Embedding Ethics by Design
in the Policing of Digital Futures in Scotland

Final Report Form

June 2021

A. Summary

This section will be made available to our networks and stakeholders as well as the general public.

Please consider the following points:

Main objectives and context

Using novel methods, this programme of events brought together groups associated with debates on state powers of online surveillance to facilitate ethically-informed policy and practice. Scotland is currently in the process of embedding ethical digital policing. A core part of ethical practice is a consideration of the public and their perceptions. In addition, civil society groups have been vocal about online surveillance, but do not have regular opportunities for constructive dialogue with state agencies in Scotland in these matters, especially prior to policy and practice being enacted.

Building on findings from the 'Eyes Online' project (University of Dundee), these events used a variety of engagement methods, such as a knowledge exchange symposium and a creative writing workshop, to allow state agencies, civil society groups and researchers to find areas of convergence in online surveillance and data policy and practice. The views of the public were harnessed through a 'Cafe Science' event. These events facilitated hypothetical narratives on digital policing policy and practice which will produce new shared knowledge between police, policy makers and civil society to embed ethics in digital futures in Scotland and enhance 'deliberative democracy'.

Aims:

1. Through novel methods of knowledge exchange, to bring academic researchers, law enforcement, public policy and civil society agencies together to facilitate ethical policy and practice development in online surveillance in Scotland.

2. To bring a deliberative democratic approach to policy and practice in online surveillance in Scotland by utilising public engagement events to gather, incorporate and enhance public views.

3. To increase the transparency and legitimacy of the state in online surveillance methods in Scotland.

Objectives:

1. Bring together in new ways wider sources of knowledge regarding ethics practices to inform policy and practice in Scotland's approach to adapting to technological advancement in online surveillance and data intelligence

2. Create a space for open dialogue on sensitive topics through use of hypothetical narrative building

3. Create tools and resources that assist citizens in more active interaction with these practices and procedures to facilitate deliberative democracy.

An account of the insights resulting from the programme (including lessons around the theme of the Sustainable Development Goals)