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# **The N8 Policing Research Partnership: Examining the first four years**

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**May 2020**

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# Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to the police officers and staff, the academics and the national policy and evidence-based policing experts who gave up their time to be interviewed or completed the online survey for this report. We would also like to thank Professor Adam Crawford and Steph Abraham from Leeds Social Sciences Institute, Centre for Criminal Justice Studies, School of Law, University of Leeds and Professor Charlie Lloyd and Dr Geoff Page from the Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of York for their invaluable help and support during the lifetime of this project.

# Summary: The N8 Policing Research Partnership: Examining the First Four Years

This report presents findings from 20 qualitative interviews with senior police officers, Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and national policy leads, all of whom were knowledgeable about the N8 PRP and evidence-based policing (EBP) and from a survey of staff in the N8 Policing Research Partnership (PRP) police forces. The qualitative interviews aimed to evaluate the benefits and challenges of the first four years of the N8 PRP from the perspective of regional and national policing experts. The survey was designed to assess uses made of N8 products and to see how the N8 PRP was seen by police officers and other staff.

## Key points

- Interviewees thought that moving to EBP would involve significant cultural change, and that it would be wrong to expect any meaningful short-term changes in police use of research evidence
- Establishing the organisational infrastructure for the N8 PRP was seen as a significant achievement
- Interviewees thought that there needed to be more organisational support for embedding EBP
- Interviewees thought that more needs to be done to ensure that research gets used and its recommendations are properly implemented.
- Awareness of the partnership is high amongst senior staff, and lower amongst operational officers
- Those who had used N8 PRP 'products', such as research reports, conferences and courses, valued them
- Overall, attitudes towards EBP were very positive amongst senior staff, and positive amongst operational officers

## Background

The N8 PRP secured funding for a 5-year programme of research and knowledge exchange through a Catalyst Grant from HEFCE. The N8 PRP is a collaboration between eleven police force areas, eight universities and one third-sector partner. The partnership has funded research grants and PhDs, organised conferences, supported a staff exchange programme, designed courses for police analysts and commissioned or otherwise stimulated various other activities. In 2015, the N8 PRP was one of several national and regional initiatives to encourage the police to adopt 'evidence-based policing' (EBP).

## Methods

The project mapped the 'products' of the N8 PRP, conducted 20 depth interviews and carried out an on-line survey of staff knowledge of the partnership, their use of its products and, more generally, their attitudes to 'evidence-based policing'. The survey and interviews were carried out between May and August 2019. Police officers and other staff were encouraged to participate, but take-up was disappointing, and only 151 respondents completed the survey<sup>1</sup>. All qualitative interviews were

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<sup>1</sup> The sample is unrepresentative of staff in N8 forces, being skewed heavily to senior officers and to force analysts. Nevertheless, it gives an indication of how the N8 partnership is used and assessed. In summarising the survey, we have aimed to keep the level of detail of findings proportionate to the size and reliability of the sample.

recorded and transcribed and analysed thematically. Interviewees were interviewed under conditions of confidentiality and anonymity.

### **An examination of the first four years of the N8 PRP**

The N8 PRP is one of the larger and better developed of partnerships between the police and universities. The common thread in such partnerships is the ambition of providing policing with the best available research evidence to help inform police practice and decision-making. A key aim of the N8 PRP was:

*... to enhance the impact of higher education research in the policing sector through the development and testing of mechanisms of knowledge exchange to strengthen the evidence base on which police policy, practice and training are developed and so support innovation and the professionalisation of the police [N8 PRP Project Overview]*

### **Awareness and impact of the N8 PRP**

The survey suggested that awareness of the N8 PRP is low amongst junior ranks, with 35% being aware of it. Several interviewees thought that it was “just too early” to measure the impact of the programme. Both findings are consistent with our earlier research evaluating the College of Policing’s “What Works” programme (Hunter, May and Hough, 2017, 2019). Whilst making research evidence available to the police is straightforward, embedding its use within the fabric of police decision-making is a more ambitious and long-term agenda. Those interviewed in depth described the idea of embedding evidence within policing as a generational project. As one interviewee stated:

*No amount of anything is going to change police culture in the three years that N8 has been operating. It would be unrealistic to expect, even with an investment of £7m or even £27m, a change in police culture. It is going to take a long time. [Interviewee 06]*

In its first four years the N8 PRP has funded a range of products, details of which are in an evaluation by the University of York (Page and Lloyd 2018). The current study found that those who had read N8 PRP research reports or attended conferences and courses were generally positive about their value.

A consistent theme in the in-depth interviews was that the initial funding period needed to be about laying the structural foundations through the N8 PRP Steering Group and forming local partnerships through research and training activities. Most interviewees agreed that to ensure sustainability a coherent and workable regional structure needed to be in place to enable co-production and use of evidence by police and academics:

*The N8 is an example of genuine co-production between the police and academics, it's far too soon to talk about realising benefits... N8 is probably the best example of a major funding programme to particularly facilitate the relationship between academics and the police... I think the police attitude to research has changed dramatically... I think the approach N8 takes and the funding for the small projects and what they've managed to produce has been absolutely excellent. [Interviewee 06]*

The Steering Group was welcomed, though interviewees described some teething problems, including a disconnect between the expectations of the police and academics and the inevitable cultural differences between the two occupations. One difficulty mentioned by several interviewees was that the Steering Group was initially chaired by an academic; they saw this as disrupting what was intended to be an even balance of power between the two organisations. This was rectified by appointing joint chairs, a move that symbolised the reality of a partnership of equals.

Interviewees highlighted the difficulties of embedding evidence into the fabric of the police service and the organisational culture of all ranks of police officers and staff. Acceptance of EBP will remain fragile so long as it is promoted and spearheaded by individual evidence enthusiasts. The survey did find generally positive attitudes toward the principles of EBP. Thus 57% said that research evidence had affected their working practices. Almost all senior officers and civilian staff agreed that collaboration between police and academics was vital to enhance greater use of research evidence, and 70% of officers below the rank of chief inspector thought this. However, they were more pessimistic about levels of organisational support for EBP: almost two-thirds of respondents believed there were no organisational emphasis on the use of research in decision-making, and 57% thought there was a general lack of understanding in their organisation about the relevance of research evidence to everyday policing. The overall sense from the survey was that evidence enthusiasts are champing at the bit to move their force onward towards EBP but felt that organisationally there is still a long way to go. This pattern was consistent across ranks.

### **The benefits of N8 PRP engagement**

The in-depth interviews identified the perceived benefits of the N8 PRP, which included the advantages of working in partnership, the small grant projects, being part of the decision making process regarding funding allocation, PhD and career development opportunities, establishing relationships beyond the work of the N8 PRP, being part of innovative research projects and attending forums. Some were very positive indeed, referring to the ways in which collaboration provided practical benefits as well as opportunities for staff development:

### **The future**

The in-depth interviews asked about the future of the N8 PRP. A significant theme to emerge was the need to plan and resource the implementation of research recommendations. A number of interviewees suggested that police and academics need to work better together to implement research recommendations. For example:

*I think the police have certain strengths and the academics have certain strengths. The police are great at implementing things, they have the data, they are gung-ho on doing stuff. The academics are good at analysing data, which isn't a police strength. They are good at evaluating things, which the police can't be bothered to do. I call it a marriage made in heaven because of their complementary skill sets. The police have these problems of crime, disorder, police community relations and so on. They haven't got the time to read all the academic literature. You know, the notion of evidence-based policing implies that the police are going to go delving into research reports. That's never going to happen. They haven't got the time or the interest or anything else. But the academics, that's their job. But it does mean it's a partnership and there is no hierarchical relationship between the two. It should be, in my opinion, a genuine partnership. [Interviewee 14]*

