

# **THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD: EMBEDDING EVIDENCE BASED POLICING PRINCIPLES**

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In March 2013 the UK Government launched the ‘What Works Network’, a nationally coordinated initiative aimed at positioning research evidence on ‘what works’ at the centre of public policy decision-making. The ‘what works’ philosophy is that good decision making should be informed by the best available research evidence. If relevant or adequate evidence is unavailable, decision-makers should be encouraged to use high quality methods to find out what works. Currently there are seven What Works research centres<sup>1</sup> in the UK focusing on key areas of public policy, including health, education, early intervention, well-being, ageing, local economic growth and crime reduction. These ‘research hubs’ are intended to build on existing models of delivering evidence-based policy - such as the well-established and well-funded National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE). This provides independent evidence-based guidance to the National Health Service (NHS) and health professionals about the targeting of funding and the most effective ways to prevent, diagnose and treat disease and ill health. The newer centres follow a similar pattern of synthesising available experimental research and making it readily accessible to professionals. For example, the Educational Endowment Foundation has developed a toolkit to appraise interventions in education in terms of their cost and impact, whilst also commissioning primary research to fill in gaps in research knowledge. The What Works Centre for Crime Reduction is following the same pattern, synthesising the research evidence and making it available for the police and others in a readily digestible form. However, one feature sets it apart from the other six centres: it is situated within policing’s professional body, the College

of Policing (hereafter, the College). Such an arrangement should present the perfect opportunity for both the producers and consumers of evidence to work in partnership.

Since its inception in 2012, the College and indeed its predecessor, the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA), have promoted the importance of research evidence to inform practice in policing and crime reduction. An NPIA action plan for improving knowledge use in policing (NPIA, 2010) presented a vision of “a police service that routinely uses good quality knowledge to decide what to target, what action to take and what resource to deploy” and cited a range of targets to be achieved by 2013, over which the What Works Centre now takes ownership. These include:

- Investing in research and developing research partnerships;
- Quality assuring research evidence; and
- Sharing and embedding that knowledge in professional practice.

The College is now making a clear push for evidence-based decision making to become the norm rather than the exception for police officers. As part of the College’s professionalisation agenda, officers are being encouraged to move away from policing by ‘custom and convention’ and towards evidence-based decision making. As Sherman has stated “*This body [the College] has tremendous potential to follow the pathway to innovation*” (Sherman, 2013: p380). The College has stated that by 2020:

- There will be more effective policing based on a research and evidence base which is informed by members, forces and the public
- There will be a measurable increase in policing practice based on research

- Members will be routinely assessed in their annual performance development review (PDR) and for selection for promotion or specialisms, on their application and development of evidence based practice<sup>2</sup>.

The core of the What Works centre consists of an academic consortium grant-funded by the College and the Economic and Social Research Council to synthesise and summarise research on crime reduction. Our Institute, (The Institute for Criminal Policy Research, Birkbeck, University of London) is part of the consortium, but our role is to mount an independent evaluation of the What Works Centre. This chapter presents some of the findings that have emerged by the end of the second year. Its structure is as follows. We start by summarising the activities of the What Works Centre, and some of its achievements to date. We then present findings that give a sense of the extent to which the police have adopted principles of evidence based policing (EBP)<sup>3</sup>. We present findings from two case-studies of potential '*opinion leaders*' or '*opinion changers*' working within the police. In addition to the case studies, we detail the views on progress of the various groups involved in the What Works Centre. To anticipate our findings, the evaluation suggests a large gap between the College's aspirations for evidence-based policing and the status quo. We end with an analysis of our findings and present thoughts about future developments, including suggestions for bridging the gap between aspiration and the reality.

The case-study findings presented here are drawn from interviews with nineteen 'Evidence Champions', and with seven officers who had been selected for, and mostly completed, the High Potential Development Scheme (HPDS<sup>4</sup>). Evidence champions are individuals within a police force, usually police officers below the rank of Chief Inspector (middle manager) who act as mediators between producers of research and police practitioners; they are expected to

promote awareness of research evidence, and ensure that it is taken into account in policy and practice. HPDS officers are those who have demonstrated that they have the potential to be future leaders. At the start of their course they will usually be a police constable or sergeant, and most would expect to be promoted whilst participating in the scheme, which lasts five years and includes presentations on the relevance and importance of EBP. Both groups of officers should be well-placed within their organisations to disseminate knowledge and promote EBP practices. In addition to these two groups we present views of College staff, the academics involved in producing and refining the evidence base and other well-informed stakeholders, about the centre's evolution. More details about the methods and wider findings can be found in our evaluation reports<sup>5</sup>.

