



Criminal Justice Research Strategy 2007-08



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PURPOSE

The purpose of this Strategy is:

- to set out the strategic context of the research and statistical work being taken forward within the Criminal Justice System of Northern Ireland (CJSNI);
- to show how this work is linked to the overall research aims and objectives of the CJSNI; and
- to invite research proposals that will contribute to the achievement of these aims and objectives.

The current Research Strategy relates in the first instance to the year 2007/08. It would be the intention that the Strategy should be continued subsequently on a rolling basis and revised annually for each new financial year.

BACKGROUND

Historical Context

The Good Friday Agreement (Belfast) Agreement set in motion reviews of criminal justice and policing within Northern Ireland.

Published in March 2000 the review of the criminal justice system made 294 recommendations for change. The Government accepted almost all of the Review recommendations and brought them into effect through the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 and the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2004.

An Independent Commission was established to look at policing and under the chairmanship of Chris Patten made a number of recommendations in its report on September 1999. Changes introduced included the establishment of a Policing Board with powers to hold the police to account and the creation of the Office of the Police Ombudsman which deals with complaints about police conduct.

As a consequence there is considerable demand from within the criminal justice system for high quality research to inform the policy changes required and for post implementation evaluation of these changes.

The Criminal Justice Review

It is recognised that research, evaluation and monitoring plays an important role in contributing to a programme of change. In particular the Criminal Justice Review (CJR) recognised that research and evaluation has “a crucial part to play in making sure that the Criminal Justice System is held to account, by providing ways of monitoring performance”. It recommended that evaluation should

become “an integral part of planning for the development of new policies and programmes”.

There are three themes that emerged from the Criminal Justice Review recommendations:

- the first relates to the sharing, collation and standardisation of statistical information;
- the second relates to the role of research and evaluation in the policy development, implementation and review process; and
- the third theme encourages the development of criminal justice research expertise and capacity.

The first of these themes is primarily met through closer working between the criminal justice agencies.

The Criminal Justice Research Strategy addresses the second and third of these themes and is aimed at providing appropriate support for this modernising approach through the provision of research and statistical input to the development, monitoring and evaluation of the Criminal Justice System.

Recommendation 277 of the criminal justice review states;

“We recommend that discussions take place between those in government responsible for justice matters, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (now the Department for Employment and Learning) and the Universities with a view to developing a costed research strategy.”

While individual agencies have had their own research strategies this is the first strategy to be developed for the criminal justice system as a whole.

In the development of this strategy, consultations were undertaken with each of the criminal justice agencies, the Department for Employment and Learning, the Queen’s University Belfast and the University of Ulster. As new policy challenges are faced the research priorities will evolve. Consequently we see this strategy as a working document and believe that dialogue should continue between the relevant agencies and stakeholders.

Criminal Justice Board

The strategic direction of the criminal justice system within Northern Ireland is coordinated through the Criminal Justice Board (CJB). The Board consists of the heads or senior representatives from the seven main statutory Criminal Justice organisations in Northern Ireland - Police Service of Northern Ireland, Public Prosecution Service, Probation Board for Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Court Service, Northern Ireland Prison Service, Youth Justice Agency and the

Northern Ireland Office. The Board has as its remit to secure an improved service to the public through better co-operation, co-ordination and accountability in the administration of the Northern Ireland Criminal Justice System.

The purpose and aims of the CJSNI are:

"to support the administration of justice, to promote confidence in the criminal justice system and to contribute to the reduction of crime and the fear of crime".

- provide an independent, fair and effective criminal justice system for the community;
- work together to help reduce crime and the fear of crime;
- make the criminal justice system as open, inclusive and accessible as possible, and promote confidence in the administration of justice; and
- improve service delivery by enhancing levels of effectiveness, efficiency and co-operation within the criminal justice system.

Sub Groups

The work of the Criminal Justice Board is taken forward by a series of sub groups. Each group contains representatives of the main Criminal Justice Agencies and other relevant organisations as appropriate.

The sub groups include; Research and Statistics, Equity Monitoring, Delay Action Group, Bail Action Group, Public Information, Review Implementation, Victims & Vulnerable and Intimidated Witnesses, Youth Justice and Community Safety Forum.

The Research and Statistics Sub Group brings together statisticians and researchers from each of the criminal justice agencies as well as the Northern Ireland Policing Board and the Office of the Police Ombudsman. It is the role of the Research and Statistics Sub Group to support the Criminal Justice System by;

- Facilitating and advising on the provision of research and statistical information;
- Enhancing access to statistical and research information in furtherance of the objectives of criminal justice and social policy; and
- Contributing to improvements in the efficiency of collection, collation and dissemination through greater co-ordination.