*I saw a lot of output [from the N8 PRP], but I didn't see a lot of implementation... I didn't see, this is an initiative, the collaboration found this, and it's been implemented across these number of police forces with this level of impact. I never saw that. I saw a lot of good things, I listened to a lot of good discussions, a lot of interesting discussions, but I never saw the impact [Interviewee 05].*

In the in-depth interviews, there was unanimity that the N8 PRP should continue to promote, enable, and provide a regional structure for the co-production of police academic knowledge. All agreed that sustaining and supporting the N8 PRP was important for both the region's police forces and academics. However, most said that the continuation of the N8 PRP will require several things to happen: the necessary funding being available: EBP being fully embedded into the organisational fabric of forces; and senior police officers and PCCs being able to see an organisational benefit to being part of the partnership. For example:

*I think the sustainability of N8 will hinge on funding... You can have great relationships here, there and everywhere, but academics need funding, and the police at the moment would say they haven't got any. That's a real problem. I mean you can try and make use of free labour, with Master's students and PhDs even, but that's not what the police need. The police need proper experienced researchers working with them. It's not easy to see how that can happen without the funding...The police need to have clear evidence that it's worth their while investing in these relationships. [Interviewee 06]*

*Evidence based policing needs to become a part of the overall cardiovascular system of policing, don't strip it out. [Interviewee 13]*

*To combine the knowledge of the police with the intellectual academic firepower that N8 has available to it would be formidable [Interviewee 04]*

## **In conclusion**

Interviewees were unequivocal in their support for the continuation of the N8 PRP, all were largely impressed with the distance travelled by the partnership in its first four years. Many interviewees discussed the teething problems the partnership had experienced, as well as the accomplishments. Moving forward interviewees want the partnership to evolve, from one that produces research to one that commits to assisting the police to embed evidence and implement recommendations. There was a general consensus that the police need to start seeing the tangible benefits from their partnerships with academics.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2015, the N8 Policing Research Partnership (N8 PRP) secured funding for a five-year programme of activities, research and knowledge exchange work through a Catalyst Grant from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The N8 PRP comprises eleven police force areas<sup>2</sup>, eight universities<sup>3</sup> and one third-sector partner<sup>4</sup>. The overall aim of the partnership has been to enable and promote research partnerships and embed evidence between and across the participating universities and police force areas. In adopting such an approach the partnership has focused on tackling 21<sup>st</sup> century policing problems through an evidence-based lens, promoting high quality independent research, sharing data, enhancing research capacity and capability and developing a model for sustainable collaboration and on-going development. The partnership has nine distinct strands:

- Research Co-production (Small grants and PhD studentships)
- Evaluation and monitoring
- Staff and knowledge exchange
- Data analytics
- Training and learning
- Policing innovation forum
- Public engagement
- International programme
- Governance and management

The partnership has awarded 15 small grants and published six reports from these grants<sup>5</sup>, has run two data analytic courses, held an annual innovation forum (four to date), organised nine public engagement events and funded nine PhD studentships. A comprehensive list of the N8 PRP activities can be found at <https://n8prp.org.uk/>

As part of the N8 PRP, York University, the evaluators of the overall programme, commissioned ICPR to undertake a six month evaluation focusing on police officer/staff use of research, their views of the value and

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<sup>2</sup> The 11 forces are: Cheshire Constabulary, Cumbria Constabulary, Durham Constabulary, Greater Manchester Police, Humberside Police, Merseyside, Northumbria, Lancashire Constabulary, North Yorkshire Police, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire Police

<sup>3</sup> The eight universities are: Durham University, Lancaster university, University of Leeds, Liverpool University, Manchester University, Newcastle University, University of Sheffield and University of York

<sup>4</sup> Your Homes Newcastle is the third sector partner within the N8 PRP partnership.

<sup>5</sup> The small grant reports have covered areas such as the police response to coercive control, policing Bitcoin, exploring novel psychoactive substance use, policing cannabis, and innovation in policing domestic abuse.

usefulness of research evidence, the reach and impact of the partnership, and the challenges it faces. The evaluation covered the partnership's first four years.

### **Aims of the evaluation**

Our six month evaluation was conducted alongside the N8 internal evaluation but independent of it. Its aims were to:

- Examine the effectiveness of the N8 PRP model for delivering and embedding evidence within the 11 N8 police forces;
- Examine the perceived impact of involvement in an N8 PRP research partnership
- Examine the challenges experienced during the first four years
- Conduct an on-line survey to examine the use of N8 research products by operational police officers, crime analysts, senior police officers and Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs);
- Examine interviewees' thoughts on what the future direction and priorities for the N8 PRP should be.

In Chapter 2 we examine the first four years of the N8 PRP. In particular we have mapped the seven PRP strands, the aims of each strand and the products to date, including highlighting selected published work by the N8 PRP partners, conferences, workshops, courses and forums. We then present findings from our 20 qualitative interviews, focusing on interviewees' thoughts about the effectiveness of N8 PRP model for commissioning and delivering research, the use and perceived impact of research by N8 police partners and the challenges experienced as reported by our small sample of interviewees. In Chapter 3 we present findings from an on-line quantitative survey

## **Methods**

This evaluation mapped the 'products' of the N8 PRP, mounted in-depth interviews with 20 respondents<sup>6</sup> who were knowledgeable about the N8 PRP or evidence-based policing at both at a local and national level and carried out an on-line police officer/staff survey. This aimed to garner an understanding of respondents' knowledge of the partnership, their use of its products and more generally, their attitudes to 'evidence based policing'

### **Mapping the N8 PRP Strands**

To map the products of the N8 PRP we documented what work had been undertaken over the first four years to gain a clearer understanding of each strand and the different collaborative formations. This enabled us to generate

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<sup>6</sup> Of the 20 respondents, six were from within the partnership and 14 were non-partnership, wider national figures.

a framework of academic partners, police constabularies, activity strands and products. To understand some of the key areas of success and the main challenges we read a selection of outputs, including evidence reviews and findings papers from the small grants work, looked at available conference presentations and examined the significant activities from the seven strands. Finally we read the three N8 PRP *Annual Reports* (2015 - 2018), and Page and Lloyd's (2018) *Evaluation & Monitoring Interim Report*.

### **Qualitative interviews**

We conducted 20 depth interviews with senior police officers, police research 'guardians', Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), academics and key professionals working in this area. Given the nature of the research and the seniority of those we wished to approach, we sought support from the senior management of the N8 PRP asking them to raise awareness about the research amongst our target group. In total we interviewed:

- Six senior police officers and Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), selected from the 11 N8 PRP force areas
- Eight academics with experience of working in a collaborative research partnership funded by an N8 PRP grant or other police academic partnership; and
- Six national academics and policy stakeholders.

Interviewees were asked for their views on the progress of the police service at embedding evidence within policing policy and practice, the strengths and weaknesses of the N8 PRP model, the challenges and perceived impact of the N8 PRP, and their views on the possible future direction of the N8 PRP.

Interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. A coding framework was developed through research team discussions of themes identified through the initial manual coding. The framework was then added to and refined during the formal coding process<sup>7</sup>.

### **The survey**

The survey was conducted on-line, using a questionnaire developed in consultation with the N8 PRP and York University. Police officers and civilian staff were encouraged to participate, but as will be discussed later in this report, take-up was disappointing, and only 151 respondents completed the survey. Despite problems of representativeness, the survey gives an indication of how the N8 partnership is used and assessed, and some

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<sup>7</sup> Interviewees were interviewed under conditions of anonymity and confidentiality. Interviews were all conducted between May and September 2019.

useful comparisons can be made between these survey findings and those from a similar one in 2016 covering staff in N8 forces and in other police force areas. The survey was analysed in SPSS.

