Evaluation of the Edinburgh Police Research and Practice Group

Suzanne Young

SCCJR, University of Glasgow

April 2012

COPYRIGHT NOTICE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

1.1   In association with the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR), the Edinburgh Police Research and Practice Group (EPRPG) is an SCCJR knowledge transfer project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) established to facilitate research-oriented collaboration between police practitioners, policy makers and academics.

1.2   The project activities included a series of seminars and workshops to disseminate research evidence to frontline practitioners, and to engage in collaborative thinking about research priorities and the processes of generation and meeting of knowledge demands.

Aims of the evaluation

1.3   The evaluation of the EPRPG was carried out with police officers who had attended the seminar series and set out to:

- Explore the organisation and delivery of knowledge exchange activities.

- Investigate the impacts resulting from the knowledge transfer seminars.

- Consider suggestions to improve the project in future activities.

Key Points

1.4   While this evaluation was conducted with a small number of respondents, there are important issues that can be identified from the project:

- The aim of the project to bring academics and police officers together has proved very successful. The seminars attracted a diverse audience from Lothian and Borders police and community partnerships.

- The topics presented were broad in range and appealed to the priorities of operational policing. The topics were considered to be of interest to a

range of police officers but the advertising of the seminars needs to be improved to attract these colleagues.

- The main benefit of the project reported by participants was gaining knowledge on police-related research carried out by academic researchers. The seminars were able to impart knowledge and challenge police officers' thinking on topical issues.

- The seminars have contributed to police officers having more confidence in academic research on policing and some of the presenters have been consulted in the development of police policies and practices following the seminar.

- The main limitation of the seminars was that although due to the KT context of the project they were designed with much more awareness than usual of the difficulties of translating academic knowledge into police practice, there was still perceived to be more of a link needed to practical impact following the sessions. Police officers were not always clear how they could utilise the knowledge gained in their everyday policing practices.

- The main proposal to improve future seminars was to provide a delegate list with contact details to allow contact to be made between attendees following the seminars. The participants were unsure whether they were expected or encouraged to follow up on contacts made, and if so, how best to do this.

- Working groups were regarded as the most effective means to achieve a practical output following seminar topics. There is scope to build a strong working relationship between policing and academia given the enthusiasm expressed during the evaluation. In this vein, a working group has now been set up from within the EPRPG to develop a new 'executive sessions' model of KT for policing in Scotland, and this will take the work of the AHRC project forward beyond its funding term which ended in 2011, in line with the recommendations emerging from the feedback obtained in this evaluation.

CONTENTS

1. Background

1.2.   Introduction

In 2009 the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) awarded Professor Simon Mackenzie (University of Glasgow) and Dr Alistair Henry (University of Edinburgh) a three year knowledge transfer fellowship to explore academic-practitioner collaboration in the context of community policing. The project was designed in close consultation with Lothian and Borders police officers, who also facilitated its implementation and contributed to its extension. The main output of the project, one that will be sustained beyond its funded life, was the creation of a new forum through which research findings could be disseminated and, more importantly, practitioners and academics could develop meaningful dialogue about research and the areas of practice in which it is needed – the Edinburgh Police Research and Practice Group (EPRPG).

The EPRPG began in January 2011 as a means of feeding findings from the community policing knowledge transfer project, and the related small research studies, back to the police. However, it quickly emerged that there was an appetite for research seminars and workshops on a much broader range of police-related topics, many of which arose from discussion at the sessions themselves. Over the course of the year two further series of sessions were run, providing academics and PhD researchers from many institutions with opportunities to present and discuss their research within the EPRPG forum. Topics were diverse and identified as of current relevance by active police collaborators on the project. They included: social networking technologies; vandalism and antisocial behaviour; climate change; natural hazards and policing; desistance and early intervention; sectarianism; Muslim experiences of airport security; information sharing between partner agencies; and measuring public confidence in policing.

1.3.   Project objectives

The aim of the EPRPG was to encourage academic-practitioner engagement through a series of research led seminars. The project had two overarching goals:

1. To provide a forum whereby police officers could learn about relevant academic research in an effort to impart knowledge and challenge practitioners' thinking about a particular topic. Also to share experience of police practice both within the force and with the academics involved, through the establishment of collegial discussion and active working relationships. This is the 'two way information flow' aim.

2. For academics and practitioners to share knowledge in order to confront particular crime and justice issues, and ultimately inform police policy and practice in a practical transformative way. This is the 'impact' aim.