Not all of this evidence base can be gathered solely by researchers and statisticians within the criminal justice agencies. There is a clear need for Northern Ireland to maintain a pool of expertise in the public, private and academic sectors that can carry out research, often collaboratively, on a wide range of criminal justice issues. An important reason for publishing and

disseminating this Strategy is to invite expressions of interest from suitably qualified researchers to take work forward that will address these priorities.

Resources

There is agreement from each of the criminal justice organisations to work in partnership to fund crosscutting research and enhance research capabilities. Most of the research priorities are crosscutting in nature and fall under the remit of one or more of the sub groups of the criminal justice board; these will be funded by the Northern Ireland Office research budget. It is not feasible to be prescriptive about the precise levels of funding available for 2007/08, particularly in the light of pressures from the Comprehensive Spending review. As an indicative estimate, however, the funding available in 2006/07 for research and survey work was of the order of £620k, of which approximately half was committed to annually recurring survey work.

Research projects initiated from within the criminal justice system will generally be funded in line with the research priorities of the initiating organisation and must take account of the available budget.

Speculative research proposals will be considered by the relevant organisation or sub groups and if necessary funding and management arrangements will be negotiated between the organisations involved.

The Northern Ireland criminal justice system will also work in partnership with other organisations and jurisdictions when research cuts across several areas of responsibility. Researchers may also apply for funding from other sources outside the criminal justice system.

Promoting and Enhancing Research Capability

A number of the criminal justice review recommendations relate to the enhancement of criminal justice research capabilities and the promotion of all-island co-operation. Examples suggested include joint seminars, conferences, training and staff exchanges between government and outside research institutions.

Staff from the criminal justice agencies and outside research institutions regularly work together on research projects and have met at seminars, conferences and training events.

The criminal justice agencies have promoted criminal justice research capabilities through a variety of formats. For example the criminal justice agencies within

Northern Ireland, along with the Home Office and Scottish Executive have funded the attendance of postgraduate students from across the island of Ireland at the British Society of Criminology annual conference.

Currently discussions are taking place between the Research & Statistics Sub Group, the Irish Department of Justice and representatives of all the Universities on the island on future funding arrangements for an annual North South conference, a postgraduate conference and a seminar series. Views are welcomed on what format future arrangements should take.

In the past a number of the criminal justice organisations employed Research Officers from outside research institutions. However the numbers involved have fallen considerably over recent years. We recognise there are benefits for both the criminal justice system and outside research institutions in closer working and welcome suggestions for future co-operation.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Research Aims

The overall aims of the Strategy are:

- to provide a robust research and statistical evidence base to inform the development, implementation and review of policy in support of the aims and objectives of the criminal justice system; and
- to provide objective information on the operation of the Northern Ireland Criminal Justice System to Parliament, policy makers, practitioners and the general public.

Research Objectives

Specific objectives for 2007/08 and beyond include:

- the provision of research and statistical analyses that monitor the operation of the Criminal Justice System;
- the provision of research and statistical analyses of the effectiveness of processes and programmes within the Criminal Justice System;
- the provision of research-based analyses and information on the effectiveness of the component elements of the Criminal Justice System;
- the provision of analyses of issues relating to equity of treatment and public confidence in the Criminal Justice System;
- encouraging and supporting academic and independent criminological research in the university, voluntary, and private sectors; and
- publishing relevant research and statistical bulletins as appropriate.

GUIDANCE FOR RESEARCHERS

Expressions of interest

External research, arising from the Strategy, will be commissioned principally by way of selective competitive tender. This procedure does not, however, preclude researchers from approaching the Research and Statistics Sub Group or any one of the individual criminal justice organisations with their own ideas for research. Any such unsolicited proposals will be considered by the appropriate agencies.

Researchers are invited to submit unsolicited proposals using the attached Expression of Interest Form

Expressions of Interest may be considered by the Research and Statistics Sub Group in the process of drawing up short-lists for selective competitive tender, depending on the nature of the project and the extent of expertise of the researchers.

Invitations to Tender

An invitation to tender will be accompanied by a specification of the required research. The specification will usually provide the relevant background and legislation to the requirement and will identify the aims of the proposed research. The specification may also discuss possible methods for the research. Researchers are expected to base their tenders on the specification, utilising their own knowledge of the subject. Tenderers are also encouraged to put forward their own ideas about how the research might best be undertaken to meet the specified aims.

Assessment of Tender

Tenders are assessed by professional research staff from within the Criminal Justice System together with colleagues from relevant policy areas; this process is overseen by the Central Procurement Unit.