### **Limitations**

We cannot make any claims about the representativeness of our interview or survey samples. Those who had higher levels of awareness and use of research may have been more inclined to take part in an interview or answer the survey about N8 research products. We contacted a total of 35 potential qualitative interviewees of which 20 responded positively and agreed to be interviewed. A link to the survey was sent to research guardians in all of the 11 forces to forward to force colleagues. We also sent a tweet to all the forces and contacted Federation representatives from each of the force areas asking if they would circulate the link. In addition the survey link was posted on the home page of the N8 PRP and regular emails were sent to all 11 forces from the senior management at N8 encouraging officers to participate.

### **Report structure**

In Chapter 2 we map the research products commissioned and published by the N8 PRP and the conferences, workshops, courses and forums which took place in the Partnership's first four years. In Chapter 3 we present findings from our 20 qualitative interviews, focusing on interviewees' thoughts about the effectiveness of N8 PRP model for commissioning and delivering research, the use of research products by N8 police partners and the perceived impact of the partnership's work and the challenges, as perceived by our interviewees, of the first four years of the N8's work. In Chapter 4 we present findings from the survey, which provides an indication of how the N8 partnership is used and assessed by both operational and senior management, data analysts and PCCs. In Chapter 5 we summarise our findings and examine the implications for the future work of the N8 PRP.

## **Chapter 2: Mapping the N8 Policing Research Partnership Strands**

This chapter presents an overview of seven of the nine strands of the N8 PRP. It summarises what has been done, where available we document the views of interviewees about the strengths and challenges of the strands, in doing so we have also drawn on the 2018 evaluation report by Page and Lloyd.

### **Mapping N8 Activities and Products**

The N8 Policing Research Partnership (N8 PRP) was set up to facilitate research and knowledge exchange, with the aim of helping drive change in regional policing priorities and providing police partners with a robust evidence base to assist with strategic and operational decision making. Since it began, the partnership has funded, organised and delivered a number of initiatives with all of the strands except 'Governance and Management' and 'Evaluation and Monitoring' involved in collaboration between academics, police officers and staff. The N8 PRP aimed to provide regional partners with a framework and the funding to create partnerships which would eventually become self-sustaining and provide local collaborations with the potential to influence change in police practice (Page and Lloyd 2018). Below we briefly outline the aims and outputs of each of the collaborative strands.

### **Policing Innovation Forum**

The aim of the Policing Innovation Forum (PIF) is to bring together researchers and practitioners to explore where the knowledge gaps are in policing and where the challenges lie. It provides participants with a forum to exchange ideas and knowledge and drive innovation forward through research and other collaborative work. The PIF is an annual event that focuses on a specific area of policing with both academic and police speakers. In addition, the PIF also acts as a catalyst for the Small Grants (Research Co- production) Strand of the N8 PRP, with the annual theme of the PIF tending to influence the grants issued that year. One of the objectives of the small grants scheme is to encourage and develop new police and academic research collaborations. In 2016, over 50% of the small grant applications were related to outcomes from the Policing Innovation Forum, illustrating one of the many ways in which co-production can occur outside of the formal research route. The PIF was widely acknowledged by interviewees as an excellent opportunity for sharing knowledge and networking and many identified the strand as one of the visible successes of the N8 PRP, a finding also highlighted by Page and Lloyd (2018).

### **Research Co-production (Small Grants)**

The N8 PRP Research Co-Production (Small Grants) Strand allocates funding to facilitate and support research co-production projects and PhD studentships. The findings of the funded research are intended to assist and

support police decision-making across the N8 region and beyond. The projects are structured so that police practitioners work closely with researchers to create cross-institutional and force collaborations. The aim of each grant is to address specific policing challenges and to develop knowledge to deliver outcomes which impact the work of frontline officers and benefit the public. One example of N8 PRP awards was a grant awarded to Greater Manchester Police, the North West Regional Organised Crime Unit, the Universities of Leeds and Liverpool and Birmingham City University, and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). The project, *Policing bitcoin: investigating, evidencing and prosecuting crimes involving cryptocurrency*, aimed to help the police improve their response to economic criminality involving cryptocurrency and the ongoing threats arising from digital currencies. The findings increased cryptocurrency knowledge of all the partners and led to further research being developed examining terrorist use of cryptocurrencies (c.f. Page and Lloyd, 2018). The collaboration brought together experts from a range of academic fields and highlighted the investigative and prosecutorial challenges when cryptocurrency is used for criminal purposes. The project influenced both local and national practice. Another example of a collaborative research project involved Merseyside Police, Lancaster University, the University of Liverpool, the University of Central Lancashire and Women's Aid, entitled *Police Officer Responses to Coercive Control*. It aimed to provide the police with insights into how legislation is applied to the policing of coercive control across England and Wales. Its findings enabled the project team to develop a 'Coercive Control Learning Tool', for use by police forces as a training aid. It is currently being piloted by Merseyside Police with a view to making it available to other interested forces (Page and Lloyd 2018).

In addition to the small grants, the N8 PRP has supported nine collaborative PhD studentships. Each of the N8 PRP universities has registered one postgraduate researcher (PGR), funded for three years, benefiting from advanced training and development provided by university Doctoral Training Centres (DTCs). The DTCs give students the opportunity to apply their knowledge and findings within a practical setting with the aim that the research they produce will have a direct impact on partner police forces.

The small grants strand has been recognised as one of the N8 PRP successes. Consistent with findings by Page and Lloyd (2018), many of our interviewees thought the small grant awards were an example of what could be achieved when police and academics work together. For example:

*I think the small grants scheme was one of their biggest successes in relation to [research co-production]... I think it really helped to generate a sort of capability and understanding for police partners. It helped the academics to understand the problems that the police face when conducting research, and I think it often leads to future large-scale funding. [Interviewee 08]*

*I think the small grants programme is a real, real benefit... I think they've done about fifteen now, which are influenced by both police and academics...I think there are some really, really valuable examples, as*

*well, of true coproduction, and of that then going on to give tangible outcomes in terms of policy and practice. I know, there's one specifically I remember from the first round, which was around cryptocurrencies... and I know they've gone on now to take that, get additional funding, and influence policy around police guidance to analysts involved in cryptocurrency investigations [Interviewee 13]*

In addition, a small number of academics interviewed by Page and Lloyd stated that they had returned to policing research because of their involvement with the N8 PRP (Page and Lloyd 2018).

### **Staff and Knowledge Exchange**

The Staff and Knowledge Exchange strand aims to foster a greater understanding and trust between police and academic partners and help to better prioritise policing research. The strand focused on developing the research skills of police officers and staff, by improving their knowledge of particular areas of policing and facilitating their access to supervised research programmes. The collaborations included a staff exchange partnership between Durham Constabulary and Sheffield University, *The Feasibility of Undertaking Restorative Approaches with Serious and Organised Crime Offending* and one involving Durham University and Durham Constabulary, *Policing Ethics*. The latter focused on creating and implementing an Ethics Committee at Durham Constabulary. In the same year, a PhD Internship, *From 'Report to Court': A Comparative, qualitative study of police domestic abuse recording practices and responses*, involved a collaboration between Durham University and Cumbria Constabulary with additional involvement from Greater Manchester and Northumbria Police.

In addition to the collaborative work the strand also hosts an annual N8 PRP Knowledge Exchange Conference. The event aims to inform both academics and police officers/staff about specific areas of policing. Areas covered thus far have included *Workforce of the Future in Policing* and *Policing Domestic Abuse as part of a Coordinated Community Response*.

Building on existing relationships and establishing new ones were viewed by interviewees as one of the strengths of the N8 PRP model. Through conferences, events and the expert register, police partners are able to gain access to experts from a variety of academic fields across the policing spectrum. Attendance at N8 PRP events and conferences was viewed as being a key factor in forming police/academic relationships and were widely considered ideal opportunities for networking and sharing best practice. Academics interviewed by Page and Lloyd (2018) found that the N8 PRP provided a channel for easy communication with police contacts. For a couple of police partners, N8 PRP events had led to a fruitful training partnership.