2. The Evaluation

Aims of the evaluation

2.1.   The evaluation of the EPRPG set out to:

- Explore the organisation and delivery of knowledge exchange activities;

- Obtain the views of programme leaders about their experiences of running the project and of participants who attended the events in order to assess the advantages and limitations of the project;

- Examine the possibility of measuring the impact of the project in terms of strengthening police and academic relations, the practical application of academic research and benefits for both the policing and academic communities;

- Generate feedback from participants on suggestions for future development of the project.

2.2.   The majority of the participants in the evaluation had attended the seminars put on by the EPRPG but had not attended the various community policing working groups and other activities which had been run as part of the AHRC project. This evaluation is therefore focussed on the effectiveness of the seminars.

Methods

2.3.   Qualitative methods were employed to obtain feedback from individuals who organised and/or attended the knowledge transfer activities.

- Interviews took place with three police officers who were involved in the development and implementation of the project (three interviews).

- Focus groups were carried out with police officers who attended the events. There were three focus groups, each consisting of three police officers.

- The interviews and focus groups generated information on the participants' experiences of the seminars, what they benefitted from

most, improvements that could be made, how they have utilised the knowledge gained at the seminars, and suggestions for future activities.

3. Findings

Organisation and Delivery

3.1.   The seminars took place at the police headquarters seminar room over a one hour period. The seminars consisted of a forty minute presentation by an academic researcher followed by a twenty minute question and answer session. Organiser PP101 reported that the reception to the project had exceeded his expectations with a variety of police and other organisation representatives attending the seminars.

Publicising the seminars

3.2.   The events were advertised through the police intranet system and email. Flyers were issued to advertise upcoming seminars.

3.3.   Seven of the twelve participants made reference to how well the seminars had been publicised, attracting a broad range of audiences from the police, criminal justice partners and other community groups. PP101 specifically noted the positive response and highlighted that this has shown that there has been and continues to be a demand for these types of knowledge sharing events.

3.4.   Despite the seminars being well publicised ahead of the event there were suggestions made to improve attendance at the seminars:

- ▪ Three of the police participants suggested that the name, Edinburgh Police Research and Practice Group, might be problematic to attract audiences. PP201 said that the name *sounds a bit too serious and academic* and PP502 thought the title was *a bit technical.* PP503 agreed that some individuals may be *put off* by the name and that they might not open the email circular believing it is not relevant to them.

- ▪ PP201 stated that many of his colleagues would have enjoyed the seminars given the relevance to their role and suggested improving the PR of the events to encourage more people to attend. One police officer recommended targeting individuals and organisations more effectively by advising people why seminar topics would be of particular interest. Two police officers suggested targeting potential audiences more successfully by making it clearer on the flyers and email notifications why the topics would be of particular interest to certain groups. One police officer who had regularly attended the seminars specifically

suggested expanding on the content of the presentation on the flyer (as opposed to just the title) so individuals can determine whether it is relevant to them.

- A further suggestion by one of the seminar co-ordinators (PP301) was for future seminars to be clear on whether they are offering a practical application or simply sharing knowledge about a particular topic. He advised that this needs to be on the part of the speaker and the organisers in terms of how they advertise the sessions.

3.5.   The importance of publicising the seminar programme effectively was demonstrated by one seminar attendee (PP201) who had initially been asked to attend a specific presentation by his line manager. Following attendance at that particular seminar he chose to attend the three subsequent presentations. He advised that he was unaware how relevant the seminars were to his operational policing and believes more of his colleagues would have attended had they been better informed. This was supported by PP203 who stated that many of her colleagues would be interested in the seminars but are unaware of the relevance to them.

Configuration of seminars

3.6.   The short one hour lunch time seminar format received a positive response from all those who participated in the evaluation (twelve in total) since this was perceived to be the most efficient approach to attract participants. In addition, the forty minute presentation followed by a twenty minute discussion was regarded as effective.

3.7.   One of the seminar organisers (PP101) advised that holding the sessions in the police station poses the best chance of police officers attending but it was proposed by PP401 (another organiser) that varying the location would be beneficial to accommodate police officers and organisations from further afield who wish to attend.

3.8.   Three police officers who had attended the seminars suggested holding future events on a Wednesday to attract a wider range of police officers on their opportunity days.

3.9.   The seminars in 2011 had taken place in three batches of four seminars, with two to three months in between each batch. It was suggested that a shorter time scale between the seminar programmes would be beneficial to maintain interest.

Seminar content

3.10.   The seminars ranged in their topics, methods and impact on policing. The majority of the seminar presentations were given by one academic researcher, however, on occasion, there would be two presenters.

