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International Experiences in Police Research: United Kingdom

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About me:

- Headed a government police research group (PRG).
- Headed a university based research Institute (JDI).
- Now head a university consortium from UCL to support the UK 'What Works Centre for Crime Reduction' based in the College of Policing.
- Drawing on this experience in what I say.

About my talk:

- Answer the set questions.
- Talk about the new 'what works' agenda in the UK.
- Say something about police, research and political cultures.
- Discuss some possible models for delivery based on what has been said.

Set questions...

- The structure of the policing and academic/university communities in your country?
- How your centre was created?
- The mandate of your centre?
- The process by which research decisions are made
- The role of governments, academics and police in making decisions within the centre.
- How the centre and research are funded?
- What works well in the centres/network?
- What were/are the challenges to the set up and are they ongoing?
- How is progress of the centre evaluated?
- What improvements could be made to the centre?
- How your network/centre maintains academic independence and police relevance?
- What advice do you have for Canada as it establishes a national policing research network?

What Works Centre for Crime Reduction

- What Works Centre for Crime Reduction is one of six. Announced in March 2013. It will:
- review research on practices and interventions to reduce crime;
- label the evidence base in terms of quality, cost and impact; and
- provide Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and other crime reduction stakeholders with the knowledge, tools and guidance to help them target their resources more effectively.

What Works Centre

- Led by a core team from the College of Policing formed largely of government researchers.
- Supported by a "commissioned partnership programme" which has been jointly funded by the College and the Economic and Social Research Council.

Commissioned Partnership Program

- Consortium of 8 universities to support this Centre.
- Nine work packages costing £3.2m from ESRC/College of Policing.
- Three year program.
- **PLUS:**
 - Extra money (£50k) to other university groups to fund specific projects.
 - Encouragement of local engagement between police and universities.

Work packages:

WP	DESCRIPTION
1	A comprehensive listing of existing systematic reviews on crime reduction topics, mapped by topic area.
2	12 new reviews on key topics (to be identified) carried out over 3 years.
3	A comprehensive labelling scheme, using a consistent evaluation standard, to rate and rank the effectiveness of interventions incl. costs.
4	Application of the criteria in WP3 to each systematic review.
5	Developing guidance for practitioners on costing interventions.
6	Design a development program on evidence appraisal for the police.
7	Deliver a pilot of WP6.
8	Primary research in light of key gaps and evidence needs.
9	Independent assessment of the impact of the What Works Centre and supporting research.

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Police, research and political cultures

The police

- Police disliked research – why?
- Their culture is action oriented rather than analytic.
- They are rooted in a militaristic and hierarchical organisation.
- Risk averse.
- They are used to decisiveness rather than caveats.
- Apply rules rather than argue about them.
- They are rewarded for arrests, activities, obedience to ‘the boss’.

The academics

- Analysis before action.
- Question everything.
- Don't go beyond the data – which leads to complex and caveated conclusions.
- Write long papers full of detail.
- Research can take time – possibly years.
- Aim to publish in academic journals and only funded to do so.
- Their rewards are culturally inward looking.

