

Final report

Evaluating the N8
Policing Research
Partnership

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Glossary

CPD	Continuing Professional Development. Invariably (in this report) a programme set up by Lancaster and Leeds Universities for police data analysts.
DADS	Data Analytics Digital Service. A platform set up by the Data Analytics strand, intended to provide access to online resources, a forum, and to facilitate research applications.
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England. Provided University funding for the N8 PRP.
N8	A collaboration between eight research-intensive universities in the North of England.
OPCC	Office of the PCC (see below).
PCC	Police and Crime Commissioner.
PIF	Police Innovation Forum – an activity strand, delivering annual conferences.
PRP	Policing Research Partnership.
Steering group	A key decision making body of the PRP, meeting quarterly and notionally combining representation from 11 police forces, 11 OPCCs, 8 N8 Universities and one third sector partner (Your Homes Newcastle).

Introduction

The N8 Policing Research Partnership.

The N8 Research Partnership is a collaboration of eight research-intensive universities in the North of England. It seeks to...

1. Promote deeper collaboration between universities, business & society;
2. Establish innovative research capabilities & programmes of national and international prominence; and
3. Drive economic growth by generating income, supporting jobs and new businesses.

Early N8 programmes focused primarily on science, technology and engineering. However, in early 2013, a growing desire for a programme of social sciences research became apparent. This initially led to an ESRC-funded programme of work centred on coproduction (Campbell and Vanderhoeven 2016). Separately, the creation of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in late 2012 offered an opportunity to explore the possibilities of developing a collaboration centred on policing. Initial discussions among N8 researchers led to the development of working principles, purpose and rationale for collaboration across the N8 universities in the field of policing research and the establishment of the N8 PRP at an inaugural meeting with Police and Crime Commissioners and police partners in late 2013. Arising from this, eight policing priorities were identified as a basis for collaborative work. This was followed by a successful bid for a College of Policing small grant then supported the production of eight evidence reviews, accompanied by a series of meetings and events across the North of England in early 2014. This was the first substantive undertaking of the N8 Policing Research Partnership (N8 PRP).

Supported by limited pump-priming funds from the N8 institutions, the Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) Catalyst Fund was targeted as a potential source of continuing support for the N8 PRP. The Catalyst Fund supports innovative work in Higher Education institutions with the potential for long-term sustainability (HEFCE 2017); and offered a potential route to establishing a large-scale, enduring partnership between policing partners and academics. A £3m bid was consequently developed in mid-2014, with matched funding agreements from eleven force areas and one non-police partner (Your Homes, Newcastle) as well as from the eight participating universities.¹ The success of the bid was announced in February 2015, and the Catalyst-funded work of the N8 PRP began on 1st May 2015. The start of Catalyst funding marks the beginning of the work reviewed in this report.

The aim of the N8 PRP is...

‘...[t]o encourage policing institutions to become learning organisations with reflexive cultures and practices that value the generation, mobilisation and application of knowledge as well as to transform the ways in which researchers engage and communicate with policing partners in research production and dissemination’ (N8 PRP 2017:7)

With an emphasis on driving change in both policing and academic communities, coproduction is positioned at the heart of the N8 PRP's processes and operations. To this end, the N8 PRP has nine activity strands. Each is led by an N8 higher education institution:

1. Governance and management (University of Leeds)
2. Policing Innovation Forum (University of Manchester)
3. Data analytics (University of Leeds)
4. People and knowledge exchange (University of Durham)
5. Research co-production (University of Newcastle)
6. Public engagement (University of Liverpool)
7. International programme (University of Sheffield)

¹ With a combined value of over £7.2 million across the five years of the project.

8. Training and learning (University of Lancaster); and
9. Evaluation and monitoring (University of York).

Strand 1 includes the N8 PRP's Steering Group, which engages key stakeholders in the N8 PRP's decision-making processes, ensuring accountability and oversight. Strand 9 centres on evaluating the impact and monitoring the processes of the N8 PRP. Strands 2-8 are designed to 'catalyse' enduring relationships between policing and research partners through events, programmes of coproduced research and knowledge exchange, and the development of products and systems with the capacity to facilitate real-world change. Many of these are interlinked. For example, the theme of the annual Policing Innovation Forum (Strand 2) is also the primary focus of the annual round of Small Grants (delivered by Strand 5). Similarly, Data Analytics (Strand 3) and Training and Learning (Strand 8) have collaborated on programmes of work designed to upskill police data analysts. Full details of the strands can be found in the N8 PRP's annual reports², with regular updates, links to publications, and a calendar of events provided on the N8 PRP's website.

Evaluating the PRP

Between 2016 and 2020, in consultation with police partners, we sought to conduct small scale evaluations of:

- The PRP's Continuing Professional Development programme for police data analysts;
- The PRP's Small Grants programme;
- Two 'data mobilisation' events, bringing academic perspectives to police problems³;
- Governance arrangements and the overall operation of the PRP.

This final goal was approached through two waves of interviews with police and academic steering group representatives, leading to interim and final evaluation reports.

Throughout the four years we attended PRP quarterly steering group meetings plus a wide range of events delivered by various strands to get a full sense of the PRP's implementation. This included attendance at the CPD programme, four of the five Policing Innovation Forum conferences, the People and Knowledge Exchange *Workforce of the Future* conference and PhD event, the International Strand's *Working with the Police on Policing* conference, and a Community Engagement deliberative event. In collaboration with strand leads, small pieces of evaluative work were incorporated into the international conference and deliberative event (a feedback survey and follow-up interviews, respectively).

A methodological note

From the outset, it must be emphasised that this is not a full evaluation of all of the PRP's operations and processes. Indeed, in the search for substantive messages some fine detail has inevitably been lost – we could not write up the histories and achievements of each activity strand separately, as doing so would consume a great many words for an audience that would likely be limited. Nor does this report seek to capture or describe every aspect of reach, engagement or impact. It seems very likely, for example, that we have missed much of the reach of the international strand, whose work engaged heavily with international partners who were not the focus of this report. It is also very possible that there may be pockets of impact and familiarity with the PRP within partner forces that we have not reached.

Our methods sought, in collaboration with police and academic partners, to identify those strands most likely to yield promising examples of coproduction (data mobilisation, data analysts, and small grants); to engage with

² Annual reports are hosted on the N8 PRP's website: www.n8prp.org.uk

³ Evaluation of these events proved unworkable. Following four email exchanges and one interview we identified no impact from the first event, as police presenters had either changed roles or failed to secure any response from academics. The second data mobilisation event did not implement its pathway to impact (uploading problems to a digital platform for discussion and input) and the problems were not discussed on the day, leaving no clear target for evaluation.

research-interested police partners outside of the steering group (data analysts and small grant bidders); to understand engagements between the PRP and the community (public engagement's deliberative events) and to develop an understanding of the programme as a whole (steering group interviews at 1.5 and 5 years). I have sought to triangulate sets of findings where possible, and to present a transparent account. This does not mean there have not been shortfalls within the evaluation or aspects of impact that have been missed. This should be borne in mind whilst reading any and all aspects of this report.

Throughout the report, we have maintained the anonymity of interviewees.

Structure of this report

A key message from police partners throughout our evaluative work has been that brief, digestible reports with accessible summaries are essential for communicating findings. As such, this report opens with a four-page summary of key findings. The main body of the report comprises brief (c.4 page) reports on each aspect of the evaluation. Each is intended to be self-contained – each report can be pared off and read on its own or read within the context of the other reports contained here.

The main body of this report begins with write-ups of the interim and final evaluations, which centred on interviews with steering group representatives and so explored the work of the PRP as a whole. It then turns to evaluations of specific components – the CPD programme for data analysts; and small grants.

Key findings

Interim Evaluation

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-only meeting prior to the full steering group 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.

After 5 Years. Police Perspectives on the N8 PRP

The steering group

- Policing partners voiced concerns that steering group attendance by chief officers had diminished.
- This was accompanied by a sense that senior representation was needed to 'get things done'.
- Some police partners felt their voices were not heard at steering group meetings.
- Some also felt intimidated by academics and academic language.