3.11.   The police officers that attended the seminars did so mainly out of their own interests and were attracted by the relevance of the seminar topic(s) to their role in operational policing.

3.12.   The seminar content received positive feedback from all twelve of the participants, particularly in relation to the topics chosen. All of the police officers were satisfied that the topics were current, relevant and of importance to operational policing. The topic relevance was considered very important to the police officers and they were also interested in the less obvious relevant topics such as climate change.

3.13.   The seminar presentations were regarded as informative on the basis that they provided an alternative perspective to policing. One police officer commented that the seminars had offered a broader picture of sectarianism, which had made them think differently about the topic.

> It was helpful to hear the views from other parties as opposed to just purely a policing view or what's getting put down by the media. (PP602)

3.14.   An important strength of the seminars was that they helped to reassure the operational police officers that they were doing 'a good job'. The empirical research presented at the seminars in many cases supported the experiences of the police officers that attended and this provided affirmation that the police officers' practices were not significantly out of alignment with current research evidence.

3.15.   The key strengths of the seminars were as follows:

- The topics were relevant, topical and of interest to operational policing.

- The variety of audiences attracting police, policy makers, community groups and academics.

- They gave police officers confirmation that they were working within appropriate parameters of cutting edge knowledge in doing their job.

- They provided a different perspective on crimes, introducing perspectives not previously considered by police officers.

- They introduced police officers to academic research and brought academics, police officers and practitioners together to share knowledge on particular policing issues.

3.16.   There were suggestions put forward to help improve the content of future seminars:

- Three police officers found some of the more quantitative presentations excessive in terms of the amount of statistics presented. It was suggested that these presentations be tailored more to understanding how the statistics can help the police.

- It was recommended that all presentations should demonstrate how the research can be of use to operational policing. Although all the seminar topics were of interest, some presentations were unclear about how their research could be utilised by the police officers.

- The seminars which had more than one speaker received less positive feedback due to the time constraints placed on the presenters. The topics were deemed very relevant but there was not enough time to go into great discussion with each speaker. The police officers propose in future only one presentation per session.

3.17.   Participants were asked whether there were any specific topics they would like covered in future presentations. Suggested topics included: general theories of community policing; hate crime; human rights; more on the use of social media; and the influence of national and international politics. For all the suggestions please refer to Appendix 1.

Knowledge exchange and impact

3.18.   There were two aims of the Edinburgh Police Research and Practice Group; the first was to successfully bring academics together with police officers to share knowledge (KT); the second goal was for the academic research to impart information to police officers and other practitioners to start the process of debate in an effort to enhance policy and practice (impact). The interviews with police officers explored whether the EPRPG was a suitable platform to achieve these goals.

Networking

3.19.   An aim of the seminars was to introduce police officers to academics researching police related issues and facilitate networking opportunities to build stronger relationships between academics and the police. The successful turnout at seminars was regarded as a positive sign in terms of networking. The variety of

audience participants meant that there were opportunities to meet representatives from various organisations and sectors of policing.

3.20.   The informal format of the seminars was perceived to be a good opportunity for academics to present in front of police officers for the first time and one of the seminar co-ordinators (PP301) perceived the seminars to be a very beneficial platform for early career researchers to begin building contacts with police officers.

3.21.   Project co-ordinator PP301 believes that the seminars encourage police practitioners to build relations with academic researchers by providing the police with confidence to contact academics. However, the one hour time slot made it difficult for networking to take place during the seminars. The issue of time was commented on by six of the participants. The extract below from one of the focus groups highlights this difficulty:

> You come, you sit, you ask your questions and you go away to get on with your day job. (PP503)

3.22.   An obstacle for many of police officers interviewed was that there was no way of knowing who else had attended the seminar. There were some suggestions put forward to help improve with this networking:

- Provide everyone with a delegate list with their name, institution/role and contact details.

- An outlet to make further inquiries such as a contact database on the website.

- A longer seminar session with time at the end for those who attended to network.

3.23.   Although the seminars were viewed as a good networking opportunity only 3 of the twelve police officers interviewed had actually followed up the contacts made. The police officers who had followed up presenters did so because the seminar topic was directly related to their role. In these three cases it was reported that a positive working relationship is starting to develop. There were three reasons provided as to why other police officers had not made further contact:

- Not directly related to their area of policing

- Lack of contact details provided

- Unsure whether people would be happy to be contacted

3.24.   The participants expressed interest in developing working relationships and there is scope to facilitate this by sharing delegate contact details.