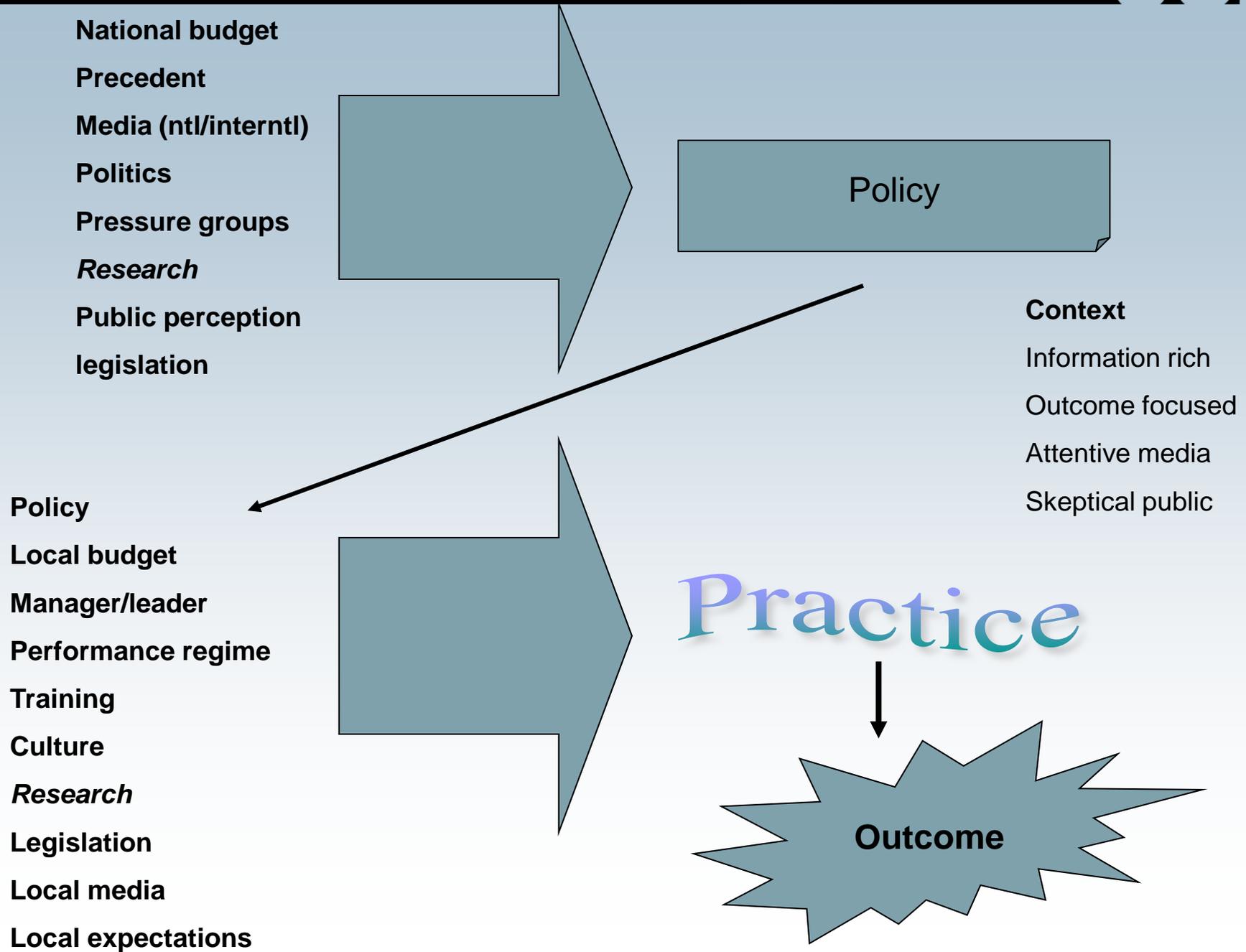
The politicians (Government)

- Care about being re-elected (this is not irrational):
 - Like positive media coverage – announcements.
 - Want a constant stream of new ideas.
 - Want simple messages.
- See research as a potential embarrassment.
- Think it takes too long.
- Won't wait for the results of a pilot study .
- Are subject to all sorts of pressures to implement different policies.

But remember!

- Ministers are human too.
- If you don't know then say so - but find out.
- Tell the truth, not necessarily what they want to hear – ‘Speak truth to power’.
- Senior policy advisers are not called mandarins for nothing.
- They want crime to go down (so they can take credit for it?).

Academics need to understand the political context



Possible models for delivery

- Central government funded body (like PRG) with Ministers/policy advisers/police as ‘customers’.
- University consortium based facility with representation from police (and others) on boards (see the Scottish Institute for Policing Research or CEPS).
- Independent Centre with funding for university support closely aligned with the police (WWCCR).
- Others? E.g. PERF.

Whatever model you go for.....remember

- It is a fundamental feature of research that when you start out you don't know what the answer will be.
- You cannot predict *ab initio* which research will prove relevant to policy or practice.
- Fund clever people as research team leaders and leave them to get on with it.
- Good research takes time.

Remember.....

- Do not fund evaluations of existing policy and practices.
- Involve the researchers at the beginning of a new policy development and let them work with implementation teams.
- Pilot projects are a good idea.
- Think long term – fund strategic programs of work.
- ALWAYS allow the research to be published after peer review.

Researchers aide memoire:

- Test hypotheses, don't just describe problems.
- Write your results up clearly.
- Keep it concise.
- Spell out the practical or policy implications on one side of paper.
- Put complex methodology or stats in an appendix.
- Guard against modifying the results or conclusions of your work to 'please' the funders.
- Publish in journals but also in other user friendly formats.

A final word on research programs

- A list of topics is not a program of research. Research programs are going somewhere – they are strategic.
- They build on earlier hypotheses – think about hypothesis based research – act like a scientist.
- Aim to build a body of knowledge as a foundation for future policing.

Advice to Canada!

- I'm not sure it matters what the structure is.
- What *really* matters is the principles upon which you work.
- These need to give thought to:
 - Stable funding systems
 - Length of time staff are in posts (constant change is a bad thing)
 - Programs not projects
 - Links to police training arrangements
 - Trust

Jill Dando Institute 

EXAMINING EVIDENCE

CHALLENGING BELIEFS

CUTTING CRIME

of Crime Science

THANK YOU