

Crime and Justice Research at the Home Office and Ministry of Justice

Amanda White, *Home Office Science: Crime & Policing Analysis*
Robert Street *Home Office Crime Drugs & Alcohol Research*,
and **Teresa Williams** *Ministry of Justice Analytical Services*

The Home Office and the Ministry of Justice are the two government departments whose work is most closely associated with the interests of the British Society of Criminology. The two departments work closely together on a range of issues, and many of you work with both departments. We are very grateful, therefore, for this chance to produce this joint article on the state of play of research within our departments.

The demand for research and analytical evidence remains strong as we draw on the substantial evidence base on crime and justice to inform the Coalition Government's policy agenda; consider the analytical implications of greater transparency and more local accountability; and start to think about the data and evidence we and others will need to review what has been achieved. Reviewing and summarising existing evidence has been a central feature of our work in the past year. A particularly prominent example, was the synthesis of evidence which MoJ analysts produced in support of the sentencing and rehabilitation Green Paper, published in December 2010. The evidence report can be found at www.justice.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-040311.htm.

One implication of needing to deliver within tighter resources is that our departments are applying a more flexible approach to managing their resources. In practice, this means that, although we have clearly published priorities and commitments in our published Departmental Business Plans, our requirements for externally commissioned research are being developed and refreshed on a continuous basis. We continue to commission and fund work externally, and conduct research and analysis in-house. Examples of recently commissioned research include:

- Case-file analysis study (commissioned by MoJ with HO advisory input) being undertaken by TNS-BMRB to undertake a case-file analysis of offences that were initially investigated as serious sexual and serious violent offences to look at the factors affecting decision-making processes and justice outcomes
- A rapid evidence review (commissioned by the HO) of the impact of increases in alcohol price on crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour to inform decisions on changes to the price of alcohol.

Another change within the Home Office is the launch of a single "Home Office Science" organisation, consisting of the social research groups in various parts of the Home Office together with the economists and statisticians, and also the physical and biological scientists mainly located in the Home Office's Centre for Applied Science and Technology (formerly Home Office Scientific Development Branch). Over the medium term, in the areas of interest to the British Society of Criminology, it is hoped that this will make it easier to build on potential synergies across disciplinary boundaries, and also with other areas of Home Office activity.

We are conscious of the need to provide as much advance notice as possible of forthcoming research projects and are looking at ways of doing this. In the meantime, our published Departmental Business Plans provide the themes for our research priorities:

- For the Home Office there is strong continued interest in policing, drugs, and organised crime, among other topics;
- And the Ministry of Justice is focusing on the efficiency and effectiveness of the criminal justice system and reforming how MoJ delivers its services – as well as work in support of the non-criminal aspects of MoJ policy.

We are always keen to hear about research you may be undertaking that fits with these themes and know that it isn't always easy to find the right person in a department to alert. The MoJ has set up a dedicated research 'in-box' (research@justice.gsi.gov.uk) for this purpose, but you can also contact the Chief Researcher in each department direct and they will pass on queries to the relevant lead - Amanda White at the Home Office and Teresa Williams at the Ministry of Justice.

As well as responding to immediate evidence needs, both departments are actively thinking about longer term evidence requirements over the full spending review period and beyond. Some key themes include:

- Developing our capability in data linking has been a priority and we have done some successful experimental work to link datasets across the Criminal Justice System with each other. We have also linked the MoJ prisoner cohort survey data with the Police National Computer to explore patterns of reoffending.
- The seeming popularity with the public of crime maps produced by the HO has highlighted a need for us to think more about how data can be presented to wider audiences, in ways that combine simplicity and accessibility of presentation with preserving the integrity of data and its analysis.
- The implications of the government's intention that public services - including in criminal justice - are formulated and delivered on a more local basis, with greater public engagement and accountability and fewer central targets and mandates. This seems likely to result in a different and more diverse world of policy and practice, potentially with significant local variation and innovation in how things are done. There will be more locally initiated and delivered interventions, their likely smaller scale posing methodological challenges particularly for assessing impact, but also presenting some interesting opportunities for comparing and contrasting different approaches.
- Alongside this, we are exploring ways of trying to collaborate in more concrete ways with organisations like the British Society of Criminology, the ESRC, and the Nuffield Foundation, and have recently met with those bodies to discuss a range of ways in which this collaboration might work in practice - for example by exploring more collaborative approaches to procurement (within the constraints of procurement law); ensuring that government departments can access the emerging ideas and thinking from a wider range of external players; and working together to ensure our collective investments complement rather than duplicate. We are particularly interested in exploring the range of current and new methodological approaches that can best be applied to the new context in which criminological research will be undertaken.

More generally we aim to strengthen our engagement with the external research community. One of the key challenges for government researchers has always been to try and feed in the insights from the wider world of research, in such a way that meshes with the particular policy and political demands of

government business. To this end, the Home Office's Chief Scientific Advisor, and the Director-General of the Home Office's Crime & Policing policy group, have recently written to a number of leading criminologists, asking if we might call upon their expertise to assist the department, if and when the need arises. The response has been very positive. MoJ is similarly actively considering ways in which it can harness external advice and thinking, building on the existing expert groups it has in some of its policy subject areas.

We hope to broaden our level of engagement as the year develops. In the meantime, we look forward to discussing our research agenda and related topics further in a roundtable session at this July's British Society of Criminology Conference in Newcastle.
