



*working together to combat
Serious Organised Crime*

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Progress Report:

Organisational Adaptability

Research Collaboration Progress Report

December 2020

The empac logo, consisting of the word "empac" in a white sans-serif font inside a dark blue square.



Introductory remarks

The East Midlands Police Academic Collaboration (EMPAC) exists to bring policing practitioners and academic researchers together to align our mixed skills and knowledge on topics of mutual benefit, with a view to gaining external research investment to improve policing in the region and beyond.

Serious and organised crime is one of our identified thematic priorities and this report represents just one part of our ongoing effort to work together in order to better protect our communities.

As strategic EMPAC leads we are keen to see our collective effort grow to inform our policing services with the best evidence-base and innovation insights. We encourage you to work with us to be a part of policing research and innovation to improve policing.

Strategic EMPAC leads on behalf of the East Midlands Region

Police and Crime Commissioner Hardyal Dhindsa

Chief Constable Rachel Swann

Background: The importance of tackling Serious Organised Crime

The UK Cabinet Office reported in 2018¹ that serious and organised crime (SOC) affects more UK citizens, more often, than any other national security threat. It costs the UK at least £37 billion annually.

The national focus is to work together to:

- Prevent people from engaging in serious and organised crime
- Protect victims, organisations and systems from its harms
- Prepare for when it occurs, mitigating the impact

Local impact and learning

In the East Midlands, facilitated via the East Midlands Police Academic Collaboration², policing and academic researchers have started to work together to build upon the existing regional strengths in policing SOC, to identify ways of achieving even more. Working together, and on behalf of the region, Deputy Chief Constable Chris Haward (EMSOU) is the operational lead and Professor Dave Walsh (DMU) is the academic lead.

This joint work brings together practitioners with researchers on the thematic topic of SOC to consider the existing knowledge base, gap analysis and potential future research that might help to further support policing. Taking a broad approach, a number of issues have been identified, and will be the subject of future reports, which will allow the overall process to expand in bite-size bits through dissemination and further contribution and experimentation, where appropriate.

To further improve policing capability, six key aspects have been identified that would benefit from further exploration and analysis:-

1. Links between UK and international Organised Crime Groups (OCGs)
2. Digital technologies used by OCGs
3. Business models used by OCGs
4. Protecting individuals and communities from OCGs
5. Evaluating policing effectiveness in preventing, disrupting and detecting OCGs
6. Creating a more agile law enforcement mindset to counter the entrepreneurial nature of OCGs

Opportunities

Joint discussions have so far revealed a number of themes which could be usefully developed. This report is one of several that will update on the progress made in seeking further development, involvement and support in relation to the enhancement of the capability of policing to combat SOC.

This particular report targets the adaptability and agility gap between OCGs and policing. Policing adheres to many complex regulations and requirements and often has a command and control approach, whereas OCGs tend to operate on a more fluid basis. The following table illustrates the key differences in approach.

¹ UK National Strategy on Serious Organised Crime, 2018-2021

² East Midlands Police Academic Collaboration (EMPAC) comprises Derbyshire Constabulary, Leicestershire Police, Lincolnshire Police, Northamptonshire Police, Nottinghamshire Police, the five respective Police and Crime Commissioners, the East Midlands Special Operations Unit and the Universities of Derby, De Montfort, Leicester, Loughborough, Lincoln, Nottingham, Nottingham Trent and Northampton.

Table 1. Mind the gap: the difference between policing and crime adaptabilities

	Police	OCG
Organisational character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rule bound ○ Non-entrepreneurial ○ Structured ○ Responding to public expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Political ○ Risk averse ○ Specialist units ○ Siloed approaches ○ Command and control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Agile ○ Entrepreneurial ○ Flexible ○ De-centred ○ Not constrained by rules, borders, etc ○ Promiscuous partnering for common objectives
Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reactive ○ Historical ○ Short term future horizon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Forward-looking ○ Horizon-scanning ○ Seek vulnerabilities for exploitation
Operational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Tried and tested ○ Stifled creativity ○ Constrained out of the box thinking ○ No resource for critical reflection ○ Non-experimental 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Adapt to technological changes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Creative ○ Adaptive ○ Rapid ○ Outsource specialisms ○ Franchise

This is an exercise in ‘understanding the enemy, and understanding yourself’, that is, appreciating the dynamics of the criminal marketplace, how the actions of policing resonate in that environment and being attuned to the operational and strategic parameters within which OCGs operate. One emergent key theme that has been identified is the difference in the capacity for adaptability within the policing and OCG environment, respectively. The research indicates that policing is often taken by surprise, whilst OCGs appear to be more able to anticipate likely policing tactics and responses.

Based on the existing international knowledge base, there is an opportunity to identify and adopt ways of policing which might facilitate the gaining of a degree of the adaptability initiative. Much of the existing evidence shows the long-term net gains that result from the sharing and utilising of transnational policing’s pragmatic experience which enables more fluid, adaptive and agile monitoring of the policing/OCG dynamic and the opportunity to apply novel techniques and approaches in an attempt to mitigate the impact of SOC.

The risk of not acknowledging the above gap means policing is likely to fall behind, pitched against an entrepreneurial and agile enemy.

Engagement and future commitment

Already together, over 1,000 academic and police hours have been invested so far into the SOC research process, supported by some initial funding from De Montfort University. There is now the opportunity to widen the evidence and insight base by involving other researchers and practitioners (such as Drs Craig Paterson and Dick Severn at Sheffield Hallam, Dave Hill of Northampton University (who has already commenced some linked work at EMSOU and Professor Rob McCusker) on the transnational policing evidence base. Importantly, their work must be complemented by the wider policing perspective from areas such as neighbourhood policing and from intelligence drawn from regional forces.

In the interim, based upon the joint research activity, *red teaming*³ has been identified as a potential tactic worthy of further examination and possible trialling, although some preparation would be required to maximise the learning opportunity.

The long-term aspiration is to bring in sustainable research investment funding to the region from funding bodies such as the Economic and Social Research Council. Research bids take time and are highly competitive but the strong collaborative approach we have in the region puts us in a good position to demonstrate interaction between theory and practice, with a demonstrable track record of active learning, change and impact.

Recommendations

1. We share what we have done so far.

The existing joint SOC research work, led by DCC Haward and Professor Walsh is shared to consolidate and expand its potential, with the support of the region's forces. Reports can be posted on the EMPAC web for ready access to policing and academic colleagues.

2. We get the best evidence.

Relevant others are involved to widen the evidence base and ensure the complexities and relevancies of the region are reflected and the evidence base is as strong as possible.

3. We try things out.

Agile opportunities to explore, experiment and learn are considered at the earliest stage – for example in the development of the embedding of red teaming. Where experiments are identified as worthy of trial, resourcing options and costs can be considered on a case by case basis.

4. We bring in sustainable funding.

A bid writing team is formed to attract new research investment into the region, for which EMPAC as a collaboration operates as a bidding partner alongside DMU (as bid leader), integrating other relevant centres of excellence that could strengthen our breadth and depth of knowledge.

³ *Red teaming* has a substantial evidence base from its use in military, Intelligence and business communities. It encourages one to 'think like the enemy', to identify potential internal and external weaknesses proactively and improve the subsequent anticipation and disruption of the enemy.