### **Work to date: the What Works Centre's products**

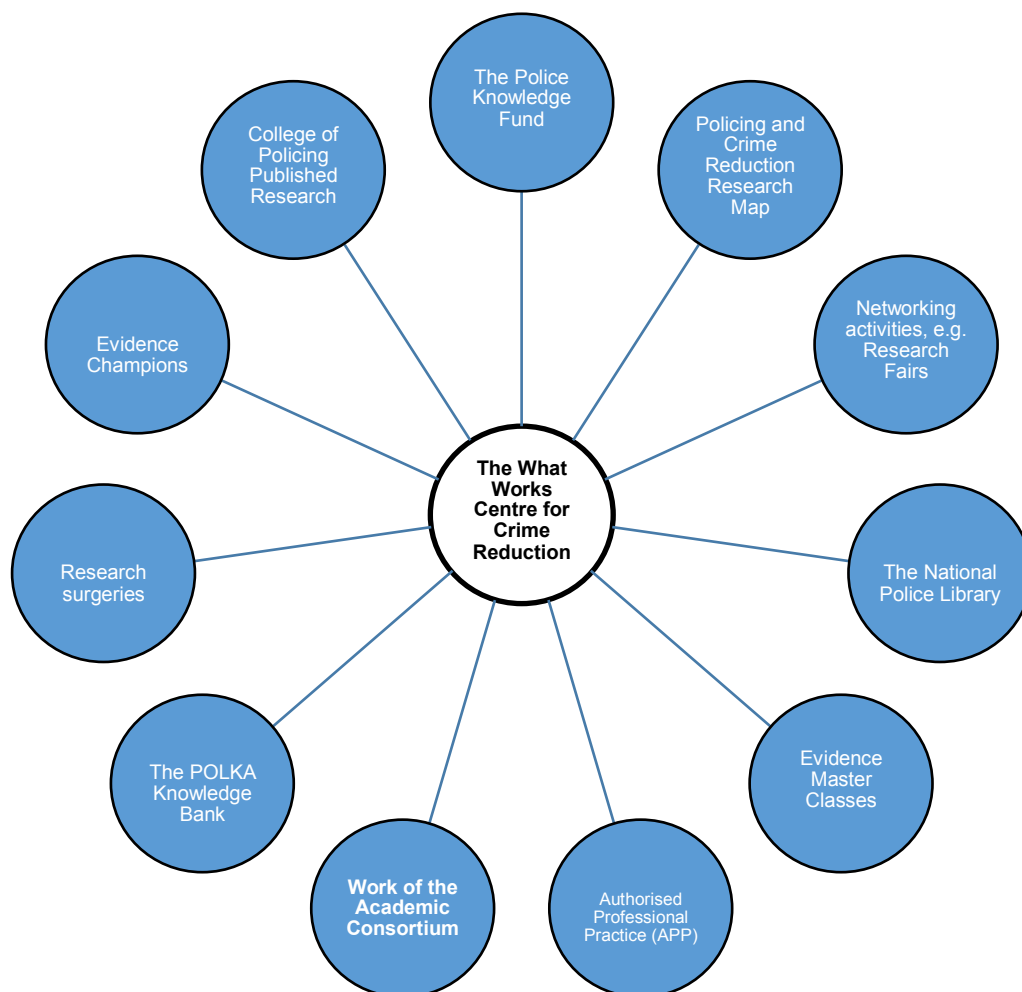
The What Works Centre co-ordinates and manages a number of initiatives, which range from housing the National Police Library and hosting a 'Research Map' (or directory of research) to coordinating a £10 million Police Knowledge Fund<sup>6</sup>. Given how tightly professional knowledge is interrelated with other features of the College's professionalisation process, the boundaries of the What Works Centre within and beyond the College are inevitably porous. The What Works Centre is, however, committed to delivering various 'core products' that relate to the provision of research evidence on policing. These include:

- Identifying pre-existing systematic reviews of research into crime reduction;
- Carrying out additional systematic reviews where there is scope for doing so;

- Providing web-based summaries of pre-existing and new systematic reviews in terms of the quality, cost and impact of interventions, the mechanisms by which the impact is achieved, the ways in which contexts determine impact and implementation issues;
- And thereby providing police officers, Police Crime Commissioners<sup>7</sup> (PCCs) and others with a remit to tackle crime, with the knowledge, tools and guidance to help them target their resources more effectively.

Figure 1 illustrates some of the key mechanisms which ultimately deliver the College’s core products.

**Figure 1 Key evidence mechanisms of the WWCCR**



The products and the mechanisms delivering these products are the main elements of what we have described as a ‘push strategy’, aimed at getting the police to adopt principles of evidence based policing (Hunter et al., 2016). The idea is that organisations will automatically make use of evidence on effectiveness if this evidence is ‘pushed’ towards them in attractive and accessible ways. Increasingly, however, the College of Policing has recognised the need for ‘pull strategies’ that create an organisational appetite for research evidence. These strategies involve the creation of organisational incentives to adopt EBP principles (cf Langer et al., 2016). Thus work is in hand to make EBP principles more prominent in police training, and to ensure that staff selection and promotion procedures attach greater weight to the adoption of these principles as core criteria. It is becoming increasingly clear to all those involved in the What Works Centre that there needs to be a better and more detailed understanding of the influence of ‘push’ and the ‘pull’ strategies and how these influence the adoption of EBP principles throughout an organisation and the extent to which such principles are accepted and valued within the professional culture (cf Ritter and Lancaster, 2013).