## **Public Engagement**

The Public Engagement strand aims to establish and support a sustainable police-community engagement network and online platform for police forces and researchers in the North of England to share resources and knowledge related to community engagement. In particular, understanding the importance of the public to policing and the recognition of good practice in police-community relations. Work in progress includes the development of a remote panel to examine the public's perception of policing issues and decisions making processes.

Between 2016 and 2019 the N8 PRP public engagement strand organised a series of police-community engagement events and seminars, all of which focused on specific community concerns, including restorative justice and police enforcement of 20mph speed limits. These events brought together speakers from N8 PRP universities and constabularies, the relevant office of the police and crime commissioner (OPCC) and related businesses and campaigners. These particular events were seen to be significant catalysts in creating and developing police/academic relationships (Page and Lloyd 2018).

## **Data Analytics**

The Data Analytics (DA) strand was created to provide resources and specialist training to police data analysts, to improve their capacity to support strategic and operational decision making. It aimed to improve data sharing processes and the flow of data between police forces and academic researchers, minimising risks and saving time and money. Unlike the other strands, the data analytics strand has widened its reach to include any university in the north of England that collaborates with an N8 police force or constabulary.

Part of the data analytics strand is an eight-module Continuous Professional Development programme (CPD), developed specifically for police data analysts. The aim of the module is to improve the digital transformation of policing by providing police staff with data science training. In 2018, a group of 33 data specialists began the CPD Programme, with an extra ten attending at least one module. The feedback from participants across the 11 constabularies was described by Page and Lloyd (2018) as 'excellent'.

Another element of the strand is the Data Analytics Digital Service (N8 DADS), an online platform which provides tools and resources and encourages data sharing between police and academic staff. This cloud-based portal creates a collaborative workspace for police and academics to share expertise, opportunities and develop new projects. In association with both the College of Policing and the East Midlands Policing Academic Collaboration (EMPAC), the DA strand has produced a data tool for forces and universities to use.

The DA strand has also developed collaborative funding proposals, one of which was a project focusing on understanding the use of data analytics within N8 PRP constabularies, improving practice and understanding the challenges to then implement new methods to overcome any arising difficulties. Of all the strands, our interviewees highlighted the DADs service as one of the areas which struggled to achieve what it set out to do, as illustrated below:

*My feeling was that most of the strands were going quite well, except for the one on data analytics, and that was because it took them forever to get some sort of systematic arrangement in place for getting police data. That's not a criticism of N8. It is the devil's own job to get the police to give you data unless it's about a very specific project where you can quote chapter and verse on why you want it. My view is that academics need data to play with and explore and think about... It's about control. The police don't like the idea, and for fairly good reasons, of giving away data without knowing what is going to happen to it. [Interviewee 06]*

*That was my experience [not being able to put training into practice because of the lack of technology]. You know, I was somebody who did that [data analytics] for a living... The Police Service was so poor in terms of their analytic technical backup. So the analytic capabilities, and particularly the use of software, is so limited inside policing that they're still using a hotspot mapping thing when you could be doing something far more creatively. [Interviewee 14]*

## **The International Programme**

The International Programme strand was designed to examine international developments in police-academic partnerships and research co-production outside of the UK, to better inform similar partnerships in the UK. A number of international partners including organisations from the Netherlands, Sweden, Australia, USA and Singapore collaborated with the University of Sheffield to produce an international report.

In 2017 the programme involved drawing together a special issue of the European Journal of Policing Studies, entitled '*Police-Academic partnerships: Working with the police in policing*', with contributions from various European academics. An international conference on '*Working with the Police on Policing*' in Sheffield in October 2016 gathered speakers from the UK, USA, Belgium, France, Canada and Australia. The strand leads also took part in a round table discussion on '*Mobilising Research Evidence and Knowledge in Policing: Comparative Experiences*' at the American Society of Criminology (ASC) Conference (November 2016) and organised international research trips in 2018 to the Oregon Centre for Policing Excellence and to the Norwegian Police University College (NPUC).

## **Training and Learning**

The Training and Learning strand aims to develop research training and provide opportunities for knowledge exchange between police officers and partner organisations. A series of training workshops and events have been developed to address various issues in policing including: data analysis, vulnerabilities of victims and offenders, policing traffic, evidence based policing, mental health, and psychoactive substances and drug markets. These workshops have been successful in providing attendees with the valuable skills and knowledge needed for effective decision making through the use of data.

Together, the Training and Learning and Data Analytics strands created the CPD course mentioned above for policing information and data specialists from each of the 11 forces in the N8, which was delivered as a series of one and two-day workshops between January and August 2018. The workshops have also provided a forum for analysts to discover different means of collaborating, including data and analysis sharing and learning.

## Chapter 3: Assessing the N8 Policing Research Partnership: A Qualitative Approach

This chapter summarises interviewees' views on the organisational structure for delivering the N8 PRP model, the perceived impact of the partnership's work over the last four years, the challenges experienced and interviewees thoughts about possible future directions for the N8 PRP.

### The N8 Policing Research Partnership Model

Traditionally, new recruits have learnt 'to police' through a mix of classroom teaching and practice-based approaches (Lumsden, K., & Goode, J; 2016). Officers learnt the foundations of the law through a formal classroom-based approach and the application of the law through 'on the job' training. Learning the craft of policing tended to be guided by new recruits' mentors and their more experienced officer colleagues. More recently, however, the College of Policing has sought to embed evidence within policing and to move from a craft-based profession to an evidence based, craft informed profession.

Whilst it is widely recognised that many officers welcome academics and researchers as partners and value the input of those from outside the profession, there are still some within and outside of the police organisation that remain staunchly against academic input and are fiercely anti-academic, as illustrated by two recent tweets from police officers:

*More degrees than a thermometer but no common sense...Academics have destroyed policing [Twitter user RB]*

*Policing requires common sense not academics [Twitter user W77]*

One senior national figure, however, highlighted the push and pull of 'evidence' for the police service:

*Ironically or paradoxically, the service is very familiar with dealing with evidence, in building cases against criminals and prosecution cases. It's less comfortable and has had to really develop its understanding of how to develop an evidence base in relation to what works, or, culturally, that's been challenging and remains challenging. [Interviewee 15]*

Embedding research evidence within a hierarchical organisational framework, with multiple complex structures and a diverse workforce needs an innovative multi-faceted approach. Such an approach must be able to adapt its message dependent on position, rank, specialist area, civilian or uniformed. Making evidence relatable to both operational officers and senior management is challenging, implementing the findings of research into policy and

practice and understanding the best way to do this is both highly demanding and time-consuming, as highlighted by the interviewee below:

*For me, one of the things that I've learned, is that it takes patience to try to get something to work differently, an extraordinary amount of patience, particularly if you're trying to apply research to how you do it differently, how you think about it differently, how does this link to performance? It takes a lot of time to do this stuff, a lot more than people might have in terms of time. So people need to find a way of just stopping and having a deep enough conversation to enable change to happen... It's about having the right internal conversations to find a place to get stuff done and integrated. [Interviewee 14]*

Across the police service and academia there are a number of partnerships, some of which are local *ad hoc* relationships and others formal regional collaborations. The aims of each partnership differs, but a common thread is to better inform police practice and decision-making by providing both senior and operational police officers and staff with the best available evidence. One of the aims of the N8 PRP was:

*... to enhance the impact of higher education research in the policing sector through the development and testing of mechanisms of knowledge exchange to strengthen the evidence base on which police policy, practice and training are developed and so support innovation and the professionalisation of the police. [N8 PRP Project Overview]*

In the first four years of the N8 PRP a number of activities were funded; the implementation, progress and feedback of which, have been evaluated and documented by York University (Page and Lloyd 2018). We interviewed academics, policy makers, senior police and PCC staff about the N8 PRP model, the strengths of the approach, the N8 outputs, research implementation and any discernible changes to policy or practice arising from N8 products and initiatives.