Impact

- There were widespread concerns about impact – a lack of identifiable products or branded tools made it hard to 'sell' the PRP to force colleagues and senior officers.
- By 2020, police partners understood the PRP almost exclusively in terms of small grants. The PRP otherwise had almost no recognisable activities or apparent impact for police partners.
- Small grants awarded to other forces were little known about, and had little perceived value.
- As small grants are competitive, this created inevitable 'winners' and 'losers' with some forces tallying up how much funding they had secured vs the cost of PRP engagement to assess the value of engagement.

Assessing the value of the N8 PRP

- Many police partners saw clear value in bilateral relationships with familiar, local partners and found the value of a large regional network like the N8 PRP less clear.
- The particular value of the N8 – as research intensive universities – was not clear to police partners.
- Relationships arising from new degree programmes for trainee officers were seen as potential alternatives to the PRP.

The future of the partnership

- Many interviewees described real internal resistance to continued funding of the partnership, seeing clearer value in funding directly commissioned research.
- More branded, packaged training programmes and products were seen as one important future goal.
- Greater cross-force collaboration on small grants was seen as another potential ‘win’.

After 5 Years. Academic Perspectives on the N8 PRP

Activities

- Academic partners described delivering a wide range of activities across many project milestones.
- Most key PRP milestones were achieved, with creative responses applied when problems occurred.

Engagement

- Many academic partners worked well beyond their funded hours on the project.
- However, consistent engagement with a large regional partnership over five years could prove difficult. Sharing leadership within a small team was seen as one means of ensuring consistent engagement.
- A small number of academics found it hard to commit fully to the PRP because of a lack of institutional support, or concerns about the PRP’s perceived lack of critical distance from police partners.
- Turnover in police representatives was thought to present challenges to partnership building.
- There were mixed views as to the extent to which the PRP was a known brand within policing.

Becoming a ‘Police Research Partnership’

- The PRP’s steering group included Police and Crime Commissioners’ (PCC) representatives and Your Homes Newcastle, a third sector partner. However, they stopped attending within two years.
- This withdrawal of PCCs and the PRP’s third sector partner was seen by academic interviewees as a real loss, representing a shift from a ‘policing research partnership’ to a ‘police research partnership.’
- A majority of academic interviewees voiced concerns about a perceived lack of critical distance from police partners.
- Relatedly, a number felt that police priorities played an excessive role in determining PRP priorities, sometimes at the expense of more ‘researchable’ questions.

Coproduction

- Nearly every strand embedded significant elements of coproduction in their governance or delivery.
- Academics broadly viewed coproduction as best deployed at the programme level, determining priorities.
- Some academics also felt there could have been significantly more coproduction in delivery – noting that, for example, only one small grant was police-led.

Perceptions of impact

- There was widespread recognition that police understandings of impact may differ from those of academic partners, and that police expectations of tools and applicability may not have always been met.
- Positive experiences of events were widely noted – for example, Innovation Forums received consistently strong feedback.
- ‘Multiplier events’ – bringing multiple strands together to present findings from a wide range of projects – were seen as a big win for the partnership.
- ‘Multiplier people’ – who picked up opportunities from multiple strands to develop and further particular pieces of applied research – were seen as another outstanding example of what the PRP could deliver.

Funding and the future

- The future of the PRP, particularly without Catalyst funding, was seen as fragile.
- Small grants and the Policing Innovation Forum were widely seen as the most essential elements to retain.
- The next two years were seen as essential to maintaining the PRP's viability, with significant interest in the partnership's new model of shared directorship between academics and police partners.

A Need for Analysis: Evaluating a CPD Programme for Data Analysts

Analysts' routine work within forces

- Across all roles, analysts' workloads were heavy with processes and outputs clearly specified.
- Analysts felt pressured to produce brief, simplistic reports. Robust methodologies were not understood by reports' consumers; data visualisation and dashboards were essential.
- An "it's gone up" or "it's gone down" mentality amongst senior officers meant that statistical tests and analytical techniques were not valued.
- Some analysts had no autonomy within their role. They could not envision change.
- Others had limited creativity, often limited to cosmetic decisions (not analytical techniques).
- A handful of analysts described genuine analytical creativity in their role. This group were supported by organisational measures, including protected development time.

The CPD programme

- Nearly all analysts were excited about commencing the CPD programme. Training opportunities are rare.
- Interviewees widely praised the teaching team, but struggled to apply learning.
- Some found the teaching too difficult; others too easy; others could not relate it to their role.
- Analysts struggled with taught software. Installing software on police computers took months.
- Learning outcomes did not always fit with analysts' working priorities (e.g. simplicity, visualisation). This made it harder to 'sell' new practices or processes in force.
- Police data were rarely used, making it harder for analysts to see direct relevance to their work.
- On returning to work, analysts often struggled to find the time to apply new techniques.

Impact

- Specific examples of applied learning or actual (rather than planned) changes in practice were hard to find.
- More often, interviewees described expanded horizons and feeling better informed.
- Analysts in about half of all force areas had contacted one or two other analysts to share data, collaborate on specific issues, or seek information about software. Few contacts were ongoing.
- Engagement with the online forums is minimal.
- Very few analysts subsequently engaged with other N8 PRP information or events.

Small Grants, Big Benefits. Evaluating the Small Grants Programme of the N8 PRP

Who applied for small grants?

- Academic partners led nearly all bids within our sample.
- Early career researchers benefited particularly from the scale and pump-priming structure of the programme.
- Most proposals drew on pre-existing networks or partnerships. New partnerships were rare, and mostly local.

Why choose to apply to the small grants programme?

- Most interviewees were already engaged with the N8 PRP and saw the small grant scheme as a good fit for emergent ideas.
- The annual theme for small grants was launched at an annual conference, the Policing Innovation Forum.
- We identified only one small grant that grew directly from the Innovation Forum; though many more were based on the theme established there.
- The small grants were seen as: collaborative and impact-focused; encouraging partnership; straightforward to apply for; and perfectly pitched for projects that could ‘pump-prime’ subsequent, larger proposals.

Coproduction

- Proposals were often worked out iteratively, through discussions between police and academic partners.
- Evidence of close partnerships and large commitments of time and resources were described by all interviewees.
- Dissemination was often shared – particularly when small grants findings targeted practitioner audiences.
- Retirement or promotion of senior officers could cause difficulties in maintaining strategic interest in projects.

Legacy

- Every project either had produced, or expected to soon produce, articles in academic journals.
- Two projects had secured ESRC funding totalling £530,000; four further proposals were in development.
- We identified several examples of projects changing policy and practice; and launching research careers.

Overall views of the small grants programme

- Interviewees – including most unsuccessful applicants – were very positive about the programme.
- Links with the broader N8 PRP systems and support mechanisms were highly valued, supporting dissemination.
- Annual rounds of funding were also a boon, enabling feedback to be swiftly worked into successor bids.
- The small grants were seen as a high-value reputation-maker for the N8 PRP within academic institutions.

Interim evaluation (18 months)

Introduction

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.

Methodology and Findings

This report presents summaries of 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? [A]nd 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.

After five years – police views on the PRP

Methodology

The N8 Policing Research Partnership (PRP) is a collaboration between 8 research intensive Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) and 11 police force areas in the North of England. Under the terms of a £3m, five-year Catalyst Grant (2015-20), activities were structured into nine ‘activity strands’ with each strand led by an academic partner. The University of York held responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the work of the PRP. Within this short report, we present the perspectives of PRP steering group representatives from 8 of the 11 partner forces. Interviews were conducted as the five year funding of the partnership drew to a close, and it moved towards a new funding and delivery model. Interviews focused broadly on changes to the PRP following the publication of our interim report, coproduction, collaborations (including with non-N8 and non-police partners), perceived impact of the PRP, leadership, engagement with academic strands, and the envisioned future of the project.

Findings

The steering group

The composition of the steering group has changed over the PRP’s five years, becoming a more straightforward police-academic partnership. Whilst conducting interviews for York’s interim report in 2016-17, several PCCs were still engaged with the PRP and we interviewed two PCC representatives. Your Homes Newcastle, the PRP’s sole third sector partner, was also still sufficiently engaged to respond to requests for interview. By 2019-20, steering group contacts were only available for police partners and HEIs.