### **Progress in embedding EBP principles**

Our report on the first year of the What Works Centre (Hunter et al., 2015) painted a picture of slow progress down the road towards the adoption of EBP principles. We found that from Inspectors to Chief Constables:

- Research evidence is one factor among many that affects decision-making
- Professional judgement and advice from colleagues are key influences on decision-making
- A common complaint about research from academics and researchers was that it is long-winded, full of jargon and lacking clear messages
- Time is limited and a Google search is the go-to information source

This picture should not, however, be viewed as an indicator of the willingness of police officers to adopt EBP principles, but should be seen as a gauge of the types of evidence currently sought and used by police officers and an indicator of the perceived barriers to the greater take-up of research. It should also be highlighted that traditionally, the police have been measured and judged by their arrest and conviction rates, only recently, in the last five or so years, has the over reliance on the performance culture been questioned, challenged and gradually replaced. Encouraging officers to move from a culture of measurement and targets to one of critically appraising the available evidence and problem solving will undoubtedly take time, especially given the structure of policing and the unpredictable nature and immediacy of the problems that need solving. It is clear that research evidence is only one factor that enters into the decision-making process in policing; it is still a relatively small factor in comparison to the legal requirements and organisational regulations, professional judgement, craft traditions, performance management systems and the less formal features of the organisational culture that determines which people get rewarded in policing. EBP is still very much in competition with these daily pressures faced by both operational and senior police officers. It is unsurprising therefore that the uptake of adopting the principles of EBP has, to date, been slow. Awareness of the What Works Centre products was (unsurprisingly) very limited, and there was considerable scepticism about the aspirations of evidence based policing. Over the second year there has been substantial progress in populating the toolkit, and in developing a more sophisticated set of push and pull strategies to promote EBP principles. However, it is also becoming clear that it will take considerable time to achieve the cultural shift towards valuing evidence and attaching importance to a professional knowledge base. Findings from our case studies of Evidence Champions and officers selected to take part in a High Potential Development Scheme (HPDS) illustrate this only too clearly.

## ***Evidence and Frontline Champions***

Evidence champions are individuals within a police force who act as mediators between the researcher/research organisation and other police practitioners, helping to promote and filter evidence into viable policy and practice. The ‘*Champion*’ as an essential component of knowledge mobilisation or knowledge to action strategy is well established in the literature (e.g. Nutley *et al.*, 2007). Their role is variously described as ‘intermediary’, ‘broker’, ‘messenger’, ‘opinion leader’ or ‘role model’ but essentially, these are individuals who will act as a mediator between the researcher and other practitioners, helping to promote and filter evidence into viable policy and practice (Chearney and Head, 2011). There are various examples of such roles, including the Student Champions Scheme run by NICE which recruits and trains students to disseminate information about the organisation to fellow students, or Project Oracle Evidence Champions - commissioners and funders of programmes for young people whose role is to “*promote an understanding of the significance of embedding evidence and evaluation in the commissioning process*”.

There are two types of champion endorsed by the College: Frontline champions, who are operational officers recruited and paid for by the College for a period of six months to raise awareness of the College and its programmes and services and to act as a point of liaison between the College and force; this initiative preceded the What Works Centre; and the network of Evidence Champions was an initiative developed as part of the What Works Centre in 2013 to encourage discussion and collaboration amongst peers about evidence informed practice both within and across forces. This was a voluntary role and open to anyone with an interest in research.

Most of our interviewees described the aims of the role in terms of being a mediator’ or ‘go-between’ College and Force, in the words of one champion as doing the ‘*PR for research*’ but



also to embed or normalise the use of research evidence in every-day work by identifying evidence for good practice or encouraging and developing capacity for evaluative research within force in order to adapt or develop crime reduction initiatives. Champions were of varying police rank, comprising Police Community Support Officers<sup>8</sup> (PCSOs) to chief inspector but also civilian staff linked to analytic or corporate departments and the Police and Crime Commissioners' offices. Sixteen of the 19 were educated to at least degree level and two had (or were working towards) a doctorate. A personal interest in research or academic study was often cited as a reason why they had been suggested for the role; sometimes it was considered to fit well with their existing activities and others were self-nominated rather than selected by their force or they became involved after having some contact with staff at the College.

