increasing use of technology.

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