There was also a general feeling that the seniority of police representation had diminished. We interviewed two chief officers, one of whom reflected:

I was surprised going to the first steering group that I’ve been to for a while to find that I was the only chief officer. I fully expected to be... apologetic that we haven’t provided a chief officer and others had.

Almost without exception, police partners voiced significant concerns about this perceived lack of chief officer commitment, identifying that without chief officer buy in resources would not be committed:

We work in a hierarchical organisation, there’s no two ways about it. If you want to get things done having chief officer buy-in, chief officer sponsorship of it, makes that more effective. So, you know, sitting on the steering group... I think is really important and it should be a chief officer that’s involved in that.

This led to differing understandings of the PRP’s evolution. Whilst academic partners often saw changes within the steering group as representing a shift towards the embedding of the PRP as a function within forces, policing partners presented it as a move towards the PRP being more peripheral to their forces’ priorities.

A related change in the structure of the steering group centred on the cessation of a ‘police pre-meet’ in 2017. The pre-meet was used by police partners to discuss the day’s agenda, and to establish police priorities for the full afternoon steering group session. However, the need for a pre-meet was called into question as it was thought that trust between academic and policing partners was sufficiently well established for the police to no longer need a unified voice. To signify a change, the chairing of steering group meetings began to be shared by academic and police partners. However, significant turnover then took place within police representatives’ ranks. The trusting working relationships that were thought to enable the dissolution of the pre-meet had clearly struggled to survive significant turnover, and many police interviewees felt isolated and unheard by the time of final interviews.

As stakeholders who come to the consortium meetings, I felt on previous meetings that your voice isn't really listened to. And I don't know if...I don't think that's down to personalities, I don't know any of the people particularly well, but what I'm saying to you now on the phone isn't anything I haven't said at previous consortium meetings publicly. And other people have supported me, but nothing has changed. So you...and that I would suggest affects then the engagement of the police forces.

Reflecting a point raised during the interim evaluation, policing partners also continued to feel excluded by academic language:

And it's like, flipping hell, this is a lot to think about, to get my head in... Don't get me wrong, but walking into that sort of world, you feel like you're a bit of a banana, do you know what I mean? You do think, hang on a minute, I'm going to get found out here, but for me, it has to be common sense. What are we trying to achieve? What difference is this going to make to people at the front door?

Within this context, police partners were genuinely enthusiastic about the intended establishment of a police co-director role and re-established police pre-meet, following the beginning of a second phase of the PRP from April 2020.

Assessing the impact of the PRP

Within activity strands, deliverables had – overwhelmingly – been met. Adaptations to difficult circumstances led to innovative new programmes of work being established. When it proved difficult for Durham to find volunteers or hosts for the PRP's 'people exchange' programme, funds were instead diverted to support Masters students focusing on priority policing areas. This was thought to add to the PRP's reach:

Most of the N8 work hasn't really gone below PhD level and we are trying... to achieve some significant... breadth through Master's level dissertations instead.

Similarly, the CPD programme for data analysts emerged from a convergence of interests between strand leads; as did two well-attended Data Mobilisation events. More broadly, adaptability and responsiveness were embedded within the PRP from the outset, for example in the small grants programme (a pot of money with very few concrete expectations or specified outcomes attached). In terms of funded plans of work, then, activity strands consistently met their established goals.

From the perspective of police partners, this rarely translated into significant or visible impact.

There's no sense of...there's very little sense of concrete deliverables, the work of the PRP has not been very visible to frontline managers and has not produced things that can be carried back to senior officers and sold as part of the N8 brand or value

I: Is there an example where academia or the N8 components of the PRP added similar value [to a practitioner / practitioner relationship].

R: I really can't think of one, I'm so sorry. That's really awful.

By the start of 2020, when police interviews really began, several police partners identified ongoing benefits arising from funded small grants programmes, and two mentioned the CPD programme for data analysts⁴. One interviewee also mentioned some positive collaborative work arising from a data mobilisation event. The PRP otherwise had almost no recognisable activities or apparent impact for police partners.

The practical significance of this was that the PRP was very largely equated with the small grants process, and so the merits of the PRP were largely assessed on forces' history of securing (or failing to secure) funding. This inevitably created a sense of winners and losers:

The N8... mainly functions around the small grants... So, you know, I've crunched the numbers, I went back to when they first started. When you look at them, [another force] have had eight or nine accepted, which is just...when you look at the figures other people have had, you know, we're looking at ones and twos across the board. So it's completely disproportionate in terms of its allocation of resources.

We've certainly got more out of it than it's cost us, because it's cost us nothing and then we've had all those small grant research...

⁴ Two also stated that they had stopped their data analysts attending after the first iteration of the programme, as they saw little benefit from it.

More broadly, it made the PRP a very hard sell for some steering group representatives. The partnership was understood, in part, as a gamble for small grants funding; and some interviewees identified that senior colleagues felt that the same money could perhaps be more effectively and assuredly spent on research conducted in-force.

This also related to a sense for some police partners that the PRP was a process for *commissioning* research – and in this, it was thought to be somewhat defective. The OU collaboration, in contrast, was seen as swift, flexible and responsive – in part because of some ongoing flexibility that allowed police priorities to be potentially funded all year round.

The particular value of the N8 PRP

Perhaps the unique selling point of the PRP is that it involves a multi-institutional collaboration between eight research intensive Russell Group universities, and 11 police forces. In this, it offers police partners particular access to rigorous research and dedicated, topic-specific expertise.

However, within our interviews, few police partners saw this as a particularly valuable selling point. Established, bilateral relationships were widely valued over topic-specific expertise:

Why can't...it's almost like the N8, does the N8 give us anything that [our local university] could not? I don't know, because we've got [academic 1] locally, we've got [academic 2] locally, who worked with us before, you know, some personalities who actually blend in really well, and that's half the battle, isn't it?

I can't help but think that the benefits of a local university... doing that work for us, makes it more packaged up and nice for us, for me, and that's my thoughts.

Very little distinction was made between new universities and Russell Group universities, with one police interviewee describing new universities as 'based around impact' and 'research intensive.' The development of the Policing Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF), then, presented an additional challenge to the continued role of the PRP. Several interviewees had seen their relationship with the universities delivering the contract for their PEQF degree apprenticeships, and thought it likely that this would obviate their need for the PRP:

Those [training] relationships [with new universities] are forged much stronger, and stand the test of time. Because I think, you know, without putting too fine a point in it, there's a danger that if the N8 doesn't change the way it's operating the PRP, will it still exist in...?

Strikingly, one police partner suggested that students' dissertations could play a significant role in filling their research need:

Obviously as part of the PQF all the students have to do kind of a work based assessment, don't they, a dissertation, and so obviously we're really keen to try and make sure that it's areas that are of interest to the force and where we've got gaps...

From an academic perspective, it seems likely that this would lead to a great deal of poor quality and methodologically problematic research. However, similar understandings have been voiced in other sites – collating the titles and core topic of student officers' Masters dissertations, for example, to understand research coverage within one force.

Noticeably, when police partners did ascribe considerable additional value to the PRP, it was often in the context of a lack of established relationships with other university partners. There was a core sense of speaking different institutional languages here – and, even after five years, of the PRP perhaps selling a product that police partners did not see many benefits from.

The future of the PRP

At the time of interviews, plans for the future of the PRP centre on a refined set of continued activities, funded by contributions from HEIs and police partners: small grants; conferences (or similar smaller events); internships; data analytics; and the CPD programme for data analysts. Of these, the Data Analytics Digital Service (DADS)

and the internships programmes mirrored aspects of the PRP that did not flourish in the first five years of the programme.

More broadly, police partners described a difficult funding environment, and one in which decisions about continuing financial contributions to the PRP had been very marginal:

I wouldn't be putting too fine a point on it to say that we genuinely had a conversation about whether we continued being a partner to the N8 PRP. Because we just haven't got anything for our money. Granted it was only about eight grand so, you know, it's not going to break the bank. Because they were asking and talking at one point, around £20-£30,000? If that was the ask, we would have just pulled out.

