

# A Qualitative Study into the Success and Challenges in Embedding Evidence-Based Research Methods in Operational Policing Interventions

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**Abstract**—There has been a growing call globally for police forces to embed evidence-based policing research methods into police interventions in order to better understand and evaluate their impact. This research study highlights the success and challenges that police forces may encounter when trying to embed evidence-based research methods within their organisation. Ten in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with police officers and staff at Greater Manchester Police (GMP) who were tasked with integrating evidence-based research methods into their operational interventions. The findings of the study indicate that with adequate resources and individual expertise, evidence-based research methods can be applied to operational work, including the testing of initiatives with strict controls in order to fully evaluate the impact of an intervention. However, the findings also indicate that this may only be possible where an operational intervention is heavily resourced with police officers and staff who have a strong understanding of evidence-based policing research methods, attained for example through their own graduate studies. In addition, the findings reveal that ample planning time was needed to trial operational interventions that would require strict parameters for what would be tested and how it would be evaluated. In contrast, interviewees underscored that operational interventions with the need for a speedy implementation were less likely to have evidence-based research methods applied. The study contributes to the wider literature on evidence-based policing by providing considerations for police forces globally wishing to apply evidence-based research methods to more of their operational work in order to understand their impact. The study also provides considerations for academics who work closely with police forces in assisting them to embed evidence-based policing. This includes how academics can provide their expertise to police decision makers wanting to underpin their work through evidence-based research methods, such as providing guidance on how to evaluate the impact of their work with varying research methods that they may otherwise be unaware of.

**Keywords**—Evidence based policing, evidence-based practice, operational policing, organisational change.

## I. INTRODUCTION: GMP'S NEED TO EMBED EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

THERE has been a growing call for evidence-based policing to feature more prominently on the national policing agenda. Indeed, recent decades have seen a significant drive towards UK police forces being more evidence-based in their policing practice [9], [5], [27], [30]. This has included a growing number of policing trials that utilise an evidence-based practice (EBP) approach, including randomised control trials [2], and the growing number of police officers undertaking

higher education degrees in policing and criminology departments, or engaging with universities overall [22], leading to the overall development of “police science” [43]. The concept of evidence-based policing expresses the need for policing strategies to be based on the best available knowledge and testing and evaluating interventions [40], [19]. Importantly, the College of Policing’s working definition of EBP is founded on Sherman’s concept, defining it for police forces in England and Wales as, “In an evidence-based policing approach, police officers and staff create, review and use the best available evidence to inform and challenge policies, practices and decisions” [13]. This drive towards testing the impact of police work and continual evaluations of police practice stands in contrast to perceptions of historical policing as a profession that was founded and informed by experience [27]. Many UK police forces have actively sought to be more evidence-based in light of heavy financial cuts since 2010 by attempting to utilise the best available research and analysis that could lead to working more efficiently with less resources [41], [29], [4]. This drive has seemingly been supported by UK government institutions, including the Home Office [14], [34], although as Hope [21] highlights, there remain obstacles to overcome for evidence-based evaluations to be independent from political agendas. The National Police Chief’s Council (NPCC) Policing Vision 2025 explicitly states one of its aims as EBP being embedded into everyday policing practice by 2025 [35].

GMP is among those forces who have begun their own journey after receiving an Area for Improvement (AFI) in both 2015 and 2016 by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), where they highlighted:

Following HMIC’s 2015 effectiveness inspection, we assessed that Greater Manchester Police had an area for improvement. This was that “the force should use evidence of ‘what works’ drawn from other forces, academics and partners to continually improve its approach to the prevention of crime and anti-social behaviour. There needs to be routine evaluation of tactics and sharing of effective practice.” The force is unable to demonstrate sufficiently that it has achieved this requirement [24]

As a result of the AFI in 2017, in the same year, GMP created the Evidence-Based Policing Board, based at their force

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headquarters, with selected officers and staff tasked with creating mechanisms and opportunities to embed EBP research methods and principles into the organisation. The desire to take steps to embed EBP into the police force arose from the identification that while evidence-based policing activity was becoming more prevalent within the police force, this was often scattered across the organisation. This led to pieces of research not being shared widely across the police force and therefore opportunities missed to fully maximise and apply research findings. This lack of sharing research findings was seemingly most notable in research carried out with external academic partners, where the process of agreeing research undertakings were agreed at an individual rather than organisational level. As a result, the EBP Board had a scope according to its own Terms of Reference as:

The Evidence Based Policing Board sets the force strategy for ensuring effective problem-solving, evidence-based practice and research collaboration with external partners. The Board makes decisions on proposals from academic bodies for research in partnership with GMP [18]

Linked with the above scope of the board to inform the strategy in which GMP works with external research partners, other key responsibilities of the board include:

- Set the force strategic plan for effective problem-solving, EBP and research collaboration with external partners. This includes determining relevant standards and setting research priorities.
- Approve a framework to commission research projects that address the strategic policing issues of GMP and how these might improve service delivery.
- Approve a framework for the consideration of proposals from external bodies for research in partnership with GMP and make decisions on proposals.
- Ensure that there is a strategy to evaluate research outcomes and findings and examine how these can be integrated into operational policing, policy and practice [18].

As a result, the EBP Board, would potentially facilitate GMP's ability to have more ownership and understanding of the various research projects it engaged in with external academics. This would potentially go some way to halt the perception by GMP that research projects seemingly never derived a benefit for them. This coincides with the findings of Neyroud and Weisburd [43] who noted that:

More common is the perception of many police that the real beneficiaries of such research are the researchers and not the police. And why they would not they feel this way, considering that the research findings are often disseminated long after the sites have lost interest in the questions asked and usually after new administrators that have little contact with the original research are in office? [43, p.9]

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW: EMBEDDING EBP INTO POLICING

As EBP continues to grow, so do the considerations around how best to use the principles and methods it provides. While

EBP has received more focus and attention within policing, there is little research on the practical implications and considerations in trying to embed EBP delivery into the various workstreams of policing. Indeed, randomised control trials (RCT) have been seemingly viewed by public policy makers since the turn of the century as the pinnacle for research standards that highlight findings that can be trusted and applied [37]. Fleming and Rhodes [17] highlight that any variation away from RCTs for their supporters are "unlikely to value a plurality of sources and forms of knowledge in UK public policymaking", such as the utilisation of professional experience as a source [17, p.5]. This limitation of only considering trials that are of an RCT standard may then dismiss other trials that are technically less scientific than that of an RCT, despite numerous lessons and findings that could be utilised. In addition, in the fast-paced environment of policing, the planning involved in delivering RTCs on a regular basis may not always be realistic. Boulton et al. [4] note further criticism of only using RCTs in policing in that:

Whilst widely considered the gold standard of research [40], [22], some are concerned that randomized controlled trials lack external validity when generalizing to other contexts [8], because they may not be theoretically grounded or able to identify a causal mechanism explaining why the intervention did or did not work [26]. Similarly, the police must balance the level of resources invested in an evaluation with the level of resources available for the intervention [4, p.3].

Fleming and Wingrove [16] highlight that police officer enthusiasm for evidence-based policing can be a useful tool in crime prevention activity. They also note that the College of Policing initiative in 2014 to promote 'What Works' in policing [12], could be a useful tool for police officers to access and apply the findings at a local level and assist in embedding EBP into police forces more widely. However, they also importantly underscore that the transfer from knowledge of EBP to implementing it into policing workstreams remains highly dependent on available resources which may differ from police force to police force, which in turn impacts how EBP can be embedded into police forces [16]. The importance of resources in implementing EBP into policing has been raised previously, where it has been argued that a key element of implementing EBP is the use of crime analysts. However, while crime analysts may be present within a police force and perform daily analytical functions that are asked of them, the survey findings from 1,000 police agencies revealed that: "what is lacking in the description and research of evidence-based practices is guidance for integrating crime analysis into the day-to-day crime reduction operations of a police department" [38, p.303]. This lack of description has led to the limitation of how crime analysts can be used to integrate EBP principles and methods into their analytical products, where their role is seemingly directed towards providing an overview of data, but falling very short of providing nuanced analysis to help reduce crime [28], [10], [3].

Finally, another consideration in the integration of EBP into policing is the possible role that academics can play in providing expertise and additional resources. Current attempts

to promote and disseminate the concepts of EBP within policing have been attempted in several ways, such as EBP Cafes [11], where officers are invited to attend inputs and workshops on evidence-based policing. GMP have also carried out several EBP cafes through their internal staff who have knowledge and/or academic qualifications related to EBP, for other members of staff to learn. This links with the concept of ‘pracademics’ [6, p.311], where police practitioners are able to provide an additional layer of scientific support to their police force through their academic backgrounds. The same can also be true for academics who are not police practitioners, with proponents of academics working collaboratively with police forces arguing that it “would improve evidence through co-production” [14, p.10]. Indeed, there have been significant steps over recent years where police forces have been working more closely with academics. For example, the Centre for Policing Research and Learning based at the Open University was established in 2014 and now works with 24 police forces on a collaborative basis, where they decide in partnership on research projects [20]. Furthermore, the N8 Research Partnership is a collaboration of eight universities in the north of England that provide research opportunities and funding with police forces [36]. The changes to police education in recent years, most notably through the Police Education Qualification Framework (PEQF) in 2017, has also seen a rise in collaboration between police forces and academic institutions who now place a pivotal role in the education of new police officers across England and Wales. Evidence-based policing forms part of the national curriculum, with studies now emerging that evaluate the experiences of student police officers under PEQF and what police forces and academic institutions should consider in their joint delivery of training and education to new police officers [42].

While collaboration between police forces and academia appears stronger than ever before, this paper contributes to the wider literature by exploring how this manifests itself on a practical level for police forces in being able to apply EBP research methods to their operational demands, including where this has been successful and what challenges remain in being able to embed EBP principles and methods more regularly.

### III. METHODOLOGY

In order to better understand the areas of success and challenges in embedding EBP into GMP, a qualitative approach was taken, where 10 interviews, lasting approximately two hours each, were carried out between October 2020 - January 2021 with officers and staff tasked with embedding EBP into their workstreams. A qualitative approach was taken as the aim of the study was to reveal, through the voices of those directly involved, the success and challenges in embedding EBP into a police force. The interviewees were selected as either EBP board members or police officers and police staff who have been involved in operational and tactical interventions that utilised EBP principles and methods at its core. This cross-section in turn provided a contrast between the fundamental aims of the EBP Board with officers and staff who then sought to carry out the aims of the EBP Board across the police force.

The limitations of a qualitative approach based off interviews are well documented; for example, where interviewees are not selected objectively but specifically because of their expertise and experience in the research area, as well as interviewees being influenced by the situation of being in an interview [15, p.891]. Importantly, however, the interviews were semi-structured in that a range of set questions were asked of every interviewee, while follow-up questions may have differed from interview to interview based off the responses of the interviewee. A semi-structured interview approach was chosen because while research into the application of EBP continues to grow, there remain gaps and questions on how EBP can on a practical level be applied consistently and sustainably across police forces. As a result, the aim was to draw out as many considerations as possible, which required a degree of flexibility that semi-structured interviews afford. As Adams [1] notes, “[Semi-structured] interviews are a particularly useful research tool in situations where little is known about the topic of interest [...] and] where the variability rather than commonality of responses is the focus” [1, p.19].

The set interview questions were broken down into the following areas:

- Their understanding of the aims and objectives of the EBP Board;
- How and why they became involved in the embedding of EBP into GMP and the roles they have performed;
- Where they believe EBP adds value to policing and where it may not;
- Examples of where they believe EBP has been embedded and examples where it has not, including what they would have done differently with hindsight;
- Their experiences in working with academics;
- What they envisage to be the future of EBP at GMP and associated barriers to achieving that future;
- The advice they would give to other police forces about to begin their own journey in embedding EBP into their police force.

The transcripts of the interviewees were thematically coded, revealing four key themes, namely:

- Working with academics;
- How EBP can be embedding into existing police tasking processes;
- EBP Training;
- Challenges that lay ahead in embedding EBP.

A thematic analysis approach was taken because this study was focused on understanding the real-life experiences of those involved in embedding EBP into a police force. As Braun and Clarke [7] explain, “Thematic analysis can be an essentialist or realist method, which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants” [7, p.81]. Moreover, the analysis could be specifically described as theoretical thematic analysis, where theoretical thematic analysis “tends to be driven by the researcher’s theoretical or analytic interest in the area” [7, p.84]. In other words, both the line of questioning of interviewees and the consequent thematic analysis were targeted specifically to investigating the research question of the practical realities of embedding EBP into a police force.

The scope of this study is limited to the voices of those tasked with embedding EBP into GMP's operational practices as opposed to surveying how GMP's wider workforce understand or view EBP. This is in part due to this mission still being in its infancy, having begun in 2017, as well as the impact the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdowns had on the operational demands on police forces. As GMP's EBP Strategic Lead noted:

We're dealing with a lot of changing demands all the time, some very unexpected such as COVID-19 this year, and sometimes you just spend an awful lot of your time fire-fighting, rather than embedding practices that could have a long-lasting impact. That's one of my constant challenges [...] I had plans for the evidence-based policing hub resource for 2020, but as COVID-19 hit this year, that couldn't happen." (Interview 1.1 with authors, 07/12/2020)

As a result, the thematic analysis of the interviews and consequent findings are not intended to serve as a reflection of the understanding of EBP at GMP as a whole, but rather contribute to the growing research literature on EBP by specifically analysing the practical challenges police forces may face when attempting to embed EBP into their operational practices.

#### IV. FINDINGS

##### A. Streamlining External Research

Two of the EBP Board's stated responsibilities are centred

around streamlining the process of facilitating research requests so that GMP may be in a position to benefit from any research that utilises its resources, such as GMP data or access to staff. These two responsibilities are:

- Approve a framework to commission research projects that address the strategic policing issues of GMP and how these might improve service delivery.
- Approve a framework for the consideration of proposals from external bodies for research in partnership with GMP and make decisions on proposals [18].



This form should be completed in full by the researcher and returned to [researchhub@gmp.police.uk](mailto:researchhub@gmp.police.uk)

Researchers should note that GMP's principle is not to disclose personal data unless absolutely necessary. We will look at anonymising or pseudo-anonymising the data you require in the first instance.

All research proposal forms are submitted to GMP's Evidence Based Practice Board for consideration. Research proposals are assessed based on the following criteria:

- Use and benefits of research for policing in Greater Manchester
- Data requirements, including the practicalities of sharing data and timescales of the research
- Whether the research proposal is significantly different or duplicates existing research projects involving GMP.

Fig. 1 The GMP Research Proposal Form highlighting the criteria for a proposal to be accepted by the EBP Board

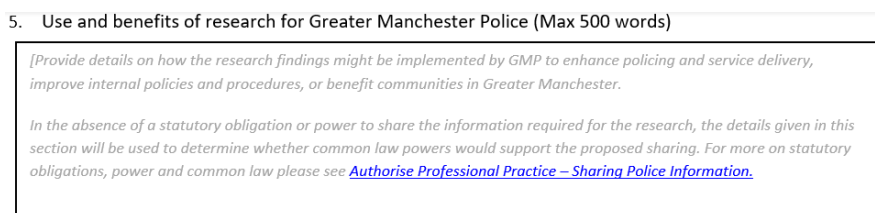


Fig. 2 Researchers highlighting how their research will benefit GMP

At first glance, the aim of the EBP Board to have more control of external research proposals being commissioned appears to have been achieved. This is evident through Figs. 1 and 2 that showcase the research proposal form which requires researchers to highlight the scope of their study, how they intend to carry it out, what resources they need from GMP, and importantly, what benefits could GMP incur from the research to improve its service delivery. As one senior leader of the EBP Board explained:

The first area of business, which I think we've made great progress on, is understanding how we supported and engaged with academia - the amount of time that academia was abstracting from policing without necessarily providing us with a useable product. We made good steps to formalise that process, particularly through the portal and research document which would come into the EBP Board and we would assess the practicality and the value of that research being undertaken to the organisation. (Interview 1.2 with authors, 30/11/2020)

As the interviewee noted, prior to the creation of this research proposal submission to the EBP Board, research being carried out by external academics with GMP resources was not necessarily providing an end-product that GMP could use. This could be for a number of reasons, such as GMP not articulating to academics what would constitute a useful product, academics not highlighting the benefits of their research in language that would resonate with GMP officers and staff, or that no such agreement was put in place at the start of the research. This marries up with previous research into the challenges in embedding research findings into policing, particularly the way in which research findings are presented to policing through published research that may be overly complicated or inaccessible to policing [9], [39]. As a result, this centralised process of sifting research proposals by the EBP Board allowed such agreements to be put in place from the offset, with the EBP Board actively contributing to a promising research study so that it may yield benefits to GMP, and by the same token, rejecting proposals that appeared to not have a benefit to GMP

but would nevertheless use up GMP resources if the GMP agreed to take part in the research. Another EBP Board member highlighted the difference between the old and the new structure, explaining:

My understanding is that the idea behind it [the EBP Board] is to bring together all of the research that's going on within GMP or any research that requires GMP resources. If a researcher needed access to GMP data for research purposes, there wasn't a proper governance structure [prior to the Board's inception] around who does and doesn't get access and why (Interview 1.3 with authors, 29/10/2020)

### *B. Embedding EBP into Internal Processes*

While streamlining external research requests was seemingly seen as an area of success, interviewees noted the challenges in achieving this same success internally and consistently embedding EBP principles across the various workstreams at GMP. One theme that consistently appeared was the fast-paced and high-volume nature of GMP's demand and how this seemingly negated the possibility to implement EBP methods into work that needed to be done immediately. In other words, EBP is framed as slower than what is demanded of GMP officers and staff, coupled with the idea that it is extra work on top of an already very high workload. These concerns mirror one of the key findings from research carried out by Fleming and Wingrove [16], where police officers highlighted the lack of resources available to apply EBP principles into their daily role. They note that "concern appeared to be related to a lack of clarity in how EBP would be applied in their specific roles [...]. This lack of clarity was associated with apprehension about whether those promoting EBP understood resource limitations" [16, p.209]. This same concern was consistent throughout the interviews in this study, with a Detective Superintendent involved in an operation that utilised EBP research methods explained:

The ability to go and seek out a different way of working that's more evidence-based, in this current climate [austerity and the COVID-19 pandemic], is really challenging [...and] the organisation is at crisis point in a number of areas, and when you're at crisis point and fire-fighting, you've got to put the fire out. (Interview 1.4 with authors, 05/11/2020)

Another officer involved in an operation that utilised EBP research methods and stationed in GMP's Operational Communication Branch (OCB), noted the difficulty in applying their knowledge of EBP as "The OCB is very policy driven so it's a lot harder to make changes or trial something" (Interview 1.5 with authors, 13/11/2020). This frustration of the day-to-day demands of policing negating opportunities to trial other ways of working and practices is acutely felt by GMP's EBP Strategic Lead, who reflected:

I feel frustration that the day-to-day demands of policing takes precedence over some of the harder challenges we have around complex problem-solving. We need to beat that cycle of just dealing with demand after demand after demand, and work to take that demand out.

(Interview 1.1 with authors, 07/12/2020)

In addition to the high demand and workload, another challenge raised by interviewees was integrating EBP into GMP's tasking process. GMP have several tasking strands that operate at a force level and district level. At force level, both the Force Performance Meeting (FMP) and the Force Tasking and Coordination Group (FTCG) identify crime and disorder problems and prioritise how these will be addressed and with what resources. Several members of GMP's EBP Board also sit on these groups and noted the disconnect in the way in which tasking is carried out but with very little or no reflection on how proposed work could be delivered that would allow GMP to understand the impact of the work. This does not simply relate to EBP methods such as RCTs, but also the planning and resource allocation of carrying out an evaluation of the work. A senior member of GMP's Force Intelligence Bureau who sits on both the EBP Board and the FTCG explained:

What I'd expect is that, once we've identified the most significant crime and disorder problems, that have been prioritised at either force tasking or district tasking for dealing with, and we're going to allocate money or resources, these problems would be assigned to a thematic lead, and that lead would have a comprehensive plan to tackle the issue that would take into account evidence-based practice methodologies in order to test success. To me, that sounds like a logical approach, but is that happening at this point in time? The answer is no in most cases. (Interview 1.6 with authors, 05/11/2020)

This view was a common theme. A Detective Superintendent who also sits on the EBP Board noted that this will not change "until whoever is chairing the Force Performance Meeting starts asking those pertinent EBP-type questions, and people know that they're going to get asked those questions" (Interview 1.7 with authors, 05/11/2020). Linked to this lack of integration of EBP into other workstreams as well as the feeling that the high workload does not facilitate time and space to try new working practices is the need to be seen to be doing something to tackle a problem as opposed to taking time that appears unavailable to plan a new course of action. Moore [32] highlighted this predicament when reflecting on the various ways a police force may be evaluated, including expectations of the public of its police force. For example, developing a long-term plan for an issue that is impacting a community and where the police have a responsibility may be perceived as the police force not doing anything to alleviate the issue. This in turn potentially increases internal pressure within the police force to start showing tangible action and potentially limit the scope for any evidence-based initiatives to take shape. One interviewee from the EBP Board highlighted this poignantly when they explained:

I think the [perceived] worst thing in the police you can do is nothing. Nobody has the courage to say 'we're not going to do anything with this [an initiative] because it's random or it's not necessary.' We measure ourselves on activity rather than outcomes. So if we're doing lots of things, for example if one place puts 10 posters up and one place puts 50 posters up, the place with 50 posters wins,

regardless of whether the poster reduced burglaries or robberies. It's about action, we like action, but we haven't really got the patience or the culture to go 'well what difference did that make?' We spend hundreds-of-thousands [of pounds] on initiatives and yet incidents aren't going down, confidence isn't going up, and we don't stop and go 'why?', we just think 'let's do more initiatives'. (Interview 1.7 with authors, 05/11/2020)

As a result, one of the challenges that lay ahead for GMP and police forces in embedding EBP, is fully integrating the concept of EBP principles across the police force which may in turn facilitate new and effective ways of working.

### *C. Over-Relying on Individuals and EBP Training*

Several interviewees noted that one of the challenges in embedding EBP research methods and principles was the over-reliance on individuals to grow EBP's presence in the organisation. One EBP Board member noted for example that two members of staff leaving GMP left the EBP Board "a bit paralysed ... [and] what we need is a structure or an engine room of intermediate supporters" (Interview 1.2 with authors, 30/11/2020). The Strategic Lead for EBP supported this, highlighting that, "Individuals move on and we lose some momentum, so from having key individuals there at the table, before we know it, they're gone" (Interview 1.1 with authors, 07/12/2020).

From the perspective of attempting to trial new interventions, this same over-reliance on individuals was present. For example, an Inspector trialling an intervention concerning children who have been classified as Missing from Home encountered obstacles when trying to trial intervention on a district other than his own in order to have intervention and control areas. He reflected:

Because I didn't have any influence of the staff over at the City of Manchester South, I was relying on the goodwill of a Police Constable from there to ensure their side of things was running smoothly, which was difficult because his colleagues regarded it as a bit of a hindrance and something that was impacting on his day job. They didn't understand what we were doing, and why we were doing it, so they didn't buy into it. It was a 'we have a day job to do here' and not realising that we were doing this [the test] to try and make people's day jobs easier. (Interview 1.8 with authors, 12/11/2020)

Furthermore, a Sergeant in the Trafford district who was trialling hotspot policing within his Neighbourhood Police Team found the tracking of his trial very difficult if he was not on duty, noting "I still had to work my shift pattern while the trial was going on. The first week [of the trial] was fine because I was there in person so I could brief the staff. When I wasn't on shift, the results sheets that I was getting back were not as detailed, not as effective" (Interview 1.5 with authors, 13/11/2020). This over-reliance on individuals coupled with the difficulty in gaining the support of colleagues is a reoccurring theme both within GMP and previous research on embedding EBP into policing. Kadry [29] highlighted the challenges GMP experienced in gaining buy-in across multiple districts when

implementing a force-wide operation that had EBP methods at its core, including control and targeted intervention areas, while Lumsden [31] has highlighted how police officers may perceive EBP as extra work and not useful to their day jobs.

One of the ways in which GMP has attempted to address this problem of over-relying on a small number of individuals is its EBP Champion network and associated training a GMP officer or member of staff receives when becoming an EBP Champion. The initial training consists of a five-day course where several videos from a UK-based university are shown to the EBP Champions, coupled with workshops delivered by staff from GMP's EBP Board. Interviewees explained that the fundamental aim of the EBP Champions network was to increase the presence of EBP at a district level in order to make the trialling of interventions more logistically plausible and robust and not solely dependent on any one individual. This concept of a champion's network closely mirrors that advocated by the College of Policing Evidence Champions Network which operates at a national level. However, while building a support mechanism to expand work capacity and interest in EBP is logical, challenges by interviewees were noted in the implementation process. One theme that emerged was the expectations of what the EBP Champions were supposed to do after receiving their five-day training. An EBP Board member noted that it was not just about the number of EBP Champions, but "they need to be visible - things like advertising on the Intranet or showcasing work at staff events. It does not really matter how many numbers [of EBP Champions] you have if they're not visible and championing" (Interview 1.3 with authors, 29/10/2020). Another EBP Board member noted that, "I'm enthused by, but not necessarily seeing the development of our EBP Champions network. There are people within the organisation who are keen on learning, but I'm not sure whether we have the structures in place to nurture that growth" (Interview 1.2 with authors, 30/11/2020). The cause for this lack of development for the EBP Champions was identified as a lack of following up the initial training with further engagement and support. One EBP Board member explained:

One of the things we recognised very quickly was, because we didn't have further events with the first tranches of EBP Champions, there was less opportunity for them to be supported in the development of their practice, but also that connection with the SLT leads was being lost. We therefore set up quarterly EBP Champions days.... Success for us, at three months, was people having engaged with the process and having started the analysis and engagement phase. My expectations weren't massive for the first three months and, as you can anticipate, we had some people who started, and some people who hadn't succeeded at all. (Interview 1.2 with authors, 30/11/2020)

Another obstacle that was noted in the developing of the EBP Champions was ensuring that those who had become EBP Champions on their districts did not discard their involvement if they moved roles or districts. This is particularly salient in consideration to trials and interventions that could take many months to plan and deliver, only to not be fully carried out if the EBP Champion leading on the work leaves before the

completion of the work. Interviewees highlighted several examples of this occurring, with seemingly more emphasis needed in the initial EBP training that their training is not limited to just the role they currently perform on their districts. One EBP Champion noted, "I seem to remember there being an expectation that each district had to report back on an evidence-based policing test that they implemented after the course. It actually coinciding with me leaving [to a new role within GMP] so I wasn't involved any further" (Interview 1.8 with authors, 12/11/2020). As a result, while the initial training of officers and staff provided initial growth of EBP across the police force, further mechanisms and expectations may be needed in order to maximise the investment of the initial training.

#### V. CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE IN EMBEDDING EBP

The journey GMP has embarked on in attempting to embed EBP research methods and principles may provide learning for other police forces who have begun, or are about to begin, a similar process. This includes both its mechanisms to work with and influence the research of policing academics so that they may yield a benefit from having taken part in the research, as well as beginning to educate parts of its workforce on the methods and benefits from adopting an EBP approach. This matches both the NPCC's Policing Vision 2025 for how EBP may be integrated into police forces, as well as mirroring the progress that other police forces have made in England and Wales in building their own EBP portfolios [4]. A challenge that remains for GMP and other police forces is ensuring that EBP principles and methods can be integrated into the routine work of both its officers and staff rather than in pockets of the organisation. One possible route is the integration of evaluations into policing projects and interventions, particularly those that are provided with funding, in order to steer those who are part of the work to consider key questions that they may otherwise have not raised. These include but are not limited to: What are the objectives? What exactly are we delivering and what is our theory or rationale behind this? How long is the work going to last? What will be measured and how will it be measured? What would constitute a success or failure? What factors may influence the results, both internal and external? These are just a select few questions and may seem obvious to some, but as previous research has highlighted, evaluations in policing remain inconsistently used [33], [23], [25]. If, however, an evaluation plan is composed, the question remains on who will conduct the evaluation. Evaluations take time to design and ultimately deliver in the aftermath of a piece of work. They also require elements of expertise, particularly methodological skills that may be commonly found within academia but less so within police forces. As noted, academic partnerships with police forces continue to grow, and is evident within the GMP, but nevertheless the time and resources of academics may not always align with the needs of a police force, as well as the barriers to using academics that take time to overcome, such as vetting and data sharing agreements. One internal mechanism that may provide GMP and other police forces with greater ability to design and carry out their own evaluations is investing intensely into the training of

researchers and analysts on EBP principles and methodologies. In their current roles, they are already highly familiar with police databases and important contextual information and are being asked to regularly provide analytical products to teams of officers. If such products begun to contain not just the scope of a problem but also possible interventions based off previous research, as well as recommendations as to how such interventions could be delivered, this would potentially embed EBP research methods and principles into an established policing tasking process. In addition, researchers and analysts may then become more involved in the work itself rather than it ending at the point of submission of their analytical product. As one analyst recalls, "it's almost a given that you [researchers and analysts] didn't get much feedback on work. I worked on one profile for three months and I never got an email or any feedback from the person who requested the profile" (Interview 1.10 with authors, 29/10/2020). As a result, for all police forces, utilising existing police resources at a time when additional funding is limited is an opportunity to expand the reach and application of EBP methods. This in turn would remove some of the over-reliance on individuals to provide support to all EBP activity across a police force, which is unrealistic and not sustainable. Key processes would need to be put in place, including who would deliver the training to the researchers and analysts, when would it be delivered, and what processes would be put in place for researchers and analysts to start implementing their training when delivering their analytical products. However, once a measure of routine and consistency is achieved, such interactions between officers and staff could organically grow a common language and understanding, and while EBP may not even be explicitly mentioned, its underlying principles and methods may be present.

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