We found no standard model of how a champion was deployed - although as noted, frontline champions were operationally based - there was sometimes a clear structure in which the champion role was positioned, for example in departments focused on *Organisational Learning* or *Evaluation and Improvement*, or within the office of Police and Crime Commissioner, with clarity about line-management (and link to chief officer team), role and tasks to be undertaken but sometimes, the role was less formalised or integrated and therefore much more influenced by an individual's personal interest and enthusiasm for research:

*It's not really [line managed] It kind of happened organically just through the work I do, the academic stuff I do and the contact with the College of Policing, you start getting invited to things. They do have an actual evidence-based policing lead in the force who is a superintendent but I don't report to them. I don't have any contact with them... [C9]*

Additionally, the role was rarely full-time and tended to be fitted in alongside other responsibilities. The priority it was given is illustrated, in part, by the time allowed to undertake ‘champion’ activity. However, most champions discussed the impact of having limited resources and how this lack of resource impeded the championing of research:

*“I went from probably spending 15% of my time doing this down to about 5% at the moment, and I do a lot of my own time on it...it’s very piecemeal” [C11]*

Champions reported a wide range of activities with some tasks - listed below - such as overseeing academic partnerships or creating inventories of force research activity or offering information to other officers about research. More commonly mentioned tasks included:

- Developing or managing partnerships with universities
- Reviewing knowledge gaps and the research needs of the force
- Developing systems for feeding learning from research into practice
- Auditing or cataloguing research undertaken within force to ensure greater knowledge about what work had already been done to avoid duplication
- Coordinating force involvement in the Knowledge Fund bids<sup>9</sup>
- Raising awareness of the evidence base in strategic or leadership meetings or in particular areas or using evidence to challenge ‘received wisdom’
- Developing or quality-assuring in-house evaluations for assessing force policy and practice
- Organising seminars to promote research evidence for a range of ranks

- Promoting the work of the College of Policing and the What Works Centre (including the Crime Reduction Toolkit)

On this last point, most of the Champions we interviewed were aware of the Toolkit, but a majority said that they had either given it only a cursory glance or not looked at it at all. Only a minority had reviewed its content in detail, and their comments were not especially positive. In part this simply reflected the fact that the toolkit was still being developed and limited the amount of available information – a problem that can be solved only over time. But criticisms also included the fact that much of the research was North American, what was available was dated, and it failed to address the very specific questions on which they were seeking answers. Whilst the academics developed EMMIE to provide research-based insights to *support* decision-making, some users failed to understand this and simply wanted a system that removed professional judgement and uncertainty from decision-making, and told them what to do in any given situation. This desire for simplicity and certainty was not universal, however, and some thought the toolkit *over-simplified*:

*I like the EMMIE framework. I think that's quite good. My initial view was I like the layers of information, but I think there needs to be another layer, of more complex information... There are pockets of individuals who do understand research and have a background in research. We've got quite a number of people who are in the service doing PhDs. [C1]*

Other comments included unhappiness at a perceived lack of practitioner consultation<sup>10</sup> about its content and design and a view that the multiplicity of tasks undertaken by police – and the limited research available that met the evidence standard for the Toolkit - demanded a forum

for dissemination of “good enough research” of observational studies or exploratory research into emerging problems:

*I know what the What Works Centre funding is about, but policing is so multi-disciplinary, it's got so many tasks and bits to deal with, and partners and everything else...public order policing tactics, for example...I wouldn't say I'm underwhelmed by the Toolkit. I think it's useful. I just think we need to go beyond that. [C2]*

The champions we interviewed were generally cautious about discussing impacts of their role on the status of evidence-informed practice in their force, often stressing their work was a long-term rather than a short-term endeavour. The activities they reported ranged from raising awareness to ‘laying the groundwork’ or setting up the framework’ for promoting and embedding evidence-informed practice.

*It's certainly not embedded at a force-level. If you went and asked 100 Chief Inspectors about EBP, you would probably get two or three who had heard of it. I sit and wax lyrical about it quite a lot of the time and people find it really interesting. I've done lots of presentations in the force around Hot Spot and the evidence regarding it, and people generally find it quite interesting...They use me to go and promote it because I present the case quite well, I guess. I'm quite passionate about it. [C11]*

### ***High Potential Development Scheme (HPDS) officers***

The HPDS ran from 2002 until 2016 and was a national scheme. Its aim was to prepare for future leadership roles for those officers who demonstrated potential. In the current policing climate this meant preparing officers who had excelled in an operational capacity, were astute, academically able and were innovative thinkers. Successful HPDS officers were expected to understand new ideas and track the development and relative merits of new initiatives. The overriding objective of HPDS was to increase the quantity and quality of future chief officers. In terms of embedding evidence-informed practice, these officers are crucial to future strategic development and thus constitute key opinion leaders. Our interviews with HPDS officers provided some useful insights into levels of progress in adopting EBP principles. Most of them recalled a methods course which had included an introduction to the academic world, essay writing, research methodologies, and the appropriateness of quantitative and qualitative approaches. All remembered the module on the usefulness of evidence-informed practice. Some responses on research aspects of the scheme are detailed below:

*I remember we did quite a big module on evidence based policing and spent quite a bit of time on it... We had our eyes opened to what gold standard research looks like i.e., what the medical profession looks like. We all realised that police research, so-called police research doesn't meet any standard at all because we just do an operation and something happened... Now we realise that it might have been due to the weather or a good film on telly or anything like that going on. [HPDS 2]*

None of the HPDS officers reported very extensive use of the Toolkit. One thought a Google search was easier to use and another preferred to call colleagues if he had a ‘research’ question. The comments below detail some of their views.