If I'm honest with you, are we going to be able to commit to long term funding? I don't know. I'd like to because I see the benefit of [the PRP] but when budgets are really tight, I think that's a bit unclear at the minute.

Clear work, then, was needed to establish the value of the PRP to its constituent members if the partnership is to have a substantial, funded future. A particular tension here centred on the fact that the value of the PRP was understood almost exclusively in terms of the small grants programme. As one police partner half-joked, 'bribe us with a small grant and we'll consider [continued funding].' Because it is seen as the PRP's sole product by many force representatives, funding rounds almost inevitably created a sense of winners and losers. Spending the same money on commissioning research in-house often looked like a much better deal. A small number of police partners suggested increased collaboration on bids as one way forward here, particularly as many police interviewees were clear that they felt a need for direct ownership of projects (rather than access to dissemination of findings from projects delivered in other areas – 'not invented here' was a widespread obstacle to implementation).

More broadly, forces described a need for – at the very least – packaged products and training programmes or recommendations as outcomes from small grants. These were thought to be clear ways of adding value beyond the win / loss binary of small grants as currently envisioned, bridging a cultural divide by framing research findings in applied language. Other ways of securing the PRP's future centred on the development of a police director's role within the programme, with the potential to boost police contributions and voice; re-booting chief officer attendance, particularly through the use of regional boards; and focusing more clearly and explicitly on responding to policing priorities in all aspects of research. As academic partners often felt that the PRP had been structured very significantly around police priorities, it may be difficult to find a mutually satisfying middle point.

Conclusions

After five years in the PRP, police partners noted that senior officers were rarely attending, and felt marginalised from decision making and proceedings. Interviewees – all of whom were steering group representatives – overwhelmingly saw the PRP as a small grants programme, with little knowledge of other activity strands. Identifying added value from partnerships with 'research intensive' N8 universities was also difficult, with many seeing particular value in bilateral partnerships with local universities – often those delivering their PEQF training. In this context, many identified that it was unlikely that their force would continue to fund the PRP.

After five years – academic views on the PRP

Methodology

We interviewed 12 academic strand leads and joint leads from 8 PRP strands between July 2018 and May 2020. Interviews focused broadly on changes to the PRP following the publication of our interim report, coproduction, collaborations (including with non-N8, non-police partners, impact of the PRP, leadership, engagement with other strands, and the envisioned future of the project. Interviews for each strand also included a set of strand-specific questions. Interviews were fully transcribed, and entered into NVivo (qualitative analysis software) for thematic coding.

At the outset, it should be noted that this report approaches the processes of the PRP – it cannot substantively assess impact. Whilst we identified some measures of impact within separate pieces of work (for example, identifying planned publications and successor research bids within our evaluation of the small grants programme), data were largely unavailable on the extent to which PRP activities drove continuing work.

Findings

Delivery and engagement

Key milestones described by academic interviewees included:

- Policing Innovation Forums delivered for each of the five years, launching the theme for the annual small grants programme and supported by practice-focused workshops.
- Twelve coproduced small grants received ‘seedcorn’ funding of up to £25,000 each, focusing on police priorities. Eight funded PhD studentships were also managed through Research Coproduction.
- The International Strand delivered a major three-day conference, two workshop series, a set of ideas papers and a coproduced special issue of the European Journal of Policing Studies.
- People and Knowledge Exchange supported three staff exchanges, a series of conferences and events, and supported multiple Masters projects focused on policing priorities.
- Data Analytics developed a theoretically-informed, coproduced digital platform supporting research applications based on extensive consultation, delivered two data mobilisation events linking police problems with academic and police partners, and delivered two exploratory research projects.
- In partnership with Training and Learning, Data Analytics also developed a six-month continuing professional development programme for police data analysts.
- Training and Learning also delivered a series of training events, and a review of training and learning within police forces.
- Public Engagement delivered two substantial surveys, facilitated a series of seminars, reviewed force engagement strategies and ran a series of deliberative events on key policing themes.

Many of these pieces of work had been embedded within the structure of the programme from the outset. However, some reflected adaptations to circumstance – for example, the CPD programme for data analysts developed from serendipitous discussions between two sets of strand leads.

Engagement

Many academic staff described taking on work well beyond their funded hours to deliver work they were highly invested in:

[I]t’s been a real hard slog, a real hard push, and it’s taken more than one day a week for me, and [my colleague] has been working in the evenings, and on her days off... We have all been really pushing because we really feel that this could be exciting.

However, a small number found it hard to deliver contracted hours – because of illness, because of distance, because of parenting, because they had reservations about the partnership (and its engagement with police, in particular) or because they could not secure substantive buy-out from other workloads from their institutions. In at least some of these contexts, sharing strand leadership within a team was seen as one promising solution:

We could not have delivered the work that we have done... it was just one of us. I don't know how some of the institutions, whether it's simply one person doing it, have managed to do anything.

Teams allowed rotating attendance at events, and attendance by those most engaged in particular topics.

Beyond steering group representatives, academic partners had varying views on their colleagues' familiarity with the PRP. Some saw the small grants as a particularly good opportunity to link their peers with the partnership:

I'm quite involved in encouraging colleagues... to apply for small grants or attending the Policing Innovation Forum. So it's very much making people aware of what's there

However, the reach could also be limited with some apparent resistance to the PRP's perceived police agenda:

In [my department] we had really keen interest [in small grants], but colleagues in criminology were really clear – “where's the critical voice, we can't engage with this,” kind of thing.

A small number also reluctant to be associated with the PRP, including disseminating information about it:

We don't need it, we're already getting the partnership work that we need, we're already sharing data, we're already delivering training, we don't need to engage with this big thing.

And where research partnerships centred on policing did develop or exist, they were rarely attributed to the PRP.

I can speak to [a colleague in another department]... But that had nothing to do with the N8. It was because of our research interests and the fact that we've had a coffee a few times and wanted to meet up

Framed by this context, there was a general sense that knowledge about the PRP had not penetrated deeply or garnered extensive engagement within N8 academic institutions. As one interviewee surmised:

People don't understand what it is. Lots of academics outside of the steering group don't understand what it is and what the opportunities are for getting involved are

Academic views on police engagement also varied. A small number saw real enthusiasm for the programme:

I'm confident that there is buy-in for it, that they do see the benefits of it and that comes through

Police steering group representatives were widely thought to be very well engaged. However, changes of police representation over time was seen as a particular challenge for building relationships:

I worked really, really hard at the beginning to re-establish that link with [a local policing partner] in particular and the current [steering group representative]. And it was a shame because I think it took two years to really consolidate that. And then changes in personnel, and it's just all gone.

Outside of steering groups and funded activities (particularly small grants), views on engagement were mixed. A small number felt that the PRP had established a strong name and reputation for itself:

I... know that it's a recognised brand, not only in the N8 police forces, but elsewhere.

Others, in contrast, were less sure.

Lots of police officers on the ground have never heard of it or don't know what it can do for them.

In one case, a project with an N8 policing partner failed because the force remained unwilling to share data:

[O]ur process, the N8 process has failed, and then their portal, in my view, has failed and we've wasted many, many woman-hours and administrative hours and legal hours trying to get something from them

Here, neither the PRP brand nor its processes could drive basic research collaboration.

Becoming a 'police research partnership'

The PRP began with 8 academic partners, 11 force partners, 11 PCC partners, and one third sector partner. By the end of the first year, only the academics and forces remained substantively engaged. For academic interviewees, this change represented something of a loss. As one described,

It started out as a policing research... partnership or an initiative. And there was a lot of talk about, “oh it shouldn't just be police, it should be wider policing, it should draw in a range of stakeholders.” And that has, it sort of gradually seems to have fallen away.

There was a sense here that ‘discussions have become very police-focused,’ perhaps at the expense of other voices or interests. Whilst applied research was clearly important, partners felt that there needed to be an additional clear role for an academic voice:

It needs to be thinking about application and implementation, but it’s not a delivery arm of policing, or the police.