The assessment of tenders will consider the following criteria amongst others (not necessarily in order of importance):

- value for money;
- understanding of the issues being addressed;
- previous relevant experience and expertise within the proposed team;
- the appropriateness of the proposed methodology, output and timetable;
- arrangements for managing the research; and
- the proposed costs and distribution of resources.

Awarding of Contracts

The assessment process usually results in the selection of a preferred tenderer, although the Criminal Justice Agencies are not bound to accept any bid and may decide to re-issue the specification or withdraw it. All tenderers are informed of the outcome in writing. On occasion, to assist in the assessment, some

tenderers are invited to make a presentation of their proposals. The successful tenderer then finalises a formal contract with the relevant Criminal Justice Agency.

Timetable

The exact timing for the commencement and completion of research projects will be negotiated with the sponsoring body.

Publication

Research reports must be written to publication standard, unless otherwise agreed. If a report is considered to be sub-standard we reserve the right to withhold the final payment or reduce the payment proportionately. Final decisions on publication remain with the sponsoring Agency or Department, but there is a presumption that research commissioned from the Research and Statistics Programme will be published. Currently all research reports are made available via the sponsoring agency's website. A small number of printed copies are also made available to those without internet access.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES

The Research Strategy covers a wide range of themes.

For ease of reference these have been grouped under the following headings: Courts; Crime; Confidence in the Criminal Justice System; Community Safety; Policing; Victims and Witnesses; Prosecution; Youth Justice; Prisons; Probation; Offenders and Offending; Review of the Sentencing Framework; Sex Offences; Equity Monitoring and Equality; Human Rights.

While the themes listed are currently the main research priorities of the criminal justice system, it cannot be guaranteed that research in all areas will proceed since new priorities may arise during the lifetime of the Strategy.

When research is being commissioned on particular themes, consideration will be given to whether it would be appropriate to include specific coverage of Human Rights issues and some or all of the nine categories listed in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998).

Courts

The Northern Ireland Court Service manages the administration of the Courts. A key priority is to undertake customer satisfaction surveys across all court venues. In addition to issues facing all organisations such as delay and confidence, an evaluation of the new office of Lay Magistrate will be undertaken in-year.

Crime

The Northern Ireland Crime Survey has become a very important means of understanding the experiences of victims and for examining offences which do not come to the attention of the police or are not recorded by them. The survey includes modules on crime victimisation, fear of crime, anti-social behaviour, drug use and domestic violence. In 2005 the Northern Ireland Crime Survey became a continuous survey. Proposals from researchers on the most effective ways to improve the use and dissemination of the contents of the Northern Ireland Crime Survey would be welcomed.

Research may also be required in relation to topics such as organised crime, examining the relationship between drugs and crime and establishing a fuller understanding of the spatial nature of crime. This could include developing a Crime Mapping System to take account of the relationships between crime and other socio-economic /demographic measures. Research proposals on these or other crime-related areas are sought.

Confidence in the Criminal Justice System

A major aim of the Criminal Justice Board is to promote confidence in the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland. This purpose will be contributed to by providing an independent, fair and effective Criminal Justice System that is as open, inclusive and accessible as possible. Confidence is measured through the Northern Ireland Crime Survey and the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey. Research proposals addressing any aspect of the community's confidence in the Criminal Justice System are welcomed. For example proposals would be welcome on how best to assess the views of minority groups and to measure the success of the Criminal Justice System in meeting the needs of those with direct experience, including victims, witnesses and defendants.

Community Safety

Community Safety Partnerships have been established in local government District Council areas to help identify local solutions to local problems, with a particular emphasis on crime reduction, fear of crime and antisocial behaviour. Evaluations of the various Community Safety initiatives will be required. Research proposals addressing these areas would be welcomed.

Policing

The topic of confidence in policing is an important one in Northern Ireland. Research through the use of appropriate surveys, may be required to provide further analysis of confidence in the police and policing arrangements, including regular consultations on the work and role of the District Policing Partnerships. Proposals addressing Policing and related issues are sought.

Victims and Witnesses

In general, whenever research is being commissioned on particular topics, consideration will be given to whether it would be appropriate to include specific coverage in relation to the experiences and needs of victims and witnesses. It is likely this will include the extension of the Witness and Victim Experience Survey (WAVES) to Northern Ireland. An evaluation of the Special Measures provisions of the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 will also be required. Research proposals in this area would be welcomed.

Prosecution

The Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 provides for the establishment of a single, fully independent prosecution service responsible for undertaking all criminal prosecutions. In order to support this aspect of the new Criminal Justice System, it is likely that there will be a need to develop mechanisms to provide baseline and monitoring information in relation to prosecutions and convictions. Suggestions for research addressing these areas would be welcomed.

