PCRN update for the SIPR Annual report 2023/24

Police-community relations network  
Dr Megan O’Neill Associate Director, Police - Community Relations Network, University of Dundee

This network provides a focus for discussing and generating independent research concerned with the relationships between police and the communities they serve. In addressing these issues the network draws upon research expertise across a range of academic disciplines, to provide a multi-disciplinary approach to the study of complex areas such as translating research findings into local policing practice, working in partnership with other organisations and increasing public confidence in policing. Through close collaboration with police and other stakeholders the network ensures that research results impact on police policy, procedure and practice. It is led by a Brokering Team, which facilitates and builds connections between relevant practitioners and researchers to further these aims.

This past November, the Police-Community Relations Network facilitated a visit from Supt Jari Taponen from the Finnish Police to Scotland. Supt Taponen specialises in preventative policing methods, particularly with young people. During his visit, Supt Taponen met with police colleagues in Local Policing and Policing Together at Police Scotland, as well as with colleagues at the Scottish Police Authority. Supt Taponen then presented on his work at the SIPC 2023.

Dr O’Neill was closely involved in the development of the SIPR Responsive Research Fund to commission research on anti-discrimination policy and practice in policing. She collaborated on the draft of the grant call and was a part of the selection committee. In the coming months, Dr O’Neill will be a member of the Project Advisory Board for the successful project.

The SIPR RRF grant on anti-discrimination was presented at a meeting of the Cross-Justice Working Group on Race Data and Evidence, run by Justice Analytical Services of the Scottish Government. Dr O’Neill is an ongoing member of this group, which includes a wide range of researchers and practitioners in criminal justice organisations. The group considers what is needed to gather more robust data on how people of different ethnicities are represented in the various agencies of criminal justice and what steps can be taken to ensure fair and anti-discriminatory practice across the sector.

Along with other colleagues from SIPR, Dr O’Neill has been involved in discussions with the new Scottish Prevention Hub – a multi-agency collaboration between Police Scotland, Public Health Scotland and the University of Edinburgh, as part of the Edinburgh Futures Institute. The Prevention Hub has several aims, primary among these is to connect data and research to prevent harms and to embed a public health approach to prevention and wellbeing across Scotland. These aims align well with those of the Police-Community relations Network, and so we will be working to help connect the Prevention Hub with researchers and ongoing work across Scotland that supports prevention and inter-agency collaboration in Scotland.

In May 2024, Dr O’Neill is facilitating a visit from police colleagues from Denmark to Scotland. Officers from the Danish National Police are interested in learning more about the practice of stop and search in Scotland and the process of reform. These officers will meet with some of the academic researchers and officers involved in the reform process (2014-2017), as well as current colleagues from HMICS, SPA and the National Stop Search Unit of Police Scotland in Damarnock.