Several interviewees highlighted the need for greater distance, and broader engagement of policing partners:

We can’t just accept the police’s perspective on what they should be doing.

The room for a critical academic voice was also seen by some as essential – querying not just force priorities, but the very role of policing itself:

I think it’s important to reflect on the extent to which policing actually is addressing the most harmful behaviours. The extent to which policing itself can cause harm.

At the heart of this shift towards a ‘police research partnership’ was a sense that police priorities had determined both annual themes, and the research delivered within them. Thus, whilst *innovation* forums (launching the annual PRP theme) were intended to be innovative...

One of [the PRP’s] challenges... has been to try and push forward innovative approaches which may not have always been tested. Actually what the Police like to do is they like to apply something which has been shown to have worked in a different context and which they know is going to work in this one.

In this context, some interviewees voiced concerns that three years of small grants had focused on a Home Office priority, vulnerability, with the final year focusing on knife crime.

[W]e’ve got to be a little bit careful that we don’t get on the bandwagon of what can easily become a moral panic... Clearly the police are being driven very strongly [towards knife crime] by the Home Office.

At the same time, others saw potential strengths in this – with a sense that developing a core of PRP research over several years had helped steer national policing priorities more towards vulnerability. There was also something of a paradox here, insofar as whilst there was a strong sense that police partners were directing the PRP’s focal themes, nearly all funded small grant proposals were led by academics⁵.

Coproduction

There were some strands in which a strong sense of embedded coproduction shone through. For example, Data Analytics engaged police partners at every level through a series of advisory boards; travelled to meet all 11 forces’ chief officer teams; sent out regular newsletters to involved partners; and developed a coproduced programme for data analysts. Likewise, within the International strand’s conference...

...we had police and academic both speaking about their experiences. Which we thought was a somewhat radical way, but good way, of actually doing coproduction in practice if you like. And doing research with the police, rather than on or for the police.

More broadly, academic partners had some reflections on the role and limits of coproduction. Here, there was a particularly strong focus on clarifying the limits of coproduction within research. The strongest sense here was that coproduction had its clearest place in governance – steering the direction of research but with police partners stepping back from delivery:

[Coproduction] should be at a programme level... I think it shouldn’t be at a research level... The idea that domestic violence is one of the themes that is agreed upon; well that’s a co-production of the research agenda, isn’t it? Even if the research itself isn’t co-produced.

The overriding impression here again centred on the need for a critical voice to be maintained, to ensure integrity and independence within research:

And sometimes the role of the researcher is to...for accountability, not...not co-operatives.

However, there were some dissenting voices. For example, within small grants there had been very few that were police-led and some academic partners viewed this as a problem:

⁵ In our evaluation of 13 small grant applications, nine of which had been funded, just one had been led by police partners.

I think we could be more explicit about saying that any awards had to be police-led. Not academic-led, policing partner first.

Beyond initial calls, there were also questions about the extent to which PRP small grants delivered on coproductive goals. Some clearly did – creating findings and tools that were disseminated through partner forces⁶. In some other cases, interviewees felt that small grants they had been involved in fell short of coproductive goals:

You know, what frustrates me about our proposal is we didn't talk to the police about what we were doing.

We lost our senior contact and then we were halfway through it before I started saying why aren't we talking to the police about what they want? And then the project ended and there was no interest in it.

A final note. One of the key findings from our interim evaluation was that academic partners found the police pre-meet divisive. A move towards joint chairing of meetings and an envisioned move towards co-directorship of the PRP were seen by several academic interviewees as very positive developments in this light, with a broader sense that since the retirement of the pre-meet 'it's been much more positive... more focused and collaborative.'

Perceptions of impact

Perhaps more than any other issue, perceptions of impact were touched on by the differing expectations of police and academic partners. From the outset, one of the clear 'asks' from police partners was for clear branded tools and simplified messages:

The message has come back that, the way that information progresses through the ranks, and to get the message out, is one side of A4, clearly branded, preferably with a predictive tool that can be used in-house.

Despite measures of academic impact being achieved – for example, publications arising from the International strand and Small Grants – several academics acknowledged that police expectations may not have been met:

We probably haven't managed [police expectations of impact] that well. We certainly haven't met it, because I think they've got an insatiable desire for impact, and impact in terms of... "if it's not an index or something which you could own and you probably can sell," if it doesn't conform to that... then it maybe doesn't fit what they want

Whether or not this was a problem of impact or a problem with broaching a cultural divide was arguably a separate question.

There is that perennial problem of language. Officers, well, police forces very often don't engage with language that isn't parcelled up in familiar ways. And at the same time know, there are those challenges about how to get them to think differently or engage in different ways. If that is the point.

Framed by this context, several interviewees explained approaches to and understandings of impact. As an academic lead commented, the impact of the conferences that played a role in several strands was – by nature – very hard to evaluate:

[T]he outcomes... are not quantifiable, but... the Innovation Forum does actually feed into the other processes that are taking place on the N8 PRP. Everybody will come out of that Innovation Forum with new ideas, inspired, approaching things in a different way.

Moreover, nascent partnerships developed on the day could begin to falter when working realities kicked back in:

They get a day off to attend an event like this and they have the best of intentions but then, you know, the next day they're on their shift and they're picking up a bunch of jobs and it's very, very easy for those ideas to just slide and be forgotten

Beyond conferences, the PRP was developed alongside a burgeoning interest in evidence-based policing, and the development of several parallel programmes and initiatives. Within this context, policing research partnerships were described that involved N8 partners, but that were nothing to do with the PRP. One interviewee noted:

I noticed quite early on [that] any piece of research on police or policing that was going on within the partner universities, almost was a need to kind of put that under the N8 banner, when in fact it had been

⁶ See the evaluation of small grants within this report for more details.

going on perfectly well prior to the existence of the PRP and would have continued, regardless. And in fact, maybe the N8 thing muddied the water in some forces and organisations.

This made it harder still to assess substantive measures of impact.

Nonetheless, there were clear case studies of direct impact, and a widespread sense that both ‘multiplier events’ and ‘multiplier individuals’ had added huge value to the PRP. In terms of multiplier events, PRP summer schools – bringing together presentations by multiple small grant holders – were repeatedly presented as a real win, delivering impact and engagement well beyond the sum of their parts:

It really worked well because it was bringing strands together and people together, and that whole presence just lifted it and it was about that synergy that you were talking about.

A couple of individuals – those who participated in early people exchange programmes, in particular, and a couple of small grant holders – were also widely seen as people who saw the potential of the PRP and used it to the full:

[Name] is a relatively early career researcher who was presenting to the [a national assembly] a few days ago... [T]he infrastructure that we put in place enabled her to do some work, to have some ideas, to do some work... and that the impact that that’s having is... fundamentally different from a lot of things which would have happened otherwise

The apparent success of these case studies left a sense that there was something important happening here – given clear difficulties in engagement across multiple work streams in multiple activity strands, the extent to which a small number of individuals and events harnessed the PRP’s potential emphasised the impact that could be delivered.

The future and legacy of the PRP

As the five funded years of the PRP drew to an end, academic partners reflected on the partnership’s potential future. Here, there was a general sense of cautious and constrained optimism.

I think it still has the potential to do things and I think do interesting things. I just think it is quite a fragile thing, still, and I think some of the directions that some of our partners might want it to go...

The sense of fragility was widespread, with particular concerns over future directions and funding models:

I worry that without a vast amount of funding behind it or a legitimate kind of project...because the catalyst was quite discrete, wasn’t it? And we all knew what we had to do and it was all part of a big collective thing. It feels different now, and I know the small grants are continuing but we’ve already seen that there’s been loss of interest or commitment. I don’t know. I think it’s early days.

With this, leadership over the coming months was seen as critical in determining the partnership’s future:

The next year or two are going to be make or break, I think. [The next director] has got a tough job. When the call went out for the academic director, I was thinking, Jesus, who’s going to step up for this? Not that it’s like a poisoned chalice or anything, but it’s a tough, tough job, isn’t it?