Youth Justice

Youth Justice initiatives will continue to feature highly in the list of research priorities. Although a major evaluation of Youth Conferencing has already taken place further research, in particular the impact it has had on juvenile reconviction rates, may be required. Evaluations of the various community based initiatives will also be required.

Prisons

The Prison Service and Probation Board continue to work closely together and with other stakeholders to develop programmes aimed at reducing reoffending. The study of reconviction rates for those released from custody continues to be a key priority. It is likely that there will be a need for research into the effectiveness of a range of offender programmes, and resettlement interventions, delivered in conjunction with the various bodies that make up the Northern Ireland Criminal Justice System.

Probation

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland supervises the greatest proportion of offenders given court ordered community-based sentences, and is also integral to the multi-agency arrangements for the supervision of sex offenders. PBNI's assessment and management of risk are central to its role in public protection. PBNI will have a significant role in the implementation of new disposals and arrangements in legislation arising from the review of the sentencing framework- research in this area is a key priority. Research proposals on the effectiveness of the risk assessment tool currently used by the Probation Board would be welcome, as would research to evaluate sentencer and service user satisfaction.

Offenders and Offending

In addition to the above, research proposals on the reasons for re-offending and desistance from offending, including the socio-economic dimension, would be welcomed.

Review of the Sentencing Framework

The implementation of new legislation following a review of Northern Ireland's sentencing framework makes available a number of new disposals to Northern Ireland Courts and revised arrangements for the release of offenders from custody. Research may be required in relation to the range of new disposals available to the court, including public protection sentences, Drug Treatment and Testing Orders, Supervised Attendance Orders and Compulsory Supervised Licence Orders. It is likely that there will also be a need for research into the operation of new arrangements, including the Parole Board and Executive Recall Unit.

Sex Offences

A number of evaluation projects are planned to take place, including research in support of the review of sex offences and advice on the evaluation of procedures for the assessment and management of risk of sex offenders and offenders against children. Research on the evaluation of offending behaviour programmes would also be relevant.

Equity Monitoring and Equality

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 places a statutory duty on public authorities to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; between men and women generally; between persons with a disability and persons without; and between persons with dependants and persons without. Section 76 of the Northern Ireland Act makes it unlawful for a public authority carrying out functions relating to Northern Ireland to discriminate against a person or class of person on the ground of religious belief or political opinion. An important issue is the lack of available data to monitor many of the categories. The Criminal Justice system is examining various methods of obtaining, storing and analysing the data in relation to offenders. The Section 75 categories for victims are currently measured through surveys; although in the future it may be desirable to have a more comprehensive monitoring system for victims and witnesses also. The development of the methodology is at a very early stage and in support of this we will be commissioning further research projects to examine the issues. Additional proposals in relation to this area would be welcomed.

Human Rights

With the introduction of the Human Rights Act 1998 all public authorities are under a statutory duty to protect the individual rights and freedoms contained in the European Convention on Human Rights. The Northern Ireland criminal justice system is committed to protecting the rights both of defendants and victims.

As mentioned earlier, research into victims' issues will be commissioned via the Victims, Vulnerable and Intimidated Witnesses Sub Group.

The Police Service, Prison Service and Youth Justice Agency will continue to work with the Human Rights Commission, offices of the Oversight Commissioners and Criminal Justice Inspectorate in relation to the rights of those in custody.

The criminal justice system welcomes further research into the treatment of defendants and the rights of victims and evaluations of their human rights programmes.

CONCLUSION

The publication of this Strategy is intended to stimulate research ideas and projects in the academic, voluntary, and private sectors. It is not intended to constrain researchers from identifying alternative areas of research, nor does it imply automatic funding or unlimited resources. Research proposals requesting funding for particular projects may be made through the Criminal Justice Website.

Researchers should also consider funding from other potential sources, including research trusts and councils. The criminal justice system will continue to commission external evaluations of specific initiatives and schemes. It will also be prepared to consider proposals outside the key priority areas listed in this Strategy.

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FORM

Research and Statistics Strategy

Please use one form per proposed research project (copy the form as required). Please also use the form to register an interest in projects or topics which are not in the Programme but for which you would wish to submit an unsolicited proposal. Information supplied by you will be treated confidentially. If you wish to submit a more detailed research proposal along with this form please feel free to do so.

Brief description of proposed research project

Research priority addressed

Contact name, full address and telephone/fax/e-mail details

Relevant qualifications and experience in relation to the proposed research.

Completed forms should be forwarded to:
Research & Statistics Sub Group;
Northern Ireland Office,
Massey House,
Stoney Road,
BELFAST,
BT4 3SX