Many interviewees stated that it, “*is too early*” to talk about impact, implementation or policy changes. Whilst providing robust evidence to the police is a relatively easy task, actually embedding evidence within the fabric of policing and transforming the culture of police thinking is a far more ambitious agenda. Many interviewees discussed the idea of embedding evidence within policing as a generational project. For example:

*No amount of anything is going to change police culture in the three years that N8 has been operating. You know, it would be unrealistic to expect at the investment of even £7m, or even £27m, into any organisation and expect to change police culture. It is going to take a long time. [Interviewee 06]*

*[Establishing police-academic partnerships] is a continual process of negotiation, and the starting point has to be a high level of trust between the academic community and the police community. Once you've established a strong relationship of trust, then I think things can happen. This is where you have to manage people's expectations and be aware that this is a long game. It's not something that's going to happen in a year or two years or even four years. It involves a culture change by both academics and the police. [Interviewee 10]*

## **The N8 PRP Steering Group**

Guiding the N8 PRP is a Steering Group, comprising academics, police officers, policy leads and national experts. The group meets a couple of times a year to discuss progress and future planning. Whilst the format of the Steering Group experienced early teething problems, many described it as a forum in which participants shared the collaborative goal of creating space at a regional level to facilitate meaningful police-academic partnerships. Below interviewees discuss the initial problems experienced and the benefits of the N8 Steering Group.

*At the start, the police felt that they didn't have any say in the Steering Group meetings, so, they set up their own little pre-meet of all the policing partners, where they would decide what it was that they wanted to get from the partnership, and what they wanted to get from that particular meeting. They wanted to make sure they were all on board and everyone had a chance to say what they wanted because then, when they went to the Steering Group, they felt it was very dominated by the academics, and that they weren't really listening or having a discussion.... They felt it was like simply going through an agenda and ticking things off, it wasn't providing an opportunity for discussion. A frank discussion was had and the academics, led by the chair, changed their approach, so the police cancelled the police pre-meet, it then became a lot more productive as a Steering Group meeting... The management, particularly the heads of the various strands, got a lot more, I think they got over themselves and started getting down and dirty with the police. [Interviewee 08]*

*I think it [N8 PRP] is a really impressive product, what I thought it did was, it provided a very formal infrastructure which signed people up to commitment to bring different police forces and different universities together. And it was formal, so, with that came project management... I think the infrastructure that was laid was probably as impressive as I've ever seen. [Interviewee 05]*

*I think one of the very good things, in fact, N8 has done two fantastic things. Both of them, I don't think, have actually been measured and have not really impacted upon frontline policing, as such, but for me, the best two things that N8 did was, first of all, it focused senior police officers' minds on, "Actually, yes, what are our research requirements?" Which, in essence, is, "What would we like to know? What problems have we got to solve that we can't solve ourselves?" In essence, for me, they're their vulnerabilities. So how can universities help? So they're thinking about how these partners, researchers and academics can help the police in a policing language of, "Okay, what are your strategic research requirements? What do you need?" That was, for me, the first really good thing that they did. The second thing that they did which was really good was, for the first time, they pulled together the whole of the north. So I'd never been to meetings and conferences, before, where you could sit down and have a real northern flavour of some of the issues that were happening. [Interviewee 17]*

Interviewees highlighted many advantages to working with the partnership and being part of the N8 PRP. Police officers and academics valued being part of the decision-making process regarding funding allocations, being represented on the N8 Steering Group, advancing the career opportunities of junior officers and researchers and establishing relationships beyond the work of the N8 PRP. Interviewees were supportive of the aim of the N8 PRP, in particular they highlighted how the N8 PRP has moved away from simply doing research *on* the police to engaging in co-production *with* the police, as highlighted below:

*With N8 there's the joint sharing of expertise and knowledge. I think having the different perspectives, the police and the academic perspectives, has the benefit of enriching the research. It's also about being able to do applied research that's centred on policing problems and because it's N8 and you've got the eight universities and the 11 forces which means you've got the potential to develop research at scale. I think if police officers see that this works, if they can see that their neighbours are as involved in the research and that there are benefits for all of them at a regional level, I think that's a real benefit. There's also a benefit in actually being able to show the relevance of the research, and how it can actually inform practice rather than it just being a small-scale project that's being conducted in one force, that doesn't really mean anything to anybody outside of that force. I think there's also the benefit of continuous professional development, for both sides. For the police, understanding the research process and what's involved, for the academics, it's understanding the working environment the police operate in, and the problems that the police face. [Interviewee 08]*

*The N8 PRP has really helped some early career researchers to start their research trajectories in some quite significant ways...To do research which has fast-tracked them because of the opportunities that it's provided and supported; it's enabled them to do something with some quite significant impact. As individuals, they would never have been able to do what they've done, it's happened because of the collective, and because of the infrastructure. [Interviewee 18]*

### *Membership of the N8 PRP*

Whilst the N8 PRP model was praised for its collaborative approach, interviewees were critical of what they viewed as the inflexibility of the N8 structure, which allows all of the northern police forces to be members but only Russell Group universities<sup>8</sup>. For some police interviewees, being part of the N8 PRP but unable to engage with their local university was described as 'frustrating' and 'unsatisfactory', most academic interviewees tended to agree. Participants thought the partnership should widen its participation to all the research active universities in the north to ensure the regional collaboration was as inclusive and comprehensive as possible. The issue of exclusion is highlighted by the interviewee below.

*If you go to Newcastle, I would guarantee that Northumbria Police have a much more intense and close working relationship with Northumbria University than they do with Newcastle. Newcastle, because it's a Russell Group University, is on the N8 and Northumbria isn't. That doesn't seem to me to be very*

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<sup>8</sup> The N8 PRP inherited the university membership from the long-standing N8 university research collaboration, which was set-up in 2007 by the eight vice chancellors of the eight most research-intensive universities in the north. Seven of the N8 universities are in the Russell Group. The eighth university was included due to the excellence of its research.

*satisfactory, actually. There is good research going on in both universities. I think a less exclusive arrangement would benefit everyone [Interviewee 07]*

For many officers, a good relationship with an expert was more valuable than the reputation of a university:

*We don't see those borders. We just see an academic. Obviously I understand there are levels at which one university is better than another, but we don't really see that. We hear, "Oh yes, Cambridge and Oxford, they're dead good universities," but we really don't care if we're working with Cambridge or if we're working with Sunderland. We just want a good working relationship... It's getting that general point of contact in our university who can then direct us to the right person [Interviewee 03]*

### **Dissemination and implementation the N8 PRP products and initiatives**

Interviewees were encouraged by, and highly supportive of, the range of approaches taken by the partnership to disseminate research findings and implement training. Whilst the dissemination strategy was praised, interviewees were nonetheless unequivocally of the view that the dissemination strategy should move away from targeting senior and specialist officers to engaging with – harder to reach – operational officers.

*At the end of the day, research does have to be presented in a research format, and I think that N8 has got better at producing snappier short research summaries. They use different channels now, they've got their newsletter, they've got their innovation forum, and they've got other knowledge exchange mechanisms that they use, other than just publications, which I do think provides the opportunity to have research delivered in a more accessible way. But I still think that a lot more needs to be done in targeting the research message to the right groups. So, if there's a huge research project and there's only one overriding key message for one small element of policing, I think they need to be braver, and actually take that message and say, "Look. I know this research took two years but, actually this bit of research is really relevant, but it's only relevant to front line, or, it's only relevant to crime analysts or, "It's only relevant to..." I think they need to target their research a bit more, and the messages that come out to the particular groups, and I don't think they do that. [Interviewee 18]*

For many police practitioners, a recurring theme was that academic research can often be littered with jargon which then renders it difficult to understand. The suggestion was that academics and the partnership should do more in terms of designing products and writing up research findings which capture the intended audience.