The small grants programme and PIF were consistently identified as lead priorities for retention. Whilst recognising that practical data sharing structures had been limited during the funded lifespan of the partnership, one interviewee saw this as the potential big win for future work:

I want it to be...I want it to establish a big data sharing thing. That’s what I want...that to me is the main thing that it could really benefit. Something like a data passport; an access passport. You don’t have to go through security of each force. You know, if you are cleared by one, that’s it, you’ve got an N8 passport to go in others. That, to me, would be the biggest legacy and the most useful legacy and to me, that’s the thing that you’re most likely not to get.

Finally, in terms of funding, sponsorship and subscription models for key pieces of work (small grants and the PIF) were identified as the most promising candidates for a sustainable future, with a recognition that long-term funding was essential: ‘this is going to have to be... a very long term process. Because it [is] a matter of culture change.’

Conclusions

After five years, academic partners widely described achieving nearly all expected milestones whilst implementing creative alternatives to planned work when envisaged plans became unworkable. The engagement of strand leads with the PRP usually stretched well beyond interviewees' funded time. Whilst small grants were seen as a particularly good opportunity for letting colleagues know about the PRP, a number described some wariness of close engagement with police partners and the PRP brand within their home institutions. The withdrawal of PCCs and the PRP's one third-sector partner, Your Homes Newcastle, was generally experienced as a loss with the 'Policing Research Partnership' being reframed as a 'Police Research Partnership.' This raised concerns for academics both about their ability to maintain critical distance from the police, and about the extent to which police priorities shaped the PRP's agenda in ways that could be detrimental to research. Views on coproduction differed – whilst aspects of coproduction were embedded in all strands, some felt that delivering research should remain academics' task; contrastingly, others felt concerned that some PRP activities had little or no obvious role for the police (for example, the almost complete absence of police leadership in funded small grants). Impact was generally seen as hard to measure. Whilst academic indicators such as peer-reviewed publications were widely delivered, there was less of a sense of prioritising police preferences for branded tools and (very) brief descriptive summaries. Some clear case studies of impact were described – centring particularly on 'multiplier events,' and a small number of early career researchers who had taken up multiple opportunities within the PRP. Finally, there was a widespread sense that the future of the PRP was precarious – and that a reinvigorated first two years of a co-directed 'subscription model' would be essential to sustaining the partnership over the longer term.

A Need for Analysis. Evaluating a CPD Programme for Data Analysts

Overview

In 2018, a team of academics and police practitioners led by Leeds and Lancaster universities developed a 6-month, 8-session Continuing Professional Development programme for police analysts. In the first cohort (in 2018), 34 data analysts from 11 partner force areas in the north of England undertook the course⁷. This report focuses on a qualitative evaluation of this cohort's experience, with interviews held at the completion of the programme and after one year. Twenty analysts were interviewed. Interviewees came from all 11 partner forces. They worked in a variety of analytical roles. The vast majority were experienced police analysts (4-17 years).

Methodology and findings

Introduction

The N8 Policing Research Partnership (PRP) is a collaboration between 8 research-intensive universities and 11 police forces (and their police and crime commissioners) in the North of England. Its work is organised into 9 activity strands. Each is led by an N8 university. The Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme described here represents the work of two strands, Data Analytics (Leeds) and Training and Learning (Lancaster), in partnership with police data analysts and other university partners. It arose from concerns that analysts were facing a lack of opportunity and recognition among senior officers of the vital role analysts should be playing in shifting from reactive to proactive policing, especially under austerity. It was hoped that a CPD programme could increase the confidence and skills of analysts to make a substantive contribution to their forces; whilst also demonstrating to chief officers the (potential) value of their analytical workforce.

Within this context, strand leads from Leeds and Lancaster conducted a Training Needs Analysis in Autumn 2016. This led to the development of a working group (in Autumn 2017) with paired teams of academics and practitioners developing content for each of eight modules. An academic partner commented:

‘The initial intention was for each session to be centred on police data with academics demonstrating methods, worked examples and solutions’ (email).

In practice, this proved hard to operationalise. Strand leads identified that few forces could secure data for wider distribution, and few analysts (with the exception of partners from Humberside and Lancashire) were willing to present. The resulting pilot CPD course thus had less input from data analysts than had been envisioned.

The first CPD programme – the focus of this report – was delivered over 6 months in 2018⁸. Three free places were offered to each PRP force. Thirty-four analysts attended. Learning resources were kept on a dedicated service (called the Data Analytics and Digital Service - DADS) to support skills development. DADS also facilitated research applications and hosted online forums to support networking and shared problem solving between analysts.

Methodology

The University of York evaluates and monitors the work of the N8 PRP. We focused on the CPD programme for several reasons. It comprised an unusually wide partnership: two N8 universities, several new universities, and all

⁷ A second cohort undertook the CPD programme in 2019, with the programme adapted in response to lessons learnt in 2018.

⁸ Subsequent iterations have taken lessons from the 2018 programme, for example placing greater emphasis on skills workshops and data visualisation whilst reducing the use of hard-to-access statistical software.

11 partner forces. It was inherently co-productive, addressing a police concern with a collaborative response. The CPD programme also engaged analysts able to offer critical insights into the application and development of evidence-based policing, and into organisations' engagement with the PRP.

We approached half of the 2018 CPD cohort for interview at the end of the programme, and half one year later. Twenty responded, and participated in 15-26 minute semi-structured interviews. Interviewees came from all 11 PRP partner forces. Nearly all interviewees had worked as police analysts for many years.

Analysts' routine work within police forces

Analysts worked in a variety of roles. Most produced statutory reports, analysed internal data for performance and business reasons, or worked on specific investigations. When they were used, statistics were descriptive: summarising data with counts, percentages, averages, etc using Excel. Some also used business-oriented tools. Statistical Process Control (SPC), for example, allows analysts to identify when figures fall outside of pre-specified levels. One analyst commented:

'[W]e do use SPC and statistical limits and significance and things like that depending on just what the product is.'

Patterns were mostly identified visually or manually, not through statistical tests. Very few analysts sought to identify the significance of reported findings; or the probability that they might have arisen by chance. This was partly because senior officers valued simplicity and brevity, disliking nuance or statistical terms. Many analysts reflected along these lines:

'They only really want the bullet points... One side of A4 at most... They don't want to know what the p -value was, they just want the "yes or no, did it work and what can we improve"?''

Because statistical techniques were not understood by senior officers they could not be referenced in reports. Because they could not be used in reports, they were not highly valued by analysts' institutions.

These analytical limitations were compounded by restricted, heavy workloads. A handful of analysts had genuine creativity within their role. They were supported by organisational measures such as protected development time. A much larger group had a small amount of creativity – often limited to appearance:

'...the way you lay out dashboards and how you design graphs and charts to be clear and informative and ... visually appealing.'

A final group had such heavy and defined workloads that they had no creativity at all. They could not envision new ways of working, or room to apply new methods. The limitations placed on analysts suggests a need for organisational reform, with training focused on three key areas: maintaining and developing analysts' skills; empowering analysts to be more confident in deploying their skills; and supporting greater managerial understanding of analysts' skills and potential. Insofar as such change requires a cultural shift, this may be a generational project.

The CPD programme

Nearly all interviewees were excited about engaging with the CPD programme. Training opportunities are rare; this one was seen as high value. The teaching team was praised for their ability to engage practitioners.

However, analysts found it hard to apply learning from the course to their work environments. Variations within the cohort created challenges. Some found the teaching too difficult:

'There was a lot of "just copy and paste this code in and press enter and that's what you'll get." I didn't understand why I was typing what I was typing.'

Others found it too basic. Still others could not relate it to their workload:

'[The CPD course] was interesting, and I learnt a lot, but it does make you realise that I, perhaps, don't have the opportunity to use it in my current role.'

Applicability was further limited by software. Three early sessions used R, a statistical programme:

‘We spent the time training to do a bar chart on R that took longer than Excel, didn’t look as good as it did on Excel, and we’re not going to get R anyway, so what was the point.’