Knowledge sharing

3.25.   The most widely reported benefit of the seminars and the workshops was the exchange of knowledge between police officers, practitioners and academics. One of the seminar co-ordinators commented on how important these sessions are to inform people of the academic research evidence available to them.

> The biggest thing about this project is raising people's awareness of what is going on out there in terms of knowledge and research so people can get in touch with each other more effectively and start working together. (PP301)

This objective was recognised by those who attended the seminars as demonstrated by the extracts below:

> Academic work has been a real benefit […]. It doesn't make sense to miss out higher education if a police priority is engagement. (PP501)

> It is surprising how much research is getting done out there that would have a relevant impact. (PP601)

> We haven't had much of our eyes open to academic research before now, it can only benefit both the police and academics. (PP603)

3.26.   PP401 considers academic evidence to be an important tool to achieve evidence led policing. Providing police officers with a broader perspective on policing issues is viewed as beneficial to improve everyday policing practices.

3.27.   The knowledge sharing was described as a two way system whereby academics can also benefit from the programme. The most prominent advantage expressed during interviews was that the police practitioners can feed into academic research by highlighting police priorities and areas of required research. This can be achieved by providing the academic researchers with a *real world perspective* (PP401) and offering feedback on the researcher's findings.

3.28.   Suggestions to enhance the co-production of knowledge:

- Researchers to spend time with operational police officers to obtain firsthand experience (PP201)

- Enabling police priorities to feed more directly or transparently into seminar topics (PP602)

- Topic specific working groups that offer an opportunity to critically discuss issues in more depth. This was done in one case in the 2011 EPRPG programme, where a technical working group discussion followed on from a seminar on methodological techniques for measuring public attitudes to policing. More of this type of 'hands on' working group activity was requested.

Impact

3.29.   One aim of the evaluation was to assess whether there was any evidence of impact on policy and/or practice. Measuring this form impact was perceived as problematic given the difficulty of being able determine whether people had actually followed up on contacts and how much the information had fed into either policy or practice. Despite this, there were various examples of direct and indirect impact provided throughout the interviews.

3.30.   The main form of impact reported was challenging police officers' thinking of relevant operational policing issues. For example the sectarianism seminars have led to further seminars on the topic to feed into how police officers approach the issue. PP201 and PP503 were able to feed back what they had learned at the sectarianism seminars to their fellow officers and line managers.

3.31.   There was evidence of some of the seminars feeding into police policy and practice:

- PP503 was able to use the social networking seminar to produce a leaflet on the dangers of social networking that was distributed to police officers.

- Leda Blackwood's presentation on airport stop and search practices has resulted in her working directly with the police to improve these practices in Scottish airports.

- PP301 knows one police officer who has gone on to undertake postgraduate study after being inspired by the academic content of the EPRPG seminars, and two other police officers have expressed an interest in practitioner fellowships to him, where officers would undertake research projects in post, supervised by an academic criminologist. There is therefore some evidence of a growing interest in and appreciation of research tools and evidence which has arisen as a result of the KT activities arranged by the EPRPG.

- The evidence presented during the sectarianism seminars is being utilised to feed into police policies, particularly in relation to banning orders. (PP503)

- Further contact has been made with Ellie Bates to discuss her evidence on vandalism. PP601 and PP602 expressed the importance of engaging with Ellie's work to feed into how police officers tackle vandalism.

3.32.   There were various suggestions put forward to improve the impact academic research can have on policing.

- Devise more of the focussed workshops following seminars that can provide practical advice for operational policing.

- Working groups consisting of police practitioners, policy makers, academics and community partners that can take the time to discuss issues in depth and devise policy and practice guidance (note that this recommendation is currently being pursued through the new 'executive sessions' project which has arisen out of this AHRC funding).

- Ensuring that policy makers attend the seminars was deemed as important. The operational police officers were unsure how they could implement suggestions put forward at the seminars.

- Presenters should, where possible, make it clear how their research can be used in operational policing.

Future Directions

Knowledge exchange

3.33.   PP401 suggested that podcasting the seminars (if technologically viable) would open up the seminars to a wider audience, particularly for those who could not attend the seminar on the day. An alternative option would be to make the slides from the presentation available for people to download following the presentation.

3.34.   PP202 felt that more operational police officers would benefit from attending the seminars and proposed that the sergeants and inspectors provide more encouragement for their police officers to attend.

3.35.   It was suggested that different types of settings are required for different topics/issues (PP101), although the seminars are raising awareness and challenging thinking, workshops would be more beneficial for discussion topics in more depth.

