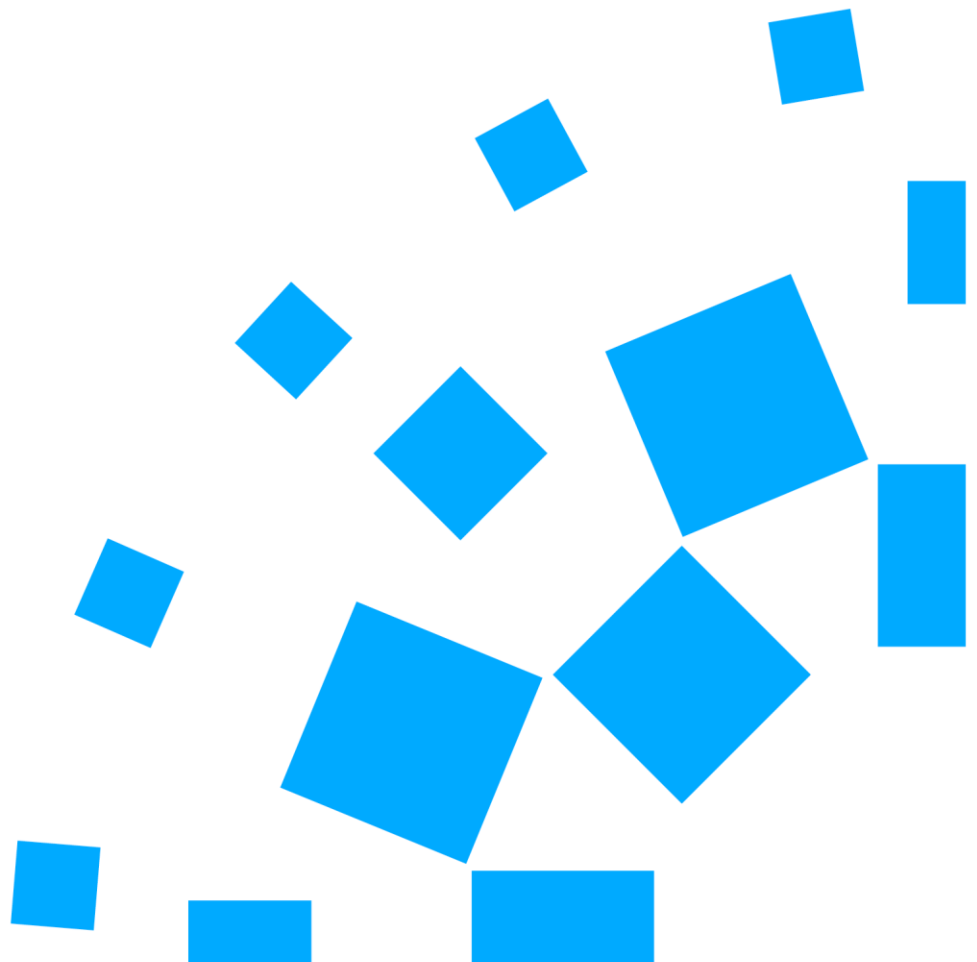


# Evidence-based research

Discussion group notes

March 2021



## Allocation of students to specialisms

- **Use your HEI's expertise to develop suitable research topics.**

Gwent have decided that their higher education institution (HEI) partner will take the lead on determining the focus of each student's evidence-based research project (EBRP). The HEI partner has the expertise to ensure that the project meets the academic requirements and provides good value for the force.

Many students have a natural tendency towards the more exciting aspects of policing. The Professional Development Unit (PDU) in Gwent incorporates a gatekeeper role at sergeant level to vet each proposal, to ensure both variety and fit with force priorities.

- **Decide on year 3 specialisms as early as you can, and build in any additional support along the way.**

Dyfed-Powys have adopted a different approach. Year 2 of the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship (PCDA) is similar to other forces with attachments in the core policing areas, but final-year student officers are deployed into response teams only. In order to provide support for the student officers to work on their EBRP, extra protected learning time has been agreed. Each student is given four additional blocks of four days, spread across the year, which is over and above the 20% Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) requirement.

Nottinghamshire instigated a dialogue between students and the learning and development (L&D) manager towards the end of year 2 to consider deployment options. These included response, communities and investigation for the first cohort, but have since narrowed to better meet force priorities.

Avon and Somerset started talking to their students at the start of year 2. This allowed them to identify individual preferences and put specific development opportunities into the work programme for year 2. For example, where an interest in investigation was recognised, there were opportunities to observe and practice interviewing skills. In order to manage this effectively, options at the start were limited to neighbourhoods, investigations (including operation remedy, dealing with drugs and burglary) and response. Avon and Somerset are now widening options to include offender management, and are trying to encourage more students to

consider neighbourhoods with police and crime commissioner (PCC) sponsorship. They are currently preparing a presentation for the PCC to outline the potential benefits and value to the force.