Three problems are set out here. Firstly, learning R was arduous. Some training involved considerable work to learn functions that felt redundant. Secondly, R’s outputs were not beautiful. Senior officers (and so their institutions) value visualisation. This made R harder to ‘sell’ institutionally. Finally, R was inaccessible. Whilst the programme is cost-free and open source, police computers are highly protected and IT departments busy. The swiftest forces took several months to install R. Citing security concerns, some would not install it at all. Teaching consequently felt abstract and theoretical. Indeed, R highlights a cultural divide. It fits the needs of autonomous, time-rich, flexible and expert-led academics prioritising robust knowledge-driven analyses. It proved a poorer fit for managed analysts in an inflexible, high-pressured, hierarchical environment where the priority is ‘visually appealing’ simplicity.

Two final points confounded applied learning. Firstly, security concerns prevented analysts from bringing sanitised datasets to sessions. This was a real disappointment for both police partners and academic leads. Analyses were thus taught using example datasets that rarely reflected analysts’ work, increasing the gap between teaching and practice. Secondly, when analysts returned to work they lacked the time to test out or implement new techniques.

Impact and legacy

After a year, we found it hard to identify examples of specific, applied learning. Analysts were not using new techniques. Nor were they using new software (though some intended to adopt R). There were some more diffuse benefits. Several interviewees felt better informed about the analytical landscape:

‘I think we’re a lot more mindful of the right way to do things and the principles and the skills that we need to employ. I think it’s expanded our knowledge across systems and open sources.’

This was useful when commissioning new work, or engaging with outside organisations. There were also some individual changes. One analyst reported using descriptive statistics more frequently.

Interviewees in about half of all forces had contacted peers. These were usually one-off contacts with one other force, centred on: sharing data; discussing shared problems (particularly knife crime); or seeking support with software:

‘There have been an occasional couple of emails... We’ve contacted other analysts that were on the course, just for their input or vice-versa, they’ve contacted us.’

A contacts list facilitated such discussions. Those analysts who had not made contact with their peers fell into two groups. Some saw value in networking, but had not yet had the time or inclination to do so. Others could imagine little or no benefit in speaking to other analysts.

We found limited evidence of the online service (DADS) supporting impact. During initial interviews, one analyst was accessing learning resources using DADS. After one year, none were logging on. The forums are largely unused. As of November 2019, of six questions that have been posted none has received a reply. DADS can also process research applications, and analysts felt that any submissions would be seen in force. Finally, analysts were not engaging with PRP information or events. A couple received the PRP newsletter. Very few had been to PRP events. Some confused the N8 PRP with other research partnerships.

Conclusions

This report details an evaluation of an initial experimental CPD programme for police data analysts. Analysts and academics worked together to develop the programme. Many of the academics had previously worked for the police; many analysts had academic backgrounds. Despite this wealth of shared experience and positive feedback on teaching, we were able to identify very little impact on practice after one year. Difficulties appeared to be cultural. Teaching used cutting-edge open-source software to demonstrate advanced techniques, premised on the

assumption that robust methods were institutionally valued by police partners, and analysts had some flexibility within their workload. Contrastingly, analysts were unable to secure software. Some could not understand the techniques taught, and others could not see how it applied to their role. Few had the space or time to trial new techniques. Additionally, robust methods were not valued by their senior officers who required simplicity, brevity and visual appeal as the cornerstones of reports. Isolated analysts thus returned to work environments lacking the software, support, or influence to deliver improved reports (and so enhanced decision-making) in their home contexts. The College of Policing have commended the approach taken by the CPD programme and are taking forward more proactive work informed by their interest in the CPD programme; yet this evaluation suggests that practice realities often remain at some distance from ideals. Targeting cultural change with sustained momentum appears essential, if academic ideals are to be applied within a policing world

Small grants, Big Benefits. Evaluating the Small Grants Programme of the N8 PRP.

Overview

The N8 Policing Research Partnership (PRP) is a collaboration between 8 research intensive universities and 11 police force areas in the North of England⁹. Under the terms of a five-year Catalyst Grant (2015-20), activities were structured into nine ‘activity strands’ with each academic partner responsible for leading one. This report focuses on one strand of work – a small grants scheme of competitive awards of up to £25,000 made available each year for between three and five projects. Each successful bid had to involve at least one of the N8 PRP’s universities and at least one of the policing partners, with broader partnerships encouraged. Grants were available for one year with an expectation that funding would ‘pump prime’ subsequent research and yield practical applications. They were managed by Newcastle University, leading the Research Coproduction strand. Each year, the open call included a topic steer related to the theme of the annual N8 PRP Policing Innovation Forum¹⁰. This report describes the findings of a small-scale process evaluation of the first three years of this programme, drawing on qualitative interviews with 13 academics and three police officers involved in nine funded projects and five unfunded proposals.

Methodology and Findings

Methodology

We sought to interview key partners within all funded projects from the first three years of small grants (awarded in 2016, 2017, 2018). We also sought interviews with people who had not secured funding, to explore whether or not the programme had a broader impact. This led to interviews with 13 academics and 3 police officers, describing 9 funded and five unfunded projects. All interviews were fully transcribed, and analysed using qualitative analysis software (NVivo 11).

Who?

As the small grants process was primarily aimed at research, it most successfully engaged researchers. Our sample consisted mostly of academics, and the police partners we interviewed had subsequently progressed to further academic study. **Early career researchers saw the clearest benefit**, with five projects emerging from ideas or partnerships developed during PhD projects. One more was developed by two officers after an investigation uncovered a gap in research:

‘[The proposal] really stems from that one investigation and the realisation that genuinely nationally there was no strategic approach towards how police or other law enforcement agencies should approach the criminal abuse of cryptocurrency...’ (Police).

Most partnerships were built on the back of existing networks or contacts. Several former PhD students took forward projects with their academic supervisors, or forces they had worked with during research. Two proposals from well-established career researchers developed long-simmering research ideas using tried and tested networks. Where new collaborators were sought, locality usually played a role with partners sought from regional forces or universities. An exception was a study initiated by police partners – who used the N8 PRP’s national register of experts¹¹ to identify academics with specific expertise irrespective of their location. Here, stated expertise trumped geographical convenience. Finally, the eligibility criteria of the small grants process brought

⁹ For more information, see <https://n8prp.org.uk>

¹⁰ In the first three years, the focal themes were: cybercrime; vulnerability and domestic abuse; and early interventions in domestic abuse

¹¹ A register of academics and police partners with interests in specific fields, available at <https://n8prp.org.uk/experts/>

some partner together. Bids required at least one eligible university and police force, and this led to some N8 PRP partners being asked to support ineligible forces or universities. In one instance, this led to a genuine, strong collaboration based on pre-existing relationships; in a second, a ‘cold call’ from a police partner asking for support in name only led to an unfunded bid.

Why small grants?

Most interviewees were already engaged with aspects of the N8 PRP, and so had the small grants process at the forefront of their minds when considering how to progress research ideas. Perhaps surprisingly, only one interviewee mentioned the Policing Innovation Forum (see Overview, p.1) as playing any role in the preparation of their bid.

‘It really did feel like an appropriate source... If you look at some of the key themes that were coming through the Policing Innovation Forums as well, you could tell we were really tapping into something...’ (Academic).

Chance encounters also triggered a couple of bids from interviewees who had not previously encountered the PRP. One team heard about the programme from a Chief Inspector who had just read a PRP newsletter; another applicant heard about the programme from his line manager upon taking up a new post.

Several features of the small grants process particularly appealed to interviewees. **Firstly**, it was seen as directly collaborative and impact-focused. Some interviewees felt that research councils assumed such projects should be funded directly by the police. **Secondly**, the mandate for police-academic partnerships was widely appreciated. Even academics who were generally more critical of policing practice enjoyed working with police partners. **Thirdly**, the simplicity and speed of the application process was valued – some projects were ready to go, and only needed funding to launch:

‘[B]ecause of both of our national networks we thought we’d be able to get the research done fairly quickly and without too much problem... And yes, the N8 came up, and we just thought ‘oh yes, it’s attractive because it’s involving forces that are in your collaboration’ ... and it just seemed to tick all the boxes’ (Academic).