> There's no one best way to learn I don't think - we should be trying different things. Bringing different views and different opinions, different experiences, into our internal police discussion leads to a much richer discussion. (PP101)

3.36. Workshops and/or working groups were requested by eight further participants. The seminars received positive feedback for their role in instigating police–academic relations but were deemed less successful in taking this relationship forward on the 'next level' of stable collaborative working relationships between individual officers and academics. In particular, workshops were regarded as most beneficial for topics that are more 'outcomes based' or policy orientated (PP503; PP601; PP603). PP601 agreed that the most topical seminars (including sectarianism and vandalism) should be followed up by a working group in order to engage in a more in-depth critical discussion.

3.37. Research training for police practitioners was put forward by PP202. The benefits would include helping police officers engage with research that is presented, building confidence in police officers who are interested in developing research, and reducing scepticism towards academic research.

Online resources

3.38. There was a dedicated webpage set up for the EPRPG which included the flyers for forthcoming seminars as part of the SCCJR Community Policing Project website. Other than one of the project organisers on the police side, none of the evaluation participants were aware of its existence. Raising awareness of the website and making it accessible to a wide audience could assist with attracting participants.

3.39. The website was perceived as an ideal space to set up a contact database, provide copies of the presentations and possibly introduce a discussion forum. These measures would be beneficial to encourage relationship building and increase the capacity of the EPRPG.

Working partnerships

3.40. Developing a stronger working partnership was deemed a priority for moving forward.

> Working with universities has been a contentious issue and we need to make it part of everyday policing. (PP501)

3.41. One proposal for future directions has, as mentioned, come from the EPRPG organisers who are setting up an 'executive session' whereby senior police officers, government policy makers, and academics collaborate in the development of policing policy. It is recommended that these sessions produce a series of published papers and/or policy recommendations.

3.42. PP603 would like to see more statistical evidence from academic research integrated into police intelligence. However, he was concerned that separate work

streams would be created and suggested integrating evidence into existing analytical services.

3.43. Working groups were deemed a positive step forward to create a co-produced knowledge bank whereby police practitioners and academics jointly devise police policy and practice guidance.

4. CONCLUDING POINTS

4.1   While this evaluation was carried out with a small number of organisers and participants of the EPRPG and centred on limited data, there are key strengths and limitations of the programme that have been identified to feed into future activities.

4.2   The coming together of police practitioners, policy makers and academics received a very positive response. The participants were open to learning about policing topics from an academic viewpoint and the seminar presenters were well received.

4.3   The organisation and delivery of the seminars received positive feedback although it was suggested that they could be advertised more effectively so police practitioners are clearer about the relevance to them.

4.4   All of the participants would like to see the seminar series continue and there were a range of topics proposed that would directly relate to the priorities of operational policing.

4.5   The seminars are effective for initiating the dissemination of relevant academic knowledge to operational policing in Scotland. The seminars were regarded as a positive starting point to raise awareness about policing issues and direct further discussions.

4.6   It was apparent that some the participants were unclear how to apply the knowledge generated in a practical sense. This is something that could be suggested to the presenters so as to tailor their presentations to the demands of police practitioners even more than was the case in the 2011 series.

4.7   In order to move beyond knowledge exchange, it was suggested that working groups would need to be established to have a more direct impact on policy and/or practice. Working groups were thought to be likely to facilitate the in depth discussions necessary to move towards practical outputs. There needs to be a forum or explicit mechanism for attendees to follow up with presenters, and this needs to be addressed in order to build working partnerships.

4.8   Overall, the first stage of the EPRPG has received a very positive response and there is a great deal of scope to take it forward to build on the police-academic partnership established. There are expressions of interest to utilise the academic evidence more effectively through the development of working groups and inclusion of academics in police policy decision making.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Suggestions for future seminar topics

	Topic
PP101	City Centre Policing: • Homelessness • Protests • Addiction • Sex industry
PP201	Community Policing: • The impact of crime on ethnic and religious minorities
PP202	Anything that ties in with the police priorities
PP203	Hate Crime: • Best policies and practice for preventing hate crime in the community
PP301	Community Policing: • Engaging with hard to reach populations • Social media and policing
PP401	Nothing Specific
PP501	Human rights and how the political and economical climate impact on offending and policing.
PP502	International perspectives: • How international events affect local policing (e.g. Islamic and Irish terrorism) The impact of austerity on the police.
PP503	Social Media • How the police can use to investigate crime and inform the public
PP601	How to tackle specific crimes, particularly; • Assault and robbery • Vandalism Broader topics, such as human rights and policing.

PP602	Future policing priorities
PP603	Crime prevention and in particular working with prevention partnerships (i.e. social workers and health professionals)