Warwickshire and West Mercia are learning from their colleagues in Staffordshire and West Midlands. They aim to have identified year 3 postings by month 18, so that the EBRP can be aligned to their postings. They will then look at how topics align with force values, PCC objectives and service improvement themes. The four forces have discussed moving away from the traditional dissertation concept and format of the EBRP. They are considering structured business reports, webinars and podcasts, learning packages, newsletters or presentations as options. They will work with their HEI partner to ensure academic rigour and value to 40 credits. The HEI is developing a marking guide to help ensure consistency in marking across a variety of project types. Their aim is to maximise student engagement and post-study value to the force (and beyond, as appropriate).

## Talent management

West Mercia are in the process of developing a talent management team as part of their force restructure. In the meantime, they have been using the tri-partite conversations to identify student officer preferences and aptitude, to inform workforce planning in respect of future deployments.

## Identifying suitable project topic areas

- **Take force priorities as the starting point for identifying research areas.**

Derbyshire start with force priorities and encourage students to identify their own topic areas aligned to these. The force has produced a leaflet to provide students with some direction on what to base their projects on. Student officers were asked to consider their topics ahead of a specific learning module based on research and development of their final EBRP. The force or HEI ratify the chosen topic, in discussion with the student, to ensure that the subject area and proposal for study is likely to provide the opportunity for a high-quality research project. There is also a check to ensure that students are not all proposing the same area of study. This

ensures that the force gains the maximum benefit from this resource pool to address a variety of operational issues.

Northumbria have high intakes, particularly to meet uplift requirements. They have instigated a process whereby students are put together in groups of five for their EBRP. The groupings are based on expressions of interest in particular topic areas very early in year 2. Each group will work on a topic, albeit from individual perspectives. Each group will have a discussion with the HEI and force to ensure that their projects meet both needs. This approach has helped the force to manage the resource requirements.

## Access to police data – ethical considerations

- **Access to police data can enhance the research project outcomes, but should be appropriately controlled and overseen.**

There are two emerging approaches to allowing students to access police data.

Derbyshire allow relatively free access to force data. This is set up within the parameters of a light-touch contractual arrangement, which sets out what data the student officer is expecting to access and why (ie, how it relates to their EBRP and the potential benefits to the force). The contract is signed by the student and a policing manager, who takes on responsibility for assisting the student officer to access the required data and ensuring that the data is protected and used appropriately. The proposal should include any reference to body-worn video, interviews, transcripts and other relevant sources of data, so these are incorporated into the contract. This process has been in place for some time and is used to manage external research requests.

Copies of a light-touch contract and an example project proposal will accompany these notes.

Although these students are close to developing and delivering their EBRP, there are still some uncertainties. The force lead has instigated weekly surgeries where specific topics, such as research methods, structure and format of the project, are discussed. Students are finding these short group sessions hugely supportive.

When the EBRP is completed, and before it goes to the HEI for assessment, it will be checked over to ensure that no inappropriate data remains in the project, or that it is suitably redacted where it remains. The responsibility for ensuring this lies with the policing manager. The force recognises that this is manageable within the small numbers they are currently working with, and may not be scalable.

Derbyshire were concerned about the storage of survey data generated by student officers. However, since the rollout of Microsoft Teams, they are intending to use Microsoft Forms (rather than other popular survey providers, which often store data overseas).

Student officers are encouraged to limit any survey or direct research activity to their immediate locality. Derbyshire have also closed their door to any external research enquiries to minimise survey fatigue in the force.

- **Open-source data can supplement research projects – direct students to What Works Centre and National Police Library.**

Other forces are not allowing direct access to force data. Instead, they will produce higher-level data amalgamated from the force's systems, helping to anonymise and safeguard the data before the students can access it.

Leicester are focusing students on open-source information. For ethical reasons, any qualitative interviews or surveys are only to be directed towards staff within the force, not externally (for example, victims of crime).

Most forces in the group mentioned access to open-source data. Dr Jo Wilkinson has confirmed that everything in the What Works Centre and Academic Support Network is open-source.

- **Action 1** – Participants asked if the College could help to overcome some of the barriers, mainly about use of data for policing purposes, perhaps by articulating the potential benefits. Forces can then go to their executive team and get permission to allow access for student officers. See the 'Next steps' section for an update on this action.

## Ownership and publication of the project

- **Think about the wider benefits of any research project – sharing is caring.**

The intellectual property rights (IPR) rest with the student officer as the author of the EBRP. However, as the employer and owner of the underlying data, the force has a stake in how the project is used once completed.

Publication of the project is at the discretion of the force and student officer combined. It will depend on the sensitivity of information in the project, the quality of the project and the usefulness of the project to other users.

Where it is deemed appropriate, the projects can be stored in the National Police Library as grey material (material that is not published anywhere else).

- **Action 2** – Participants in the group queried whether this would be visible enough for other forces and students to access. Consideration will be given to production of a national or regional journal that provides a brief overview of the ‘best’ projects, in terms of both quality and usefulness to a wider audience. See the ‘Next steps’ section for an update on this action.

