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Policing

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Police Knowledge Fund Review

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Executive summary

The College of Policing, the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Home Office launched the two year Police Knowledge Fund (PKF) in 2015 to increase evidence in priority areas and embed an evidence-based approach in policing. The £10 million fund supported the development of 14 police-academic research collaborations involving 39 police forces and 30 academic institutions across the UK, with funds awarded ranging from £250,000 to £1.3 million.

This report presents findings from the national review of the PKF programme. It draws on data collected and compiled through a range of methods including semi-structured interviews, an online survey and synthesis of the 14 projects' final reports. It presents specific examples of some of the fund's activities and outputs and their impact on key areas of policing policy and practice, against its three key objectives, to:

- build sustained capability among officers and staff to understand, critique and use research
- embed or accelerate understanding of crime and policing issues and evidence based problem-solving approaches
- demonstrate innovation in building the research evidence base and applying it through knowledge exchange and translation across all levels of policing.

The report also shares learning from the fund on what factors were found to influence the success, or otherwise, of developing and maintaining effective police-academic research partnerships.

“ I strongly believe that this has been the most important innovation in policing during my service. In times of austerity, using methods that can be empirically shown to work is vital, not only in terms of operational capacity but from a public confidence and legitimacy perspective. It also leads to innovation and creativity and helps align some of the best minds in the country to challenging policing problems. ”

police officer

What has the PKF achieved?

The PKF reflects a broad, diverse and ambitious programme of work. Examples of demonstrable impact on adopting an evidence-based approach to policing can be seen at a local, regional and national level. While it is too early to fully understand the impact of the individual collaborations and of the programme as a whole, the breadth and scale of the activity and outputs delivered across the programme is promising.

At the most fundamental level, over 30 partnerships were developed between police forces and academic institutions that were not in place prior to the PKF. These supported several hundred academics and police practitioners to work collaboratively to share skills, knowledge and experience in generating and using research evidence.

Built capability to use and understand research

Across all PKF collaborations officers and staff have been engaged in a broad range of continuing professional development and learning activities around using and understanding research evidence. These activities have contributed to a shift in mind-sets towards evidence-based policing (EBP) across ranks and roles and increased capability of officers and staff to apply evidence-based approaches which can help them respond to new challenges in a more informed and cost-effective way.

“ (The workshop) introduced me to evidence-based policing, giving me tools to identify tried, tested and therefore more successful solutions. It has also given me the confidence to test my own assumptions, to develop new approaches. This helps me to provide a more effective service to the communities I serve... ”

police officer

Impact included:

Over 14,000 users accessing new online learning resources

Over 500 police officers and staff attending EBP workshops and short courses

220+ new police postgraduate students

Over 200 police officers and staff producing short research projects such as master's dissertations

Around 50 officers and staff undertaking research fellowships and secondments

Three new postgraduate certificates in policing developed and delivered in addition to several additional accredited undergraduate and postgraduate EBP modules.

Accelerated understanding of crime and policing issues

Across the programme, police and academics worked together to co-create, deliver and use quality research evidence to improve decision making and practice. A range of new research studies, including problem analyses, realist evaluations, randomised control trials and systematic reviews have been produced in priority policing areas such as child sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, mental health and digital policing. This research activity has provided new insights and informed the development of new tools and technical solutions to support tactical and strategic decision making, as well as contributing more generally to policing improvement through changes to training, policy and strategy.

Shared and translated knowledge

PKF collaborations used a broad range of approaches to support the reciprocal sharing of knowledge, experience and expertise which have contributed to translating learning and applying it to police practice. These included the development of new:

- knowledge exchange mechanisms, including online knowledge hubs and platforms, advisory and expert groups, conferences and workshops, and research reports and briefings
- operational tools that help officers and staff use research and evidence in practice
- fellowships and exchanges that encouraged and enabled direct engagement between academics and police officers and staff.

Examples of research produced

EMPAC: 19 research projects

CPRL: 6 problem-solving research projects

Keele: 5 test bed research projects

Connect, BPC: 2 systematic reviews

Cambridge: 10 randomised control trials

Impact of PKF activity on strategy, policy, practice and training.

For example:

Research activity informed the development of best practice guidelines and procedures for the police use of cloud evidence.

New **digital evidence mobile app** for front line officers providing training and guidance to help them correctly identify, capture and preserve digital evidence.

Academic partners used **social media platform** to provide live time operational support in terms of data collection and analysis in relation to high profile terrorist attacks, murders and public order events.

Research on child interviewing simulation has led to the development of a simulator for practical use in police training.

What have we learned about developing police-academic research partnerships?

One of the key aims of the PKF was to facilitate and support the development of sustainable collaborative partnerships between police and academia. The review identifies and describes the following seven building blocks as underpinning a successful police-academic partnership:

- **Common vision**, objectives and goals
- **Effective management** of the supporting infrastructure
- **Compatible partners** at an organisational and individual level
- **Strong leadership** by both police and academic partners
- Frequent and effective **communication** between participating partners
- **Flexibility** and tolerance to change, in terms of expectations and allocating resources
- **Respect** for cultural differences

The PKF demonstrates that when these factors are considered and the collaboration is working effectively, it can have real tangible benefits for both policing and academia.

Conclusion

At the heart of the PKF, and underpinning its contribution to evidence-based practice, is its potential to accelerate the development of collaborative academic-police partnerships throughout England and Wales. There are a number of strong success stories in the fostering and maturing police-academic collaborations under the PKF programme. Many partnerships have been successful in taking ownership of specific policing challenges and exploring how best these can be resolved through research. Partners have gained valuable insights into the working practices of partner agencies, which proved beneficial for knowledge exchange. Working in partnership has increased opportunities and enthusiasm for research.

In summary, there is evidence from across the programme of how the PKF has:

- led to a better understanding by academics of the policing context and vice versa allowing the development of better structures, priorities and success measures to underpin effective partnership working and help to maximise their impact
- led to a shift in thinking about research by academics, highlighting the potential role practitioners have in developing, delivering and translating research
- developed and accelerated links between academia and the police, facilitating more effective partnership working and maximising impact
- supported the growth of research centres of policing expertise, providing a stimulus for a new emphasis on practitioner led research training and guidance that has the capacity to reach beyond policing related disciplines
- developed new structures and processes embedded within the infrastructure of force-academic activity, and in some cases, of funding secured, to continue the work of collaborations beyond the life of the PKF

These are promising but early steps in a longer journey. Two years is a relatively short period in which to develop, deliver and embed activities, and to measure their impact. The challenge going forward will be to maintain the momentum across the collaborations and to focus on co-driven knowledge translation and sustained activities to embed the many products and outputs into police policy and practice.