The Scottish Institute for Policing Research

“There is no other police research centre in the world that can boast of such a wide ranging partnership between the police and the university research community.”

It is just over a year since the Scottish Institute of Policing Research began its work. Since then the consortium of 12 Scottish Universities, based within the School of Social Sciences at Dundee, has made a major impact on the way policing research is carried out in Scotland.

SIPR Director Professor Nick Fyfe believes the institute, which is supported by the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council, has come a long way in a short time.

“The Institute is already a firmly established feature of Scotland’s research and policing landscape,” he said. “It is a unique organisation. It brings together researchers from 12 universities working in at least 15 different disciplines including forensic science, psychology, computing, international relations, criminology and human geography.

“All are committed to working with the police to carry out high quality, relevant research and to ensure that this research provides a robust evidence base to inform policing policy and practice.”

The idea for SIPR came originally from the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland and in particular Peter Wilson, Chief Constable of Fife Constabulary, who believed Scotland needed a more coordinated approach to policing research and policy development.

“Peter Wilson thought there was a need for a research institute to provide a strong evidence base and his vision and commitment helped turn the idea into reality,” explained Professor Fyfe.

“Police studies is a relatively new field in the UK and although in Scotland there are many researchers who are working on policing-related topics, before the Institute was set up there was no real reliable means of sharing information or finding out about other work being carried out.

“So SIPR is particularly concerned with capacity building and acting as a focal point for quite a fragmented set of researchers.”

He added that to help enhance that capacity one of the Institute’s aims last year was to support the appointment of new lecturers, post-doctoral Research Assistants and PhD studentships.

So far four new lecturers have been appointed across Scotland with another three in the pipeline for this year.

Two post-doctoral research assistants and four PhD students have been appointed with SIPR funding while another 6 PhD students are also researching policing topics at universities across the country.

SIPR supported research covers a diverse range of topics including the impact of collective radicalization on police-community encounters, obtaining evidence from young eyewitnesses and best ways of integrating investigation and forensic science.

“All the research has to be relevant to policing in Scotland,” said Professor Fyfe, who has more than 20 years experience in research in this field. “It provides the evidence base that feeds into policing policy and practice.”

In the same vein the Institute has also established a Practitioner Fellowship Programme offering police staff and others working in the policing field the chance to work with university staff on a piece of supervised research.

The Institute, which has just published its first annual report, has seen progress in a number of other key areas including the appointment of an International Advisory Committee made up of leading researchers and policy makers from across the UK and Europe and its first Visiting Overseas Research Fellow.

Community policing expert Steve Herbert of the University of Washington, Seattle spent a week based in Dundee last year. During his visit he gave presentations on his research to representatives of the Scottish Government and at the Scottish Police College.
Community Policing was also the theme for the Institute’s first annual lecture which was delivered by Professor Wesley Skogan of Northwestern University in the USA and attracted many senior figures from Scotland’s criminal justice and policy communities.

Professor Skogan also gave the keynote presentation at the SIPR’s first annual conference held in Edinburgh in September. Opened by ACPDS President Colin McKerracher and Head of Policing and Community Safety in the Scottish Government Bridget Campbell, the conference, Professor Fyfe believes, provided a clear indication of the Institute’s success.

“It certainly demonstrated to me the important role SIPR now plays,” he said. “One delegate said it had the potential to be one of the most important events in the Scottish Police calendar.

“It brought together people involved in policing from different disciplines, perspectives and backgrounds and provided an environment for them to meet and exchange views and hear about and discuss new and innovative research.”

The conference also highlighted how highly the Institute is regarded by leading policy makers, a view reinforced by the appointment of a number of SIPR staff to key roles at the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government.

Associate Director Professor Jim Fraser from the University of Strathclyde served as a special adviser to the Scottish Parliament’s Justice Committee in its inquiry into the Scottish Criminal Records Office and the Shirley McKie case and is now leading a Scottish Government Review of Scotland’s procedures for keeping DNA samples. Professor Fyfe is also serving as a special adviser to the Justice Committee in its inquiry into the effective use of police resources.

For the future Professor Fyfe is hoping the SIPR can continue to build on the success of its first year. There are already plans for a Scottish Graduate Programme in Policing, creating advanced level courses in policing studies tailored to the Scottish Legal System and aimed at police staff.

He is keen to develop the Institute’s role as a focal point for policing research and policy and as a ‘think tank’ to address the future challenges of policing in Scotland: “SIPR is about delivering high quality, broad ranging research and acting as a facilitator to enable productive debate between police organizations, the policy community and researchers.”

For more information on SIPR visit the website at www.sipr.ac.uk