## Time and resources for study

- **The best research projects take time – a flexible approach can help to manage this.**

There are a variety of approaches to how much study time students are allowed for their EBRP.

Most forces are adopting a flexible approach, with a maximum allowable number of hours or days that are either available at specific points in the year or at the discretion of the student officer, in agreement with the supervisor or line manager.

The number of hours or days is different across forces.

Northamptonshire are scheduling 12 weeks in year 3 (the same as in year 2), based on a Monday to Friday model, with pre- and post-weekends also free.

Northumbria have worked out the 20% minimum requirement in terms of hours. As many of their students are deployed in response teams, they are able to take their time in agreement with their area commanders. The L&D team have done a lot of work with area commands so that they understand the need to accommodate the student officers.

In Dyfed-Powys, additional study time has been agreed over and above the ESFA 20% minimum. Their student officers are deployed into response in year 3, so extra time is available for EBRP topics outside of response.

Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Mercia and West Midlands are keen to align EBRP topics with the year 3 day job, to minimise the need for additional off-the-job time. This encourages students to select real-time subjects to study, so they can capture much of their research as they go about their duties. Examples include looking at the impact of begging while working in a community's safer neighbourhood team.

## Communications to colleagues

- **Don't forget colleagues working alongside your student officers – let them know what's going on so they can support and engage with the projects.**

Nobody articulated any concerns during the discussion group around colleagues understanding the demands of the final year of the PCDA. We did, however, want to emphasise that student officers may have lots of questions for their colleagues when gathering evidence. An understanding of this may help colleagues to support and engage student officers.

It was suggested that the student blogs being produced by Sam in Derbyshire (a third-year PCDA student officer) provide some useful insight that other students may benefit from.

## Next steps

All agreed that ceding today's workshop style into a regional format would be beneficial, as would including HEIs in further discussions. Implementation Officers could help to facilitate and cross-fertilise between regions, as well as picking up anything that may need to be escalated to the College for advice or guidance.

Further similar workshops would be welcomed, repeating this topic or looking at others – for example, the end-point assessment (EPA) more generally.

- **Action 1** – In relation to the College helping forces to overcome some of the barriers to accessing data for policing purposes, it is obvious from the discussion

that this situation varies across forces. The College needs more time to investigate the issues and are keen to understand this further. More discussions will be held and an update will be provided as soon as possible.

- **Action 2** – Following the call, discussions have begun within the College around the possibility of a regional or national journal to capture evidence-based research projects. There are obviously many details to consider and it is possible that a working group may be set up going forward. We will, of course, keep you informed of progress via the headline email.

## Useful links

Dr Jo Wilkinson and Karin Rogers are keen to engage with anyone who would like to add a blog to the Academic Support Network or nominate students to do so. Here are some useful links to share with student officers.

## Crime Reduction Toolkit

Provides summaries of the best available evidence on what works to reduce crime. Focuses on the effect of each intervention, how and where it works, implementation issues and cost. The **Crime Reduction Toolkit** is available in **table mode** and **bubble mode** and is regularly updated to reflect the findings of new research reviews. Policing Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF) students can use the toolkit to examine the effect of interventions and the quality of the evidence. Interventions can be searched in a number of ways, including whether it is linked to prevention, diversion or reoffending. Recently, we have updated the intervention on **problem-oriented policing** and have added **police-led pre-charge diversion models for young offenders**.

## Safer Streets toolkit

Launched in February, primarily to help PCCs bid for Safer Streets funding, this toolkit is a useful resource when planning acquisitive crime interventions and completing assignments. The **Safer Streets toolkit** can be used to help in identifying and analysing problems, and includes an evidence-based guide to situational crime prevention tactics suitable for tackling neighbourhood crime. It also includes information on implementation considerations and lead-in times for the tactics and



case studies, to provide examples of where a problem-solving approach to acquisitive crime has worked well in the past.

## Research resources

College What Works has a number of useful **research resources** to support specific research methods, such as focus groups, interviews and surveys. Student officers can use the **logic model** and its template to design interventions to solve problems.

## Academic Support Network

Anyone working in policing and studying can join the **Academic Support Network**, which is a group in the **Police Knowledge Hub**. This group provides peer-to-peer support, hints and tips for studying (aligned to getting started, keeping going and finishing), links to relevant resources and member insights via blogs. The network has a new dedicated **PCDA area** with a number of blogs, including several from a current third-year student, who gives his perspectives on the PCDA both as a student and as a member of his shift.

## Contact us

Thank you to all who participated in this discussion group and provided documents to share.

If you have any comments or questions, please contact the Implementation Team at **[PolicingEQF@college.pnn.police.uk](mailto:PolicingEQF@college.pnn.police.uk)**

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## About the College

We're the professional body for the police service in England and Wales.

Working together with everyone in policing, we share the skills and knowledge officers and staff need to prevent crime and keep people safe.

We set the standards in policing to build and preserve public trust and we help those in policing develop the expertise needed to meet the demands of today and prepare for the challenges of the future.

**[college.police.uk](https://college.police.uk)**