Finally, particularly for early career academics, the scale and purpose of the small grants was perfectly pitched. It was small enough to be a realistic target; yet large enough to support genuinely meaningful research. Moreover, the fund explicitly aimed to ‘pump-prime’ larger subsequent projects:

‘...the small grants was the perfect scheme to go towards because it was a good small pot of funding to allow us to potentially work towards a larger bid’ (Academic).

As a result, it was a superb fit for academics wanting to initiate or develop a programme of research.

Coproduction

All proposals described by our interviewees started life with clear and strong evidence of coproduction. This began **before proposals were submitted**: in one case, an interviewee delivered 20 days of ‘pro bono’ workshops and academic support to a Northern force in the lead-up to an (unfunded) bid. In most instances, extensive preparatory meetings took place before proposals were finalised to ensure projects met the needs of both academic and policing partners:

‘[W]e were kind of... in a much more flexible negotiation capacity with police professionals to say what have we got?’ (Academic).

Ideas often evolved iteratively, and through discussions. A project from South Yorkshire grew out of police concerns, which triggered some exploratory academic work, which in turn triggered a more fully-developed bid for a small grant:

‘We were back and forth whether we could do anything with it and make it a bit more formal and properly funded. And so obviously the call just came round at the right time’ (Academic).

Relatedly, a North Yorkshire proposal came about through a convergence of priorities, facilitated through meetings of a local police-academic board. A senior academic held a longstanding interest in the policing of

cannabis; the Chief Constable of North Yorkshire was concerned about rates of drug arrests in his force area; and this led to a collaborative working-out of a research idea.

There was also some evidence that coproduction was also maintained **during the research process**. An academic interviewee reflected:

'[Our police partner] have been so invested in the project right from the beginning, which has really, really helped... [W]e never faced any barriers. They were a brilliant partner, really open and open to the critical dialogue when it was needed as well and...you know, so it's been a pleasure to work with them and we will continue to work with them on different projects because of that because it just worked, you know, it's worked really well' (Academic).

Very significant contributions of time and resources could be maintained even when strategic police investment dwindled. The retirement of senior officers in North Yorkshire led to a project with no clear ownership amongst force leaders. However, over thirty interviews with frontline officers were nonetheless arranged across five sites; and a police analyst sanitised approximately six thousand records for academic analysis. Finally, three interviewees described shared **dissemination**.

'It was definitely co-productive... we would send slides back and forth... [W]e presented this research at international conferences [and police partners] would also do some presentations. So, we didn't just leave it up to the academics to kind of disseminate the research, we shared that load' (Academic).

These interviewees emphasised their desire for practice impact, and engaging practitioner audiences.

Three central factors could hinder partnerships. **Firstly**, choosing the 'wrong' partners. In one instance, a police partner was felt to lack the skills necessary to deliver robust analyses leading to a scaling-down of collaboration, analyses and ambitions. In another, project partners were identified through the PRP's register of experts. Interviewees identified that the partners they found were not as proactive as they had hoped, with one being largely dormant throughout. **Secondly**, retirement and relocation complicated many projects with one team encountering 'four detective inspector leads' (Academic) over two years. The impacts could be significant, disrupting both relationships and work. The loss of a DCI caused two research-active officers to lose protected research time, gaining an almost unmanageable workload. When two senior officers retired from one force, 'suddenly the desire to think about this area, which is a sensitive area of course... dropped off their agenda' (Academic). Senior academics also left one project, requiring a significant restructuring of work. **Thirdly**, three studies held a particular interest in policed populations: groups who could be negatively affected by police practice. In each instance, academic partners remained at some distance from collaborating forces with potentially contentious concepts not openly shared. Humanising offenders, supporting stigmatised victims and the criminalisation of young people were prominent themes here. In two of these projects, partnerships involved broader collaborations with third sector agencies with a clearer interest in advocating for marginalised groups and investing in critical ideas.

Legacy and impact

We identified examples of legacy and impact in four key areas. **Firstly**, in terms of dissemination. Every project we explored had either produced publications in peer-reviewed academic journals or was close to submitting them. Engagement at conferences and events was widespread too, whilst a team from Lancaster had delivered training events for a coercive control training tool to practitioner audiences nationwide. **Secondly**, in terms of successor bids. In two cases of rejected proposals, participants went on to submit new small grants bids in subsequent years. Grant holders also had their eyes on larger programmes: at the time of interview, £530,000 in ESRC funding had gone to two separate projects:

'We delivered on the proposal that we originally agreed with the N8. We did the analysis of the data and we certainly found interesting things, and that certainly was a real plus in terms of going forward with an ESRC application... I can't remember now, it was £15,000 or £20,000 we got from the N8, now we've got £300,000' (Academic).

Four further interviewees were working up proposals for ESRC bids, and two of these were at a relatively advanced stage. **Thirdly**, several projects had contributed to changes in policy or practice. One small grant resulted in its PI being consulted internationally on changes to domestic violence laws. A project on modern slavery instigated significant changes in national recording practices, whilst an exploration of Bitcoin led to its two chief investigators taking on national leadership roles in the investigation of cybercurrency. As they explained, this had led to the development of a national cybercurrency policing strategy, into which they had significant input; and a recent seizure of over £1.3m in Bitcoin. **Finally**, the small grants process was felt to have launched or substantively advanced a wealth of research careers.

Overall impressions of the small grants process

Almost without exception, our interviewees were enthusiastic about several features of the small grants programme. **Firstly**, it was felt to link superbly with other N8 PRP activity strands, funding and support:

‘Right from the beginning there was lots of support given if ever I had any queries about particular parts of the application form or if I needed to double check anything, right through to the end of the project. And what I found, particularly helpful is that even when the small grant finished... not just in terms of being awarded further money from the N8 but, the... various people in the N8 have been so supportive with dissemination and really forthcoming with trying to get word out there about what we’ve been doing as much as possible. And so, yeah, it’s been a very, very positive process I would say’ (Academic).

This was felt to be particularly useful in terms of dissemination – the engagement of forces across the North (with wider opportunities at conferences and events) allowed research teams to reach a much wider audience.

Secondly, the annual iterations allowed swift turnarounds of projects and ideas, with interviewees both appreciating the one-year structure for the full delivery of programmes:

‘[A] quick project for a year, I find quite satisfying. I’m not a big fan of three year projects, (Academic).

And the opportunities this gave for producing successor bids in the case of an initial failure. **Thirdly**, as the small grants programme developed, it was also apparent that the opportunity for assembling quick proposals and receiving swift feedback supported the PRP in developing a foothold and a reputation within institutions. **Finally**, the level of funding was seen as uniquely well-pitched, enabling decent workable projects to get off the ground:

‘I’ll just say maybe at a more sort of policy level, I think it’s pretty amazing as a programme that with these small pots of money you can get such an interesting, varied set of projects. And from my point of view from my history in research funding, which I’ve done a lot of in the past, this is incredible value for money’ (Academic).

The exclusion of permanent academics’ salaries from eligible costs also leveraged significant added value for the N8 PRP. We encountered several instances of substantial, senior teams of academic staff working on projects unfunded or as a ‘charitable venture,’ either to support the career of junior colleagues or to deliver work that they powerfully believed in.

Conclusions

The N8 PRP small grants programme was widely seen by our interviewees as a success. It was seen as extremely well-positioned to take forward ripe ideas, providing enough funding to deliver substantive research work whilst building towards successor projects. In this, it engaged early-career researchers particularly well, and also secured substantive bids from some senior networks of academics. Police partners also appear to have benefitted; though they were less well represented within our interview sample. Several features worked particularly well, including the level of resourcing available; the swiftness and straightforwardness of the application process; and the emphasis put on meaningful collaboration. The networked nature of links with other activity strands was also appreciated by some. In both conception and delivery, the small grants process was seen to be a real success – and a reputation-bearer for the broader N8 PRP.

About this report

Professor Charlie Lloyd and Dr Geoff Page are joint leads of the Evaluation and Monitoring activity strand of the N8 PRP. These summaries have been written by Dr Geoff Page, who conducted interviews and analysis. More information can be found at <https://n8prp.org.uk>, including the full-length version of this report and information about the development of the small grants programme.