*Yes, I’ve been on the website, I’ve looked at EMMIE. I think it’s basic, it’s quite simple, it’s straightforward to use. [HPDS 4]*

*It’s interesting, I think the challenge is – how do we make it so that some of the What Works information is really relevant to people and actually feasible for people to start to use in their own force.[HPDS 6]*

Only two officers, whilst not personally involved, were aware of collaborations between their home force and local universities; one had previously held the position of university liaison officer and another noted his force and local university was also in receipt of a Home Office Innovation grant<sup>11</sup>.

We asked the officers how ‘research savvy’ they considered their home force to be. Their various responses highlighted commonly raised problems, including a perceived disconnect between having an awareness of research and its value and knowing how to apply this to strategic and operational decision making:

*I think we are becoming more open to it [EBP]. We’ve got a couple of examples now where we’ve seen evidence-based projects, and we’ve actually incorporated them into our workings. That’s possibly because we’ve now got a new Chief Officer team. I would say that senior officers and strategic posts maybe more*

*research savvy, as opposed to operational. I don't think EBP has filtered down as far as operational staff. Certainly, between senior and middle management ranks, I think we're seeing more, and we're more open to that idea of, "Actually, it worked there, so rather than making something up, let's use that." [HPDS 3]*

And a wariness or cynicism among senior staff about research which may prevent change or innovation:

*We continually do the same things over and over and over again, which aren't bad; we do deliver a really good service to members of the public, but we never really look at how we can take that next step and make things more efficient. Research would drive that, but research isn't really trusted... it just isn't really accepted at a high level within the organisation. [HPDS 1]*

Being able to challenge and engage in healthy debate is viewed as an essential ingredient of a culture which critically evaluates evidence. The traditional command and control structure of policing was viewed as an impediment to this type of interaction.

*There are a lot of people in the organisation that would not challenge me as a superintendent because I am a superintendent. Even if the thing I said was the most absolutely ludicrous, ridiculous thing in the world – yes, there might be some grumbles, but it's surprising how much people will do and not push back just because it's a rank talking. That's not how to deliver a service. [HPDS 6]*

Whilst all the HPDS officers felt that they had benefitted academically and all had excelled at the course work and assignments, none had engaged with the Toolkit in any more than a superficial way. The skills they had learned appeared to enhance their career progression prospects but had not been exploited. HPDS officers were not universally viewed by their forces as an invaluable conduit for evidence-informed practice to reach operational ranks. There appeared to be a disconnect between the scheme, individual learning and dissemination at force level.

### **The What Works agenda as a long-term project**

What has become increasingly clear to all of those involved in the What Works Centre is that infusing the police service with EBP principles is a much more ambitious project than originally appreciated. The way in which the What Works centre is intertwined with the College of Policing's agenda for professionalising the police makes it much harder to assess than would be the case if it were a free-standing evidence warehouse. Some interviewees felt they had grossly overestimated the ability of the What Works Centre to effect rapid change at the outset of the venture:

*There is no parallel whatsoever between evidence-based medicine and evidence-based policing. Evidence-based policing is a small group of enthusiasts. It is not embraced by large quantities of the police, and it's not understood by senior people in policing. The size of the task is way, way, way greater than that which I had thought... When I'm asked, "Has the What Works Centre met your expectations in its first two years?" my expectations were seriously inappropriate at the beginning.... We've got 'EMMIE'. Great. We can talk about what we've*



*done. Has it made a difference to policing? I don't believe it has yet. I don't think that should necessarily be seen as a failure, because of the scale of the task. [S1]*

There was a strong consensus amongst most interviewees that the impact of the work would only become evident in the longer-term as illustrated by the quote below:

*It's not sensible to expect any measurable change within a three year timescale. It's ridiculous. Given the size of the tanker that they are trying to turn around, the base from which the police had started in terms of their views of research, their knowledge of What Works and their experience on just about anything to do with what we might regard as academic. [AC3]*

### ***Presentation and communication***

A small number of respondents were critical of the way in which the 'what works agenda' had been presented by the College of Policing. In particular, the use of the terminology 'evidence-based policing' - rather than, for example, evidence-informed policing - was seen to be problematic. This was so for two reasons. First, there was concern that the terminology had conceptualised the evidence agenda as replacing professional judgement, rather than supplementing it, which risked research being viewed as a threat. Second, such language was seen to create unrealistic expectations that research evidence can tell someone what to do in response to a specific problem; whereas the reality is more complex:

*Evidence-based policing" as a phrase is a very simplistic and it kind of implies there is a bucket full of evidence here and all you have got to do is dip into it and you will have the answer. That's totally wrong and it always will be. [AC3]*

*I just think the evidence based kind of thing is misleading...They ought to take into account the evidence that is available to them but that doesn't mean that their decision should be defined on the evidence. [AC5]*

In this context, it was also highlighted that there are many research gaps remaining in crime reduction, meaning that in some areas there is no evidence for 'what works'. There was consequent apprehension that the credibility of the What Works Centre – and success of the wider evidence agenda – might be undermined if it was unable to meet the expectations that it had created:

*The college, the What Works Centre is heading for a massive great embarrassing crash on its face...they're going to say 'what's the evidence for that?' and most of the time the answer is going to be 'there isn't any'" [AC3].*

### ***Resistance to change***

There was no underestimating the challenge for the College of Policing and for the What Works Centre in changing the thinking and attitudes of police and the way in which practitioners were involved in this process was considered crucial:

*People will be resistant for a long time, and it's about how you manage that, and how you explain what you're trying to do to people and with people. What we know about any kind of successful change is you have to do change with people, not to people.*

[CP1]

As highlighted earlier by our interviewees, affecting change in any large-scale organisation takes time. Unlike other professions, decisions taken by operational police officers are rarely guided by evidence. If an arrest needs to be made, the decision is guided by law; if a situation needs to be managed, the decision is often guided by good judgement and discretion. Very little of an officer's early policing career (to date) involves assessing the evidence of what works and implementing change in accordance with this evidence. It is unsurprising therefore, that operational officers and middle management have been cautious about engaging with the What Works agenda. Police culture, which has been extensively observed, analysed and documented, has tended to frown upon and mistrust academics and academic outputs (Rojeck et al 2015; Green and Gates 2014; Flynn and Herrington 2015). Academics and stakeholders all spoke about the resistance from officers to evidence-informed practice, concluding that the lack of engagement between academics and police officers provided a partial explanation for officers' mistrust of academia and all that it has to offer.

*I think it's right that the police get extremely irritated at the idea of a bunch of academics telling them what to do, it is unacceptable. That's why we should be at pains to tell the police, categorically, that is not what this is about. This is about trying to help you make better decisions, not tell you what those decisions should be. [AC3]*

One of the stakeholder interviewees highlighted the importance of engaging with the entire workforce for evidence-informed practice to be accepted and not viewed as yet another passing fad:

*That culture is not there in policing, and until it is, it will be very difficult to get evidence-based policing accepted more widely than by a group of enthusiasts... The real challenge is to get everybody in policing to understand how it's got to change. [S1]*

Finally, interviewees discussed how resistance from rank and file officers and their representative body, the Police Federation, to the introduction of a minimum academic entry requirement is hindering the development of policing. Resistance to the professionalisation of the police is holding officers back and failing to equip them with the necessary skills that policing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century demands. The complexity of the situations police officers now face demand that they are equipped with more than just an understanding of the 'craft of policing'; officers now need to understand what works, in what situations and why, as highlighted below

*Until we crack the 'cultural' thing about accepting that there should be some national standards which are done consistently, we won't get professionalism in policing. CoP Stakeholder [S1]*

## **The Future**

This chapter has sought to describe the evolution of the What Works Centre. Our 'headline finding' is that progress has been slow. However, this 'front-page news' masks a substantial amount of work undertaken by the What Works Centre over the past two years, including the systematic reviews of crime reduction interventions and their translation for practitioners, the design of the EMMIE system and the Toolkit, and bespoke training for officers in appraising the research evidence. After two and a half years, the basic structures and outputs of the

centre are in place. This is a significant achievement, even if the original ambitions for the centre were both ambitious and narrow. By this we mean that the College had large ambitions for getting an evidence warehouse off the ground, but narrow ambitions in not initially seeing (or at least not articulating) how this would contribute to, and be a central part of, its wider professionalisation agenda.

Furthermore, as we have stressed above, there have been additional developments, for example to police training and professional practice, initiated or managed by the College of Policing which may fall outside any exacting remit of the What Works Centre but which all contribute to the solid base on which to build and sustain the What Works Centre.

A central and ambitious aim of the What Works Centre, however, is to change the organisational culture of police and other crime reduction practitioners, to increase their use of evidence for policy and strategic decision-making and, in essence, to make evidence use a ‘professional norm’. This is no easy feat when other more traditional approaches to decision making based on professional judgement are deeply ingrained – prompting one of our interviewees to describe the project as *‘turning around a tanker’*.

In achieving this change, we suggest that there would be considerable value in the College articulating a theory of change more fully. This might include:

- The rationale for moving to an ‘evidence-informed’ style of decision-making
- The key groups (ranks of officers, particular departments etc.) whose decision-making style is being targeted

- The mix of strategies that is being deployed to achieve this change in decision-making style
- How these are linked and coordinated.

