

INTERACT (Investigating New Types of Engagement, Response and Contact Technologies in Policing)

This project is exploring the use of digital technology in engagement between police and the public.

Key details

Lead institution	Edinburgh Napier
Principal researcher(s)	Dr Liz Aston research.map@college.police.uk
Police region	North East
Collaboration and partnership	Economic Social Research Council (ESRC). Collaborating universities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• University of Dundee• Keele University• University College London
Level of research	Professional/work based
Project start date	September 2021
Date due for completion	September 2024

Research context

INTERACT is a wide-ranging study of the use of technology in interactions between the police and public. It explores recent shifts towards technologically-mediated contact, to explore whether, and

how, police organisations can pursue their aims of providing a procedurally just experience for users, and build legitimacy with various publics, whilst fundamentally changing the nature and form of police contact.

Technologically-mediated contact may involve online and digital reporting, social media, Body Worn Video and police Mobile Data Terminals, for example.

The project will also benefit the academic community through advancing current theorisation of procedural justice to take account of technologically-mediated interaction and its compatibility with police legitimacy. This, in turn, will broaden our understanding of the implications of the digital age for the wider criminal justice system.

Research questions

1. How do the police and public experience and perceive technologically mediated contact across the UK in a diverse range of contexts?
2. What is the potential impact of different types of technologically mediated contact on police legitimacy for various publics?
3. What does 'visible' and 'accessible' policing mean in the digital age, to both the police and various publics?
4. What is the role of technologically mediated contact in building police legitimacy, and how can police organisations best work towards this end?
5. How can theories of legitimacy and procedural justice be developed such that they are applicable in times of rapid technological development?

Project co-investigators

The project co-investigators are (alphabetically):

- Dr Ben Bradford (UCL)
- Dr Helen Wells (Keele University)
- Dr Megan O'Neill (University of Dundee)

Research Fellows

- Dr Will Andrews (Keele University)

- Estelle Clayton (Edinburgh Napier University)

If you would further information regarding the project, please email research.map@college.police.uk and you will be directed to the most appropriate project contact.

Research methodology

This project will employ an innovative mix of qualitative and quantitative elements and pursue a broad understanding of technologically mediated police contact as both a policy and a public experience.

A case study approach will be used, which is designed as a holistic study of digital technology use in policing which will allow flexibility to explore changes occurring over the coming years.

Collaborating forces have been chosen because of their varying sizes, approaches to introducing technology, investment in procedural justice as a concept, location in different jurisdictions in the UK, as well as a result of our established relationships with those forces.

To explore experiences amongst different geographical and interest communities we will select two regions within Scotland and two within England, one rural and one urban in each case, within which to explore in-depth how technologically mediated contact is experienced in these contexts.

Interviews will be conducted with senior police officers and staff at national, regional and local levels to ascertain their reasoning behind introducing and/or expanding technology in policing and how it is intended to be used in practice.

Observations will take place with communications and contact teams within each of our three partner forces, observing their activities in carrying out this work to explore how formal policies are enacted in practice, the impact of these policies on police communication with the public, and to explore the meaning that technology holds for those who use it daily.

Observations of frontline staff in each force who use technology in their daily work will be undertaken to explore the influence of police technology on police contact with the public.

We will also recruit two virtual communities, with a strong online presence and a diffuse physical one, such as a community of interest with particular needs in relation to police contact.

This will involve a collective from the deaf community and another group with distinct contact needs. This qualitative component will utilise interviews, extended observations and focus groups. This is a vital component of our research due to its focus on how police contact is delivered and experienced.

Our quantitative component will be a series of online experiments probing responses to technologically mediated police-public interactions, both physical and online, exploring key procedural justice concepts via a range of question types and reflecting the usual range of demographic categories.