

Examining the nature and impact of ethics panels in UK policing

Considering ethics panels in UK policing – including how they operate and their impact.

Key details

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Police region	Scotland
Collaboration and partnership	Police Scotland.
Level of research	PhD
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Research context

Existing research on ethics and policing has highlighted that it is essential to have demonstrably ethical policing to ensure public trust and confidence and that this can be achieved through strong leadership, training and tools such as Codes of Ethics and ethics panels (EPs).

However, it identifies that this is hindered by a lack of consistent and ongoing training, and elements of police culture which result in officers being resistant to the embedding of ethics at the heart of operational policing.

Ethics panels offer the opportunity for organisations such as the police to enhance the ethical

consideration and oversight that should be at the core of decision making and strategy setting. This can be through the scrutiny of dilemmas by a range of internal stakeholders with their own expertise, experience and ethical frameworks to understand the implications across a diverse organisation that must provide a wide range of services to the public; or by actively involving the public in this scrutiny with representatives of communities and professions adding to the discussion to enrich the advice ultimately provided to those decision makers facing the ethical dilemma.

Currently there is limited research that specifically considers ethics panels in policing. The purpose of this doctoral research is to address this gap by examining the nature and impact of ethics panels (EPs) in UK policing.

Questions to be addressed include:

- where and when have EPs been established?
- why have some police forces established EPs and others have not?
- what do EPs look like and are there different types of EPs operating?
- who is on the EP and what is the composition, leadership and selection process?
- how do the EPs operate?
- so what – what are the direct and indirect impacts of EPs and what does success look like?

The learning from these projects will be used to develop good practice for the deployment of ethics panels to inform decision making and policy setting in a police context and beyond.

Research methodology

Following a literature review, this research intends to answer the above questions in a UK policing context through two distinct projects.

Project one will consider ethics panels in the UK, seeking to understand the current picture across these all forces, initially through a questionnaire and followed up by a more in-depth investigation of ethics panel in a number of different forces conducted via interviews and/or focus groups.

Project two will be an in-depth case study to understand how Police Scotland has reached the current situation in their deployment of ethics panels, how they operate, the impact they are having and plans for future development.

This will be achieved through interviews with those involved in the establishment, development and operation of ethics panels. It will also use questionnaires targeted at participants to gather data relating to their experiences in relation to the training, operation and impact of ethics panels.

Focus groups will also be considered in order to gather a deeper and richer degree of detail and understanding and this will be informed by the earlier elements of this project.