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Reform, research and 're-invention': some final reflections on Scottish policing

Nick Fyfe and Alistair Henry

In a piece on 'Reinventing policing', Peter Neyroud observes how fundamental changes are currently re-shaping police organisations in many states across the globe:

'States both old and new, across the developed and developing world, are undertaking police reforms to transform policing. Sometimes this is because the money has run out, sometimes because the government recognizes a need to rebuild the legitimacy of police forces.... This is both an age of "austerity" and reform' (Neyroud, 2012: 315).

These comments are an important reminder that developments in Scotland are part of a broader set of reforms to policing that are occurring internationally. In this final contribution we place the changes in Scotland in this broader context, underlining the differences in the trajectories of reform across the UK but also the underlying similarities in terms of the pressure to mobilize research evidence to demonstrate the efficiency, effectiveness and professionalism of policing. Taking up Neyroud's theme of 'reinventing policing', we conclude with some observations on the opportunities for the 're-invention' of Scottish policing.

Viewed against the back drop of UK policing, developments within Scotland present a starkly different trajectory of policy change compared with England and Wales. While in both jurisdictions the reforms have been framed by the economic challenges of declining budgets, there are at least two key points of difference. The approach in England and Wales has been strongly informed by a politics of localism focused on replacing centrally driven forms of 'bureaucratic accountability' in policing with a much stronger role for local 'democratic accountability' through locally elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs). In Scotland, by contrast, the policy discourse has focused on the economic and technocratic rationale for reform and changes to the governance of policing have involved the replacement of locally elected police authorities with a nationally selected body, the Scottish Police Authority. Where in England and Wales the overarching political objectives of police reform appears to centre on transferring power over policing to locally elected politicians, the Scottish Government's strategic objectives for Police Scotland are more wide ranging and include reducing duplication, strengthening connections with local communities, and using the capacity and capability of a national force to improve access to specialist expertise. A second important and related difference within the UK police reform agenda concerns the political narrative around what the police are for. In England and Wales, the Home Secretary has made it clear that the focus must be crime reduction and that the mission of the police articulated in the nineteenth century by Sir

Robert Peel as one of preventing crime and disorder has not fundamentally changed. In Scotland, the reform programme has been used as an opportunity to articulate a set of new 'Policing Principles' within the Police and Fire Reform Act in which the emphasis on crime and disorder is subsumed within a broader statement of the policing mission as being to 'improve safety and well-being of persons, localities and communities' in ways which engage with communities and promote measures to prevent crime, harm and disorder.

Underlying these differences in the trajectories of police reform within the UK, however, there are in fact very similar economic and political pressures to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness and professionalism of policing. One important response to these pressures there has been an increasing emphasis on the need to develop evidence-based policing and make greater use of research about 'what works'. The identification of evidence of effective and cost-efficient practices and policies is viewed essential 'if policing is to gain legitimacy and secure investment in an increasingly sceptical world of public services in which the competition for public finance is growing ever more acute' (Ayling, Grabosky, and Shearing, 2009). The processes of embedding evidence-based policing are, however, far from straightforward. Bullock and Tilley (2009) highlight how there is often disagreement about what counts as evidence of effective practice and organizational constraints in terms of a lack of support for practitioners to engage with research that might be seen as a threat to professional and 'craft' expertise. Nevertheless, the combined impacts of austerity, reform and the desire to enhance police professionalism have prompted a renewed interest in developing the evidence base for policing. In Scotland this is exemplified by the establishment of the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR) in 2007 as a strategic partnership between universities and the police service as a new way of connecting research and practice. Now recognised internationally as a model of best practice of police-academic collaboration (see Engel and Henderson, 2014 and Fyfe and Wilson, 2012), SIPR is encouraging the *co-production* of research between practitioners and researchers and a *culture of engagement* between research 'users' and research 'providers'. These activities are important because they yield the kind of sustained involvement of practitioners and policy makers in the research process that facilitates a better mutual understanding of the different worlds of police organizations and academia. These activities also help illuminate the ways in which research can play a number of different roles in relation to policing, ranging from building knowledge around the (in)effectiveness of practices, initiatives or processes (and how they are experienced) and supporting organisational problem-solving, through to stimulating deep thinking about practice, about exploring alternative possibilities and future trajectories, all of which might productively challenge how the problems themselves are and ought to be 'framed'. Nutley, Walter and Davies (2007) call this the 'enlightenment' model.

Thinking about research in this way suggests that its function shouldn't just be thought of in instrumental terms (can it help out with this problem?), it can also play a role in shaping the values and aims of practice. Indeed, the research process itself, particularly when it involves collaboration between researchers and practitioners, plays a role in this 'enlightenment' through the very openness and transparency that such an enterprise requires.

Recognising that research may be useful for different reasons is liberating because it reminds us to value different methodological approaches and what they can individually and collectively add to our understanding. The contributions to this issue of Scottish Justice Matters demonstrate that breadth of different types of research, from Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs) to more qualitative approaches. SIPR has also embraced different ways of connecting research and practice that range from support for the 'research-based practitioner' via collaborative research projects that provide opportunities to build grass roots interest in the use of evidence to inform practice (as the Royan and Eck piece illustrates), to an 'embedded research' model where research use is achieved by embedding findings into formal policies and processes of an organisation (as exemplified by the procedural justice ideas embedded into the protocols of Road Traffic Officers and the training provided to probationers at the Scottish Police College as discussed in MacQueen and Bradford's and Robertson and McMillan's articles).

Finally, the growing evidence base around policing in Scotland combined with the opportunities for change created by police reform create significant scope for 'reinventing' policing in ways which align with the 'Policing Principles' set out in the Police and Fire Reform Act. As discussed above, these principles focus on the need for prevention and partnership and for the police to be accessible to and engaged with local communities. Such principles strongly resonate with key messages from the accumulated international research evidence on police effectiveness, evidence which places a focus on prevention and community confidence as the core requirements of contemporary policing in advanced democratic societies (Lum and Nagin, 2015). There is, of course, a long and strong tradition within Scottish policing of a focus on prevention and community engagement but there is now scope to build on this in ways which are informed by cutting-edge research of 'what works' to reduce harm and increase trust and confidence in policing. Such evidence informed approaches, supported by an infrastructure of independent research and evaluation, can provide the foundations for Scotland to be seen as a world-leader in policing.

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