Adopting EBP is tightly intertwined with ambitions to professionalise policing: a central criterion for regarding an occupation as a profession is that best practice is defined by a body of well-established knowledge. There is a strong case to be made for policing reform that shifts policy and practice toward the professional end of the spectrum. However, as the policing environment becomes more complex and less predictable, we can see good arguments in favour of some form of professional accountability over traditional ‘command and control’ management. In our view, this form of accountability might involve providing front-line staff with more autonomy, on the one hand, and on the other, giving them the knowledge tools needed to exercise this autonomy effectively.

The previous paragraph has briefly illustrated what a rationale for professionalisation might look like. This may not be the best or only way of setting out the aims of professionalisation, but it would be helpful for the service to have *some* clear articulation of what professionalisation involves, and why it is important for the future of policing. We appreciate, however, that setting out clear and precise aims is not always the best way of building a consensus for change. However, the value of making such a statement has to be judged against the context of a lack of understanding about what professionalisation and evidence-informed decision-making actually involve, and the scepticism that many police officers feel about what they regard as a fad of evidence-informed decision-making.

A theory of change would also need to identify the target groups for change, and what sort of change is needed for each target group. Target groups will depend on the model of professionalisation that is being proposed, but if the aim is to provide front-line staff with more professional autonomy it is clear that they must form an essential target group.

There is increasing evidence about the best mix of strategies to achieve a shift in the direction of evidence-informed decision-making. At the start of their lives, What Works centres have tended to focus effort on *'push strategies'* that makes evidence available to decision-makers. We would argue that the College's push strategies are taking shape well, with the Crime Reduction Toolkit at their heart. However, there is still room for creating a more balanced economy of push and pull strategies. In examining the scope for broadening the range of strategies for stimulating evidence use, we have used as our starting point some of the categories of *evidence-use mechanisms* defined by the Alliance for Useful Evidence (2016), in so doing we can highlight where headway is being made and where adjustments or further work are vital.

### *1. Building awareness, understanding and support towards using evidence*

We found limited engagement with the What Works Centre, or more specifically with the Crime Reduction Toolkit, at the time of our interviews, including amongst those who are intended to help 'push' or embed the evidence agenda such as the Evidence Champions or HPDS officers. Reasons offered included doubts about the relevance of the toolkit to most police decisions. In time, there is clearly a need to broaden the scope of the toolkit beyond crime reduction, and to find a means of including non-experimental research, especially in areas of emerging interest for the police, such as cybercrime. If academics and researchers actively seek to meet the needs of policing, it is likely that the curiosity of officers regarding

how research is generated will be stimulated. In essence there needs to be a move towards *'focusing on what people care about'* if we want to improve the chances of officers seeking out evidence when attempting to problem solve or look for new ways to tackle old problems.

Care still needs to be taken with the format and content of the material that is 'pushed out'. In particular it would be worth considering finding an alternative to the label of 'evidence based decision-making', which many perceive as giving insufficient recognition to the role of professional judgement. In our view, the approach taken by the Alliance for Useful Evidence, which talks about 'evidence-informed decision-making, is preferable.

## *2. Building agreement on the relevant questions to seek answers to*

We have noted the limitations of the current evidence base and how this will likely impede any large-scale conversion of police officers to the utility of using evidence to inform practice. However, at a force level and through the work of the Evidence Champions there is scope to initiate a conversation about the kinds of research questions that the police service need answered and how to support officers who are undertaking academic study to better match dissertation or doctorate research to knowledge gaps.

The co-production of research and building sustainable partnerships between police forces and academic institutions in England and Wales is the aim of the Knowledge Fund and the process and outcomes of those various collaborations will be hugely important in cementing future relationships and matching research to knowledge needs.



### *3. Access and communication - providing communication of, and access to, evidence*

A great deal of work and thought has gone into the ‘packaging’ of evidence for crime reduction practitioners. The Toolkit and the EMMIE system were designed in response to common practitioner criticisms about the unnecessary complexity or long windedness of academic research and the failure of academics to translate findings usefully for a practice audience. One area of difficulty has been communicating the uncertainty of the research evidence on crime reduction interventions – rarely does it provide unequivocal answers to the ‘what works’ question and thus Toolkit users need to think about how interventions would be applied in their local context. Building capacity to critically appraise research findings in this way is another important task for the College of Policing and the What Works Centre (discussed below).

### *4. Promote interaction between decision-makers and researchers*

The Police Knowledge Fund – coordinated by the College of Policing - is a key mechanism for bringing together police and academic researchers. Cultivating academic partnerships was also a common activity reported by the Evidence Champions we interviewed and was being prioritised by many forces.

