

Evidence Briefing: Research Methods Training for North Yorkshire Police (NYP)

Connect is a collaboration between the University of York and NYP; it includes research and training around policing and mental health.

Why train NYP in research methods?

Main aim: To up-skill police officers and staff in research processes, diverse research methods, and research application in practical situations.

Long-term goal: To increase NYP's evidence-based approach to improve services/processes and individual outcomes for the end user, e.g. for those with mental health problems.

Research questions: Is the research methods training useful? If so, should it be embedded in NYP practice/training to enhance evidence-based practice and policy-making within the force?



How we evaluated the training

Any benefits of the training were evaluated using 1. feedback forms, and 2. an online survey (pre-training in April/May 2016, and post-training in Nov/Dec 2016), to explore changes in research knowledge and understanding.

More about the training

The Connect research methods training, designed specifically for NYP, was developed by academics from the University of York, with support from NYP. The one-day course comprised six modules:

1. Evidence, policy and practice;
2. Qualitative methods;
3. Levels of evidence;
4. Randomised controlled trials;
5. Systematic reviews;
6. Development of logic models & theories of change.

Who was it for?

Middle/senior ranking police officers (Inspector and above) and police staff involved in identifying, undertaking or commissioning research. Prior research knowledge was not a pre-requisite.

When was it delivered?

Three courses were delivered to 42 NYP police officers and staff in October 2016.

An additional two-hour research methods condensed 'Masterclass' for NYP senior leaders was delivered in September 2016 to 28 officers and staff.

A total of 67 officers and staff attended the training (3 attended both events).

[Material to be made available on the nexus subsite]

Results – 1. Findings from the feedback forms completed by 40 of 42 attendees:

On the training day attendees were asked to rate their knowledge/understanding of research and research methods at the start of the day and then at the end of the day. Comparing scores across the day (for all 3 days):

- Self-reported knowledge of research methods increased: At the start of the day only 5 attendees rated their knowledge of research methods as 'high'; this increased to 25 by the end of the day. Eleven attendees rated their knowledge as 'low' at the start of the day, reducing to just 1 by the end. Twenty-four rated their knowledge as 'medium' at the start of the day, dropping to 14 by the end (the majority had moved from 'medium' to 'high').
- The perceived value of using research to inform practice increased 'a lot' for 24 attendees, 'a little' for 15 attendees, with no effect for 1 individual from the start to the end of the training day.



Training and Evidence Briefing developed by Nicola Moran and Tracey Bywater (University of York), and Jonathan Haslam (Institute for Effective Education)



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Results – 2. Survey findings

129 NYP officers and staff completed the questions on research knowledge and understanding in both the pre- and post-surveys. Nineteen had attended the training, 110 had not. An increase in knowledge and understanding of research was evident across both groups:

- When asked to select three, of nine, options that best described their understanding of evidence-based policing, the number of officers/staff identifying 'combining academic research evidence with my professional expertise' increased from 42 to 57, the number selecting 'reading and applying information from academic research or from working with researchers' increased from 22 to 37, and the number choosing 'using an online evidence database' increased from 12 to 23.
- Respondents were also asked to rate how strongly they agreed/disagreed with eight statements relating to how research was used, if at all, in their work. The number agreeing/strongly agreeing with the statement 'Information from research plays an important role in informing my policing practice' increased from 52 to 73; for the statement 'I am able to relate information from research to my context' this figure increased from 54 to 75; those (strongly) agreeing with the statement 'I use information from research to help me decide how to implement new approaches' increased from 47 in the pre-survey to 59 in the post-survey; and for the statement 'I feel confident about analysing information from research' the figure increased from 54 to 76.

The post-training survey also asked if the training had had any impact on attendees' work. Of the 20 officers and staff who responded to the question and had attended the training:

- Six (30%) reported an increase in use of the research methods covered in the training;
- Seven (35%) reported using evidence-based research to inform their work; and
- Five (25%) stated that they had or planned to undertake or commission research as a consequence of the training.
- A further 6-10 respondents stated that whilst they had not yet had the opportunity to increase their use or undertaking of research, they expected to do so in the future.

The most significant impact was the increase amongst attendees in understanding of appropriate research methods:

	Pre (all respondents)	Post (all respondents)	Pre (attended training)	Post (attended training)
Systematic review	31 (49.2%)	37 (44.6%)	10 (71%)	12 (80%)
RCT	12 (19.4%)	18 (22.8%)	3 (23%)	8 (53%)
Interviews/questionnaires	35 (50.7%)	36 (39.6%)	4 (28%)	10 (62.5%)

CONCLUSION & AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION

Conclusion

The main aim was achieved: Skills improved, as did knowledge about the appropriate research methods to use. This suggests that the training can be used by NYP to support the wider use and understanding of evidence-based practice.

Areas for consideration

1. Extend research methods training within NYP to increase knowledge in undertaking and understanding research, to increase evidence-based practice.
2. Encourage more research activity, e.g. capitalise on officers'/staffs' ideas/knowledge to test new/current ways or processes for effectiveness.
3. Develop the training further, to offer an introductory course for those with a need for only basic information on knowledge of research, and more in-depth training for potential 'research champions'.

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