*We are talking about published academic research articles. They are completely inaccessible to the academics half the time never mind the police. There is a massive problem of communication... There are real, fairly fundamental, differences and difficulties to overcome in translating research into usable evidence by the police. [Interviewee 06]*

The problem of implementing research into everyday police practice is not new. Several evaluations and studies (Knutsson and Tompson 2017; Hunter et al., 2016, 2017; Hunter and May 2019) have highlighted the issue, with

many citing how neither academia nor policing is either structurally or culturally equipped to oversee the implementation of a new policy. Interviewees highlighted that internal police structures lack the capacity to enable research to be implemented into practice. For example, officers can get training or attend academic courses but when they come back into their police force it's not seen as being part of the job either to mount or apply research. Forces also vary in terms of their infrastructure for getting evidence embedded; there is no uniformity across the 43 forces about encouraging, embedding or implementing research findings. Equally, academics are rarely given implementation grants or the access to implement change in police practice. Some interviewees suggested that moving forward the N8 PRP Steering Group should work with the police and academics to help improve the implementation process.

*Sometimes you'll get a really good senior leader who will 'get' the research and really be enthusiastic about it but won't have a bloody clue about how to apply it, even in their own force, and feel almost defeated before they start because so much is going on they don't quite know how to get people to change. But it's about having the right internal conversations to find a place to get stuff done and integrated [Interviewee 14]*

*Police forces are not set up to receive and use research. That is in no way a criticism of N8. It's a more fundamental, cultural, institutional and political problem, I guess. It rests with chief constables. The College of Policing I know wants to promote all of this, but fundamentally, chief constables are the ones who hold the power around all of this. They're the ones who really need to make the changes. [Interviewee 07]*

Whilst many interviewees raised concern about the lack of implementation others provided examples of when this had taken place. One interviewee described how following a report from one of the N8 strands, he had re-directed resources around how football matches were staffed.

*...the report influenced one of the ways in which football events were resourced [Interviewee 04]*

Two interviewees discussed how an N8 PRP funded research project had influenced the implementation of training sessions specifically directed at frontline officers dealing with domestic abuse calls and violence against women and girls. A half day training session was rolled out to all frontline officers to increase their knowledge around domestic violence, coercion and control, as highlighted below:

*[The training] was all about coercive control, and it was very drama based, the training was actually rolled out to all our frontline officers, So, yes the research actually impacted frontline officers directly.*

Interviewer: How was the training received by officers?

*As I say, it was drama based, and it was a morning or an afternoon session where the key aspect of this training was for officers to recognise signs of control and coercion. When officers arrive at a scene of a*

*domestic incident, historically what used to happen was, if there were no injuries being presented, it was very much like, "been to a domestic abuse, advice has being given," and off the officers go. What they [training coordinators] dug into was some of the history around control and coercion, which potentially builds up over the years. As I say, the feedback that was received from frontline officers was it was absolutely tremendous.*

Another interviewee spoke about how the research initiative she had been part of had generated enquiries from other forces in the region who had then invited the officers and researchers involved in the research to present their findings.

*There's often quite a high turnover of senior police officers. So, ensuring that people that come into senior positions are aware of N8 and are aware of what its potential is and so on. It's something that you just have to be constantly doing. It's not as though you can just do it once and then just get on with things, because if you're dealing with at least eight police forces, there's going to be quite a high turnover of chief officers [Interviewee 10]*

### **The Future of the N8 PRP**

Amongst the N8 PRP forces and universities there is widespread support for the N8 PRP model. All of our interviewees valued the bold leaps that the partnership had taken in the four years since its inception. They valued the innovative models of embedding evidence and bringing the police and academics together, and many spoke highly of the outputs to date. When asked about the future of the N8 PRP, a significant theme to emerge was the need to plan and resource the implementation of research recommendations. A number of interviewees suggested that police and academics should work together to implement research recommendation. For example:

*I think the police have certain strengths and the academics have certain strengths. The police are great at implementing things, they have the data, they are gung-ho on doing stuff. The academics are good at analysing data, which isn't a police strength. They are good at evaluating things, which the police can't be bothered to do. I call it a marriage made in heaven because of their complementary skill sets. The police have these problems of crime, disorder, police community relations and so on. They haven't got the time to read all the academic literature. You know, the notion of evidence-based policing implies that the police are going to go delving into research reports. That's never going to happen. They haven't got the time or the interest or anything else. But the academics, that's their job. But it does mean it's a partnership and there is no hierarchical relationship between the two. It should be, in my opinion, a genuine partnership. [Interviewee 14]*

*I saw a lot of output [from the N8 PRP], but I didn't see a lot of implementation... I didn't see, this is an initiative, the collaboration found this, and it's been implemented across these number of police forces with this level of impact. I never saw that. I saw a lot of good things, I listened to a lot of good discussions, a lot of interesting discussions, but I never saw the impact [Interviewee 05].*

In the in-depth interviews, there was unanimity that the N8 PRP should continue to promote, enable, and provide a regional structure for the co-production of police academic knowledge. All agreed that sustaining and supporting the N8 PRP was important for both northern police forces and the academics. However, most said that the continuation of the N8 PRP will require several things to happen: the necessary funding being available: EBP being fully embedded into the organisational fabric of forces; and senior police officers and PCCs being able to see an organisational benefit to being part of the partnership. For example:

*I think the sustainability of N8 will hinge on funding... You can have great relationships here, there and everywhere, but academics need funding, and the police at the moment would say they haven't got any. That's a real problem. I mean you can try and make use of free labour, with Master's students and PhDs even, but that's not what the police need. The police need proper experienced researchers working with them. It's not easy to see how that can happen without the funding...The police need to have clear evidence that it's worth their while investing in these relationships. [Interviewee 06]*

*Evidence based policing needs to become a part of the overall cardiovascular system of policing, don't strip it out. [Interviewee 13]*

*To combine the knowledge of the police with the intellectual academic firepower that N8 has available to it would be formidable [Interviewee 04]*

To summarise, the overall picture to emerge from our qualitative work, there is clear enthusiasm for the N8 PRP, especially at senior level and amongst civilian staff. Advocates of the partnership recognised the scale of the organisational and cultural changes that flowed from the full implementation of EBP and thought that change on this scale would take many years to achieve. However, there were clearly some more sceptical views.

## Chapter 4: Assessing the N8 Policing Research Partnership: A Quantitative Approach

This chapter presents key findings from the on-line survey of officers and staff in N8 forces. The survey used the JISC facilities provided for academic research involving on-line surveys (<https://www.jisc.ac.uk/online-surveys>). The questionnaire was developed in consultation with the N8 PRP and York University, drawing in part on a survey conducted in 2016 of police forces across England and Wales (Hunter, May and Hough. 2017). Police officers and civilian staff were encouraged to participate, but take-up was disappointing, and only 151 respondents completed the survey. The sample is unrepresentative of staff in N8 forces, being heavily skewed to senior officers (17 senior officers, and 52 officers at inspector level or below) and to force analysts and other support staff (82 respondents, of whom 34 were crime analysts and a further 11 with research/policy jobs). Nevertheless, the survey gives an indication of how the N8 partnership is currently used and assessed, and some useful comparisons can be made between these survey findings and those from the one in 2016 which covered both staff in N8 forces and in other police force areas. The two surveys in combination also give a good sense of the profiles of those who are enthusiastic about EBP, and those who are not. The survey was analysed in SPSS, and some multivariate analysis was used to disentangle the relationships between support for EBP, staff seniority, levels of staff qualification and age.

### Knowledge and use of N8 PRP products

Unsurprisingly, nine out of ten senior officers were aware of the programme, and eight out of ten civilian staff – compared with only a third (35%) of junior officers. Under half the sample (44%) had accessed the PRP website, 29% had downloaded material from it, and 15% had accessed or used the PRP expert database.

Of those who were aware of the partnership, 62% had read one or more PRP publication – representing 40% of the total sample. Those that had done so were overwhelming positive about the value of what they had read, with four out of five saying that it had helped their understanding of the issues. However, they were less likely to report that these reports had led to changes in their day-to-day practice or in levels of collaboration with colleagues.

Participation rates in more specialist events and activities was understandably lower. Ten respondents had taken part in an international event, and four had attended a PRP Summer School. 28% of the overall sample had heard of one or more of 13 PRP police/academic joint projects, of whom three respondents had been actively involved in these. A smaller proportion (14%) had attended one or more PRP Policing Innovation Forums. 36% said that they had attended other N8 PRP Conferences, Workshops or Training Events.

Bearing in mind that the sample was self-selecting, and that it was skewed towards people with a vested interest in EBP and the PRP, these findings suggest that the partnership still has quite limited reach into the overall workforce. However, for all the events/activities that the survey explored, the minority who participated in some way were generally positive about their value.

Twelve people said that they had used the N8 Data Analytics Digital Service. Reactions to the service from this – very small – group were mixed. We understand that the service has now been suspended.

In both 2018 and 2019 the PRP offered an eight-day programme for crime analysts and other civilian staff, 'Data Specialists in Policing Continued Professional Development Programme'. In the 2019 course, 33 participants took part (21 data analysts, and 12 others). This was clearly well-received, with large majorities of participants saying that it had improved their understanding of the issues and their knowledge of the evidence base, was useful for their work and daily practice and stimulated collaboration with police officers. However, in-depth interviewees in the York evaluation were somewhat equivocal about real-world impact.

### **Levels of support for EBP and the PRP**

Overall, the sample had positive attitudes to EBP, with 57% saying that research evidence had affected their working practices, and 75% saying that collaboration between police and academics was vital to enhance greater use of research evidence – a view held by almost all senior officers and civilian staff, and by 70% of officers below the rank of chief inspector. Across the whole sample, 67% disagreed with the proposition that, "Evidence based practice is likely to be a fleeting fad" with only 8% agreeing, and 54% agreed that research evidence played an important role in their decision-making. Respondents were also asked whether they agreed with the statement, "Research evidence is important, but it is not as important as judgement and experience in making decisions." 34% - quite reasonably – agreed, but a surprisingly large minority (29%) thought that research evidence should trump judgement and experience.

Obstacles to greater use of research were identified as the speed with which policing decisions had to be made (75%), lack of time (62%), inability to tell the difference between good and bad research (47%), research being too wordy and long-winded (38%) research taking too long to produce (37%) and lack of clarity in findings (25%).

### **Perceptions of organisational support for EBP**

Respondents were asked their views on the level of organisational support for EBP in their force. 59% thought that there was no organisational emphasis on the use of research in decision-making, and 57% thought that there was a general lack of understanding in their organisation about the relevance of research evidence to everyday

policing. 43% disagreed with the statement that their organisation provided sufficient support and resources for EBP. 37% disagreed with the statement that “My organisation encourages and supports its workforce to gain knowledge and understanding from research evidence.” Only 35% agreed that, “When new policies and procedures are introduced, I am made aware of the research evidence which supports them.” The overall sense from this battery of questions is that EBP enthusiasts were ‘champing at the bit’ to move their force onward towards EBP, but felt that organisationally there was still a long way to go. This pattern of findings was consistent across ranks.

### **Trends in N8 forces and comparisons with other forces**

Comparisons can be made between these findings and those from a similar survey of police forces in 2016. This sample included 172 respondents from N8 forces and 431 from other forces in England and Wales. We can thus present some findings about changes in N8 forces over the three years from 2016, and we can compare N8 forces to others.

To enable meaningful and simple comparisons, scales were constructed to measure constructs of *support and enthusiasm for EBP* (‘EBPfan’) and *perceived organisational support for EBP* (‘OrgSupport’).<sup>9</sup> There was no difference in support for EBP between the 2016 and 2019 N8 samples. (The mean values of EBPfan for these samples were almost identical.) However support for EBP was stronger in both the 2016 and 2019 N8 sub-samples than in other police forces in England and Wales in 2016 ( $p < .02$ ). There were no statistically significant differences in perceived organisational support for EBP.

The differences – or lack of differences – between sub-samples levels could simply reflect differences in the make-up of the different sub-samples. To test this out, multivariate analysis was used to control for demographic factors that predict attitudes towards EBP. These demographic predictors were identified using linear regression. Results were clear: having a degree or higher level qualification was the strongest predictor for positive scores on EBPfan, followed by seniority. Age and gender were not predictors. For OrgSupport, age was the strongest predictor, with older respondents judging that organisational support for EBP was weak; the next strongest predictor was gender, with men being more optimistic than women about levels of support; finally seniority predicted positive views.

These four factors – qualifications, seniority, age and gender – were then entered into the regression analyses together with variables identifying whether respondents were in the N8 2016 sample, the N8 2019 sample or the

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<sup>9</sup> The variables were identified through exploratory factor analysis. EBPfan combined eight variable, and OrgSupport was derived from nine. Cronbach’s Alphas were high in both cases (.822 and .858). In both scales low values denoted positive values.

2016 sample of other forces. For the model predicting EBPfan, having a degree or higher remained the strongest predictor, followed by seniority and then by being from an N8 force (regardless of year of survey). For OrgSupport, the strongest predictor of positive attitudes was being young, followed by being male followed by holding a senior rank. No police force variables were predictors.

Looking at the individual questionnaire items that were used to construct the two scales, only three items showed statistically significant differences between the three sub-samples. Views about the relative importance of research and professional judgement in the N8 forces (in both years) were tilted more towards research than views in 2016 in other forces. Secondly the 2019 N8 respondents were more optimistic than others that the research evidence supporting new policies would be properly disseminated. Finally the 2019 N8 respondents had more polarized views than others about the degree of lack of understanding of research in their organisation (because the proportion with no view had shrunk).

### **Developing the N8 PRP**

Respondents were asked an open-ended question, “How would you like to see your force relationship with N8 PRP develop?” Just under half the sample offered suggestions, many of which were simply requests for more or better activities. For example, “More projects involving partners”, “Strong relationships already which I would like to sustain/further develop.” Some of the more extended comments are worth quoting in full, as they generally illustrate a positive outlook about the partnership’s aim and objectives, combined with an openness to improve, or see others improve, the partnership.

*I would have liked to have seen more action research and practitioner involvement on a wider scale.*

*I would like to see more people with access to the N8 rather than just those who are linked by virtue of their role. The N8 could help practically but is only open to certain people currently and so only hear their areas of interest.*

*For the force I work for to continue engaging - the only first-hand contact I've had with N8 has been attending the Empowering Data Specialists CPD programme - I would hope my force continues to encourage its analysts to attend whilst funding still exists.*

*Internally I would like to see more buy-in to the benefits of relationship building in the N8, but as progress and delivery is not immediately impactful, selling the benefits longer term can be an issue. If there was more national influence within the N8, or specialisms in specific topics our theme leads could support as individuals that would engage more people across the force in the partnership.*

*I think the force can develop their relationship and when we get more staff this is something we are looking to explore further, hopefully this should be in the next year. We aim to use previous research to*

*inform our products and build relationships with local academic counterparts to further our understanding on research and data analytics.*

*I think to carry on doing things that they are doing so far. Perhaps formal recognition or a qualification from attending events would be beneficial to participants.*

There were the occasional dissenting voices, the most negative of which was this:

*Prefer to develop own relationships with local universities without N8 - as there has been no identifiable benefit. Quite simply a waste of time and money with no positive impact on policing.*

## **Conclusions**

The survey of N8 officers and staff carried out in summer 2019 paints a picture which is consistent with previous research. Senior officers, and those professionally involved with research evidence are unsurprisingly positive about programmes such as the N8 PRP associated with Evidence Based Policing, but some scepticism remains amongst the rank and file. However, those who had used the products of the PRP were generally positive about these. In an earlier survey of attitudes to EBP, N8 forces were more positive than others in England and Wales, but attitudes in N8 forces appear largely stable of the period to 2019.

All findings in this report should be treated with a degree of caution, as the sample is small, and it is clearly not representative of the overall workforce. However the overall picture emerging from this survey is clear: the shift towards EBP and the greater use of research evidence involves a major process of organisational change (cf Hunter et al., 2019) and large changes in research usage, and research impact. will emerge only in the middle term. The introduction of the graduate entry requirements for police recruits from 2020 could prove a significant accelerant of the process.

The survey found the same perceptions about obstacles to greater use of research as previous research. The pace of decision-making in policing was cited as a factor, as was lack of time on the part of individual decision-makers. Research was also thought to be too inaccessible and with insufficient clarity to produce actionable recommendations. The resolution of these problems probably requires both adjustments on the part of academic researchers and changes in the expectations of the consumers of research.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

This report has examined the first four years of the N8 Policing Research Partnership. We mapped the eight strands of N8 PRP work and detailed some of the products produced by these strands. We interviewed 20 knowledgeable academics, police officers, Police and Crime Commissioners and national policy leads, asking about the organisational structure for delivering the N8 PRP model, the perceived impact of the partnership's work over the last four years and the challenges experienced. We also conducted a survey of police officers, police staff and Police and Crime Commissioners and staff. This chapter summarises our main findings and proposes recommendations regarding embedding and implementing evidence. Key points to emerge from the survey and in-depth interviews included:

- Interviewees thought that moving to EBP would involve significant cultural change, and that it would be wrong to expect any meaningful short-term changes in police use of research evidence
- Establishing the organisational infrastructure for the N8 PRP was seen as a significant achievement
- Interviewees thought that there needed to be more organisational support for EBP
- Interviewees thought that more needs to be done to ensure that research gets used and its recommendations are properly implemented.
- Awareness of the partnership is high amongst senior staff, and lower amongst operational officers
- Those who had used N8 PRP 'products', such as research reports, conferences and courses, valued them
- Overall, attitudes towards EBP were *very* positive amongst senior staff, and positive amongst operational officers

### **Awareness and impact of the N8 PRP**

Several interviewees thought that it was "just too early" to measure the impact of the programme, findings that are consistent with our earlier research evaluating the College of Policing's "What Works" programme (Hunter, May and Hough, 2017, 2019). Most interviewees agreed that embedding evidence within the fabric of police decision-making is an ambitious and long-term goal. Those we interviewed described the idea of embedding evidence within policing as a generational project.

The survey findings in Chapter 3 show largely positive attitudes to EBP, with considerable enthusiasm for collaboration between police and academics. However, a majority thought that there was insufficient

organisational emphasis on EBP, and a lack of organisational understanding about the full implications of adopting EBP.

### **The benefits of N8 PRP engagement**

The in-depth interviews identified the perceived benefits of the N8 PRP, which included the advantages of working in partnership, the small grant projects, being part of the decision making process regarding funding allocation, PhD and career development opportunities, establishing relationships beyond the work of the N8 PRP, being part of innovative research projects and attending forums. Some were very positive indeed, referring to the ways in which collaboration provided practical benefits as well as opportunities for staff development.

### **Future directions for the N8 PRP**

The in-depth interviewees were unanimous in the view that the N8 PRP should continue to promote, enable, and provide a regional structure for the co-production of police academic knowledge. All agreed that sustaining and supporting the N8 PRP was important for both northern police forces and academics. However, most said that the continuation of the N8 PRP will require several things to happen, including:

- The necessary funding being available;
- The need for EBP to be embedded into the organisational fabric of forces; and
- Senior police officers and PCCs being able to see a realisable organisational benefit to being part of the partnership.

Clearly sufficient funding needs to be available for the evidence to be successfully embedded and research recommendations to be implemented. At the time of writing the programme director was negotiating for funds to sustain the work of the N8 PRP. Below we examine the importance of embedding evidence and the benefits of implementing recommendations.

### **Embedding evidence**

Disseminating evidence across and within the 43 forces is probably best described as being an ad-hoc, scatter-gun approach which often lacks a coherent strategy. In our final evaluation report of the What Works Centre for Crime Reduction (Hunter, May and Hough, 2017) we outlined the three recognised prerequisites needed to create an evidence-using culture. These are:

- Organisational support and opportunity;
- Encouraging motivation to engage with research; and

- Ensuring officers are equipped with the capability and skills, including subject knowledge and capacity for critical thinking.

The N8 PRP forces have all embarked on their evidence journeys, with some embracing the value of evidence with a slightly firmer grip than others. Those with supportive senior command teams and PCCs tended to be further down the road, but no interviewee described their force as fully committed to embedding research. In part this is likely to be due to austerity measures, which have undoubtedly hit the public sector the hardest; and in part possibly due to a lack of understanding about how best to embed evidence. It is unknown how the Police Educational Qualifications Framework (PEQF) will affect the relationship between policing and research, but it is probably fair to say that there will be a greater uptake of research across all forces and ranks because of it.

It is important that forces equip their Training, Learning and Development staff with the necessary skills to assist officers to understand and critically evaluate research. Being part of the N8 PRP provides officers with access to high quality research and many critical friends, officers should be encouraged to exploit these connections. N8 senior academics and police officers must nurture and support their staff by encouraging them to build on capability, encourage collaboration and support opportunities when they arise. Decision making is about asking experienced colleagues for their advice *and* being able to tap into the most relevant and appropriate evidence. It is this message that senior command teams need to filter down to sergeants and inspectors. It is sergeants and inspectors who will ultimately change the culture of operational policing, not senior command teams<sup>10</sup>. If this group are convinced about the legitimacy of academic evidence, it is they who will facilitate evidence being embedding into the decision making of operational policing teams. Without the golden thread of evidence running from the apex of the organisation to the foundation, evidence is unlikely to be successfully embedded or findings from evidence-based work implemented.

### **Implementing research findings**

From the survey and our in-depth interviews, it was clear that academics and police officers support the work of the N8 PRP and want the partnership to continue. The first four years saw the N8 partnership cast its evidence net wide, drawing in both police and academic expertise and participation in areas such as data analytics, new technologies, new approaches to victims and offenders, the international evidence, small research grants, hosting conferences and seminars and public participation. Whilst the first four years were about developing the N8 PRP infrastructure and collaborations, interviewees thought that the next phase should be about consolidating the first

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<sup>10</sup> This statement is not intended to belittle the influence of senior command teams on operational officers. Their influence is equally important and ultimately sets the overall tone of each force, including its outlook on the professionalisation of policing and the force attitude to embedding evidence.

four years and piloting a small number of implementation projects. It is not for us to say which strand or project worked best or which idea might work at an implementation level. However, when asked, interviewees thought the small grant projects might be one of the better vehicles to pilot an implementation model. It is likely that neither academics nor the police will have extensive experience or knowledge on what constitutes best practice in implementation, which may mean co-opting new partners into the N8 partnership to assist.

### **And Finally**

After immersion in the world of the N8 PRP for the best part of a year, our overall impression is that a great deal has been achieved, but that the scale of the partnership's ambition is large. Achieving these ambitions – or even achieving them in part – will take a significant amount of time, as it involves cultural shifts and changes in professional outlook on the part of both police and academic partners. Expectations about the speed of organisational change need to be realistic. What has been achieved in the first four years of the partnership has, however, been regarded as incredibly worthwhile, and rewarding for those involved. There is clearly a strong case for developing the partnership further.

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