The network of Evidence and Frontline Champions is another structure through which researchers and decision-makers are intended to interact and there is considerable scope to develop the current network initiated by the College. Such roles naturally attract the research enthusiasts within forces – we have shown the range of activities they have been involved in - and with some clarity of purpose and a more defined place within force strategic organisation, one can envisage how their positive attitude towards research could be ‘infectious’

### *5. Support skill development*

Most of those we interviewed for our evaluation were educated to degree level (Hunter *et al.*, 2015; 2016) – and often this had been done as part of career development with some proportion of fees funded by the police, although it was noted that there is much less resource for this now. There is a strategy in place for enhancing skills in appraising and making use of the research evidence, this includes specific activities run by the College of Policing and academics to increase engagement with the evidence such as Evidence Base Camp or Toolkit training but there are also wider curriculum changes to embed an understanding of research into basic recruitment training for police constables and in the National Policing Curriculum. Again consistency in content and aims and some clear framework for continuous development of skills in this area will be important across these various curriculum and training initiatives.

### *6. Promote a culture of experimentation among senior police managers*

The police service is accustomed to facing challenges, indeed it has always moved with the times to keep abreast of ‘new’ and evolving criminal behaviours and legislation. However, whilst many senior officers actively promote experimentation and innovation, it is perhaps the exception rather than the norm in some force areas. Encouraging and nurturing a culture of experimentation has the potential to become a significant ‘pull’ factor to embedding EBP principles, as inventive and creative ideas need to be informed and supported by both policing colleagues and the available evidence. A healthy police force is one where innovation is encouraged, nurtured and supported. Organisational change in any large institution, however, can take time, and is likely to require architects and champions, there is

no doubt in our minds that these architects and champions already exist across the forces and ranks in policing.

By way of conclusion we should stress a theme that some interviewees developed. Retreating from the project of developing a professional evidence base for policing would have very heavy costs for the College of Policing, and for the police service more generally. Because this project is so tightly entwined with the broader professionalisation agenda, a retreat from EBP principles could destabilise the latter. This would be a seriously retrograde step for UK policing.

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<sup>1</sup> National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), Sutton Trust/Educational Endowment Foundation, College of Policing What Works Centre for Crime Reduction, Early Intervention Foundation, What Works for Local Economic Growth, the Centre for Ageing Better, and the What Works Centre for Wellbeing.

<sup>2</sup> Taken from the College of Policing ‘Our Functions’”

[file:///C:/Users/tiggey%20may/Downloads/CoP\\_Guide\\_2016%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/tiggey%20may/Downloads/CoP_Guide_2016%20(1).pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Evidence informed and evidence based policing are often used interchangeably, even though there are subtle but important differences between the two terms. Ostensibly, however, they refer to imbuing evidence into the world of police practice.

<sup>4</sup> HPDS officers are those who have demonstrated that they have the potential to be future leaders. Both groups of officers are well-placed within their organisations to promote and disseminate knowledge.

<sup>5</sup> [http://whatworks.college.police.uk/About/Documents/ICPREvaluationWHAT\\_WORKS\\_CENTRE.pdf](http://whatworks.college.police.uk/About/Documents/ICPREvaluationWHAT_WORKS_CENTRE.pdf)

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<sup>6</sup> This particular initiative was jointly resourced in 2015 by the Home Office and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Fifteen bids were funded involving 39 (of the 43) forces, 30 universities, the British Transport Police, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the National Crime Agency. All the successful bids are partnerships involving police forces and universities, some are in the process of developing regional evidence-based hubs, whilst others are collaborating on research in areas such as cybercrime and mental health issues

<sup>7</sup> Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) replaced Police Authorities in 2012, every force area is represented by a PCC, except Greater Manchester and London, where PCC responsibilities lie with the Mayor. The role of the PCCs is to be the voice of the people and hold the police to account, they are responsible for the totality of policing. The aim of PCCs is to cut crime and deliver an effective and efficient police service within their force area. PCCs have been elected by the public to hold Chief Constables and the force to account, effectively making the police answerable to the communities they serve.

<sup>8</sup> “PCSO’s are uniformed staff whose role is to support the work of police officers within the community. Their role is to assist the police in certain areas, acting as the eyes and ears on the streets. PCSO’s particularly work to reassure the public and to tackle the social menace of anti-social behaviour”. <https://www.cambs.police.uk/recruitment/pcso/role.asp>

<sup>9</sup> “The Police Knowledge Fund provides opportunities for officers and staff to get involved in innovative approaches to policing and crime reduction. The fund is a joint initiative between the College of Policing and HEFCE. It is resourced by the Home Office and HEFCE, who are also administering the fund”. <http://www.college.police.uk/News/College-news/Pages/Police-Knowledge-Fund.aspx>

<sup>10</sup> Whilst there was a perceived lack of consultation, the College of Policing did conduct an extensive consultation process with a range of stakeholders, which included the police.

<sup>11</sup> The Home Office Innovation fund is available to all police forces in England and Wales. Applicants are encouraged to submit projects aimed at transforming policing through innovation and collaboration.