



End of project report

Building sustainable policing – practitioners communities online

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Executive summary

Community policing is essential for dealing with community issues, yet it entails challenges such as time and effort to develop and maintain personal relationships with citizens. An online policing community can provide constant information about community issues and work as a live and synchronous portal of interaction between the public and practitioners. It could generate practitioner-based research questions and begin to produce data through 'citizen inquiry' methodology (the use of scientific method by the public to raise and resolve problems).

The 'nQuire-it' platform (see www.nquire-it.org) developed by the Open University has been used in this project to design 'missions' – crowd sourcing projects of interest to the police and communities - in an effort to develop connections and communication channels between police representatives and the community. A range of organisations were approached, including police stations, the neighbourhood watch, Safer MK, and Hate Crime network, with the intention to identify issues/topics of interest or worry that could be designed into missions and hosted in the nQuire-it platform. Being a crowd sourcing platform, nQuire-it could allow police and communities to engage with proposed missions, share experiences, gain information and discuss issues of common interest. Five missions were developed and shared with interested parties. Project findings were disseminated in a Centre meeting (9/5/17) and will be presented next March in the Society for Evidence-Based Policing (SEBP) conference in 2018.

Project report

The project 'Building sustainable policing –practitioners communities online' started in July 2016 and lasted for a year. A PhD student was recruited and worked part-time for the whole duration of the project (6 hours per week). The project is under the "Technology, data and knowledge management" theme of the Centre, and it focused in particular on how the police service can use technology, data and knowledge management to best effect in the fight against crime.

The aim of the project was to use the nQuire-it platform, a citizen science or crowdsourcing platform, to enable communication between police and communities and create over time practitioner communities able to produce questions and data of direct relevance to the ongoing research projects, and that would greatly augment the collaborative model already being used in these projects through the Centre. It would be very useful to develop sustainable connections with practitioners and the general public for the ongoing report of police-related issues and communication with police representatives that will last over and above the project duration.

The key aims of this project are:

- a. to identify the sorts of inquiries that are of most interest and benefit to the police and the public and create respective "missions" on the nQuire-it platform
- b. to share these inquiries widely for the community to participate

- c. to invite both practitioners and members of the public to initiate their own "missions" giving them the opportunity to report on issues they would like to investigate, and
- d. to provide ongoing support to the community evolved around the nQuire-it platform by facilitating active participation and engagement.

The nQuire-it platform

The nQuire-it platform (www.nquire-it.org) is a citizen science or crowd sourcing platform designed and maintained by The Open University. Members of the general public can join or create scientific missions of varied types. At the moment, the platform hosts three types of missions:

- a) Win-it missions set challenges with prizes for the winners. Each challenge needs a creative response. Some missions involve science experiments, e.g., 'Suggest an astronomy observation using the Open University's PIRATE remotely-controlled telescope'. Others tackle everyday problems, e.g., 'Propose an imaginative way to attract bumblebees to gardens'.
- b) Sense-it missions make use of the Sense-it mobile app to collect and share data using smartphone sensors (e.g., accelerometer, gyroscope, light, sound). For example, 'What is the fastest lift?'. The Sense-it app can be found in the Play Store.
- c) Spot-it missions allow you to capture images and spot things around us, such as strange signs and unusual uses of English.

Participants can select any of these missions and start creating their own Win-it, Sense-it or Spot-it mission. They can then invite other people to join missions by using Facebook, Twitter or Google accounts. The nQuire-it software is open source and anyone can join or create missions for free.

A recent collaboration between the BBC and The Open University aims to support people to do mass experiments using the platform. This will enable both scientists, and members of the public, to create and run online projects to explore social science issues such as, attitudes and personality. The nQuire-it platform will be redesigned to support new ways to enter responses, handling of personal data, and ways for participants to see overview results. It will then be linked to BBC TV or radio programmes to run large studies. The BBC initiative and the design of the platform will help people have a first contact with citizen science projects, including the policing-community missions, or engage with various projects others or themselves have set up.

Contacts with police and community

1. Direct Contact with Police Stations

The first avenue we pursued was to work with our direct contacts from the Centre. In late summer 2017, we visited xxx Police Station/Training facility and provided an introduction on the use of the platform (evidence café). We also brainstormed some ideas of how to use the platform to support their work. From this we learned a) that the police officers we spoke to did not want an additional outlet for reporting crime and b) any mission we did develop should support community responsibility. We have attempted to keep some of the officers we met in contact with us, but this has proven

difficult. We did create some missions based on these conversations and attempted to advertise them on Twitter and Facebook.

What they liked about the platform and nQuire-it: The concept of citizen science, the types of issues we wanted to explore

What they found challenging: The participants were concerned about it becoming another avenue for reporting crime. Their HR department also had difficulty in differentiating the difference between social media approaches to similar issues and using nQuire-it to gather the type of data they hoped to collect.

2. Neighbourhood Watch

We first began to contact NW programs by tweeting our missions at them and asking them to take part in those missions. Then, we found a contact within the Milton Keynes Neighbourhood Watch Association (MKNWA) and we began to work with xxx and xxx on developing a mission. They were interested in using the platform to find out more about why people join a NW scheme and their reasons for not doing so. A mission was created in collaboration with them.

What they liked about the platform and nQuire-it: The concept of citizen science, the types of issues we wanted to explore

What they found challenging: The language of the site (they did not like the word "mission" and found the word "idea" to be confusing), the way answers can be structured currently on the site (no option for a text answer except using Win-it missions, and the "idea" button prompts the user for a title, not a full answer)

3. Safer MK

We contacted xxx from Safer MK (a contact at the OU) and we had a meeting with him to discuss the policing missions. In the end, this particular contact was not interested in collecting more data. However, we did ask him to disseminate the mission. He planned to send it to his colleagues.

4. Hate Crime Network

We met with xxx of the Hate Crime Network to discuss the option of doing a mission on exploring the experience of hate crime in Milton Keynes. The Hate Crime Network is a local campaign to respond to the growth in hate crime following the Brexit Referendum. Together, we created a mission that combines the experience of the Open University, the Hate Crime Network, and a local LGBT organisation, Q:Alliance.

What they liked about the platform and nQuire-it: The concept of citizen science, the types of issues we wanted to explore

What they found challenging: The registration on a new site, especially since many of those who experience hate crime may not have access to technology (older migrants, refugees, for example). They also had some of the same confusions about the actual site as the MKNWA (concerning the language and the way that answers can be structured).

4. Local Schools

We contacted all of the primary and secondary schools in Milton Keynes. In particular, we focused on the xxx, as we already had connections there with their staff. We had several short phone calls with administrative staff, but it was difficult to move the project forward, so we began to contact some teachers independently. Teachers we contacted were worried about introducing new content this year in their classrooms and they asked us to contact them again at the end of the school year.

5. Other OU Staff and Researchers

We have met with several other colleagues from the OU about our work including: xxx, xxx, xxx. These meetings were about seeing if nQuire-it policing missions could provide any additional support to projects in which the academics were already involved or looking to launch. For example, for xxx, nQuire-it might be used during a winter school on the nexus of social science and computer science. For xxx and xxx, nQuire-it may form a part of a study examining diversity and equality in the online classroom.

Software development

One of the suggestions for improving the platform and making it more suitable for use with the police and communities was the design of a mobile application that will facilitate taking and uploading pictures to the nQuire-it policing missions. After securing funding from another source, a software developer worked on the design of the Spot-it app and its connection to those nQuire-it missions that require images such as the Spotting Safety Gaps mission (See next section). Spot-it is available in google play.

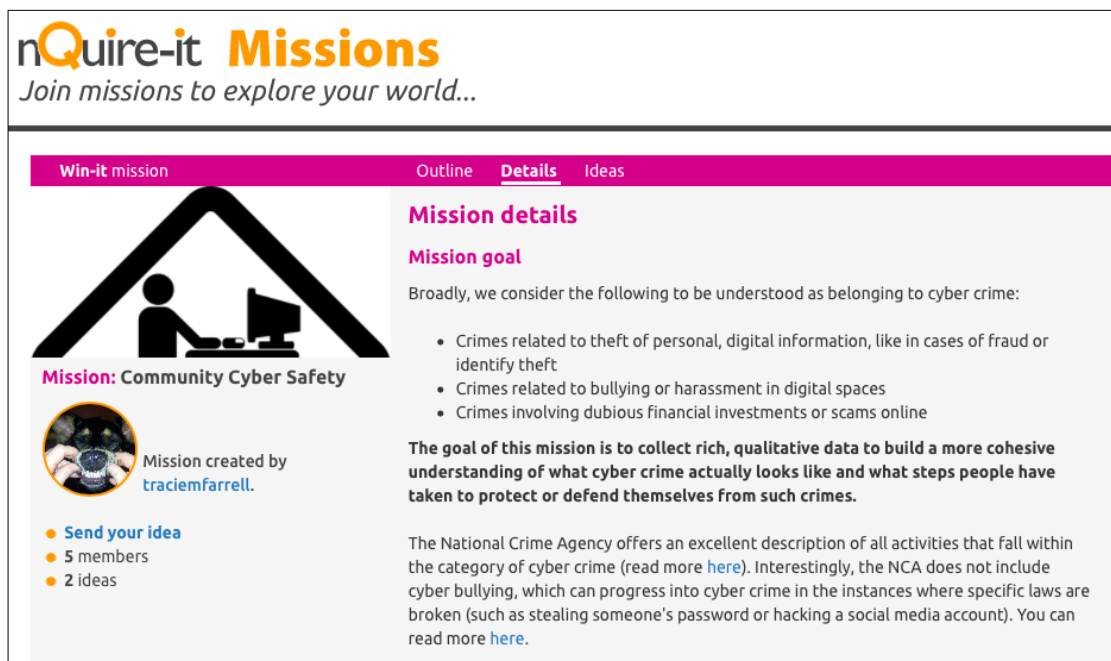
nQuire-it policing-community missions

The following nQuire-it missions were developed after consultation with the aforementioned organisations:

1. **Community cyber-safety:** Not everyone is aware of how best to protect oneself, or what a cyber attack actually looks like. We can help support one another by sharing our experiences with cyber crime, so that others can be more vigilant and aware of the consequences that cyber crime can have on one's own sense of security and on those around us. Join us in developing a picture of cyber crime that is more than statistics (See Figure 1).
2. **What is hate crime?** Hate crime is heinous and should not be tolerated. The worrying truth is, however, that experiences of hate crime are not rare. Whether they are reported or not, hate crimes and hate incidents happen every day. For those who are at risk of experiencing hate crime, it can be painful and frustrating to go through the process of reporting it. Still, it is important to *record* hate incidents and hate crimes, so that we can provide alternative spaces of support for survivors and also to demonstrate, in our own words, what the experience of hate crime really looks and feels like (See Figure 2).
3. **What do police officers want the public to know?** The goal of this mission is to challenge law enforcement to propose answers to the following question: What do you think is the most important thing that the public should know and understand about law enforcement or law enforcement officers? (See Figure 3).
4. **What roles should law enforcement have within communities?** Building understanding between the public and the police is an important part of

effective, fair policing. One of the challenges of this process is that the public do not understand enough about the roles and responsibilities of law enforcement. Another challenge, however, is that law enforcement is not always aware of how the public perception matches up with their own. To which extent do the public and law enforcement have similar or competing ideas of the roles and responsibilities of law enforcement? What factors might possibly play a role? Are their regional differences, for example? (See Figure 4).

5. **Spotting safety gaps:** The goal of this mission is to make actionable issues visible for communities and law enforcement to improve public safety for all community members (See Figure 5).



The screenshot displays the 'nQuire-it Missions' website interface. At the top, the logo 'nQuire-it Missions' is shown in orange and black, with the tagline 'Join missions to explore your world...'. Below the logo is a navigation bar with tabs for 'Win-it mission', 'Outline', 'Details' (which is selected), and 'Ideas'. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column features a large black icon of a person at a computer, with the text 'Mission: Community Cyber Safety' below it. Underneath is a circular profile picture of a person, followed by the text 'Mission created by traciemfarrell.' and a list of statistics: 'Send your idea', '5 members', and '2 Ideas'. The right column is titled 'Mission details' and contains a 'Mission goal' section. It states: 'Broadly, we consider the following to be understood as belonging to cyber crime:' followed by a bulleted list: 'Crimes related to theft of personal, digital information, like in cases of fraud or identify theft', 'Crimes related to bullying or harassment in digital spaces', and 'Crimes involving dubious financial investments or scams online'. Below this is a bolded paragraph: 'The goal of this mission is to collect rich, qualitative data to build a more cohesive understanding of what cyber crime actually looks like and what steps people have taken to protect or defend themselves from such crimes.' At the bottom of the right column, there is a paragraph of text: 'The National Crime Agency offers an excellent description of all activities that fall within the category of cyber crime (read more [here](#)). Interestingly, the NCA does not include cyber bullying, which can progress into cyber crime in the instances where specific laws are broken (such as stealing someone's password or hacking a social media account). You can read more [here](#).'

Figure 1: Community cyber-safety

nQuire-it Missions
Join missions to explore your world...

Win-it mission
Outline Details Ideas



Mission: What is hate crime?



Mission created by [traciemfarrell](#).

- Send your idea
- 5 members
- 3 ideas

Mission details

Mission goal

What is hate crime?

Hate crime is heinous and should not be tolerated.

The worrying truth is, however, that experiences of hate crime are not rare. Whether they are reported or not, hate crimes and hate incidents happen every day. For those who are at risk of experiencing hate crime, it can be painful and frustrating to go through the process of reporting it. Still, it is important to record hate incidents and hate crimes, so that we can provide alternative spaces of support for survivors and also to demonstrate, in our own words, what the experience of hate crime really looks and feels like.


The [Criminal Justice System](#) in the United Kingdom defines **Hate Crime** as:

"Any crime or incident which is perceived by the victim, or any other person, to be motivated by a hostility or prejudice, based on a persons real or presumed religion, sexual orientation, race, gender identity or disability"


Figure 2: What is hate crime?

nQuire-it Missions
Join missions to explore your world...

Win-it mission
Outline Details Ideas



Mission: What do police officers want the public to know?



Mission created by [traciemfarrell](#).

- Send your idea
- 7 members
- 3 ideas

You need to [sign in](#) before you can participate in projects.

Mission outline

Police officers are responsible for keeping communities safer, but what does the public actually know about conducting police work?

Recently, a question submitted to the question/answer website [Quora](#) received some attention from a retired police officer in the United States. To the question: "**What do police officers wish the general public knew?**," former Officer Tim Dees provided a personal and insightful answer (read more [here](#)). Possibly his most important statement, however, was that (in general) **the public knows very little about the experience of working in law enforcement and how this may affect their own living**. This makes it difficult to build the kind of police-community relationship that is believed to be a best practice for effective and fair policing (read more [here](#)).

One of the ways to make inroads toward this goal is to inform the public about the activities and experiences of law enforcement. Encouraging as many police officers as possible to reply will create a rich description of law enforcement that is much needed.

If you are a police officer, we invite you to participate in this mission by contributing an answer to the question:

What do you think is the most important thing that the public should know and understand about law enforcement or law enforcement officers?

Figure 3: What do police officers want the public to know?

nQuire-it Missions
Join missions to explore your world...

Win-it mission | Outline | **Details** | Ideas

Mission details

Mission goal

This mission is about **collecting evidence from the public** about what they think the role of law enforcement should be within their communities. We will be mapping ideas to different regions in the UK to see if regional differences in perceptions exist and to which extent. This information will be shared with law enforcement to assist in understanding more and improving police-community relationships.

This mission specifically invites members of the public to share their thoughts on the question:

What roles should law enforcement have within communities?

To assist you in preparing your answer, you may want to reflect on the following, related questions:

1. When was the last time you needed law enforcement and did you receive/didn't receive the help you needed?
2. Which experiences with law enforcement have stood out to you as being particularly positive/negative?
3. How do you feel that your expectations of law enforcement compare with that of others?

Mission: What roles should law enforcement have within communities?

Mission created by [traciefarrell](#).

- Send your idea
- 5 members
- 3 ideas

Figure 4: What roles should law enforcement have within communities?

nQuire-it Missions
Join missions to explore your world...

Spot-it mission | **Outline** | Details | Data | Upload

Mission outline

Feeling safe is an important part of a one's sense of wellbeing. It arises from feeling connected with those around us, having our basic needs met, and knowing that we are protected in times of crisis. Feeling unsafe negatively influences our body in a number of ways, both physical and psychological. People living in unsafe areas or conditions exhibit higher levels of depression, anxiety and generally poorer mental health than their counterparts living in safer areas. However, research has shown that developing feelings of empowerment, trust and social support (especially among high risk communities such as those that experience social exclusion, discrimination, violence, and poverty) can greatly reduce negative impacts on mental health.

The goal of this mission is to make actionable issues visible for communities and law enforcement to improve public safety for all community members.

Last picture

[See all](#)

Mission: Spotting Safety Gaps

Tags: [community equality](#) [Policing safe](#)

Mission created by [traciefarrell](#).

- 5 members
- 3 images

Figure 5: Spotting safety gaps

Future directions

Creating sustainable communities on the nQuire-it platform remains a challenge. Towards this direction we have partnered with the BBC as part of the Tomorrow's world initiative (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/tomorrowsworld>) to re-develop the nQuire-it platform and design large-scale citizen science experiments in which thousands of people will take part. This new version of nQuire-it will address design challenges

raised by our contacts (See above) and ensure that a user-friendly experience will be supported when the public joins a mission or initiates a new one. This will make it easier for police representatives and community members to create their own projects and seek answers through communication with others. The new platform including existing missions will be advertised in BBC TV and radio expecting to raise mass participation from the public. We plan to follow up with our contacts as soon as the new platform is ready, to raise awareness of this collaboration and motivate further participation to the policing missions by the police and communities. Also, we will present project outcomes in the coming Society for Evidence-Based Policing (SEBP) conference in 2018 and write up a publication detailing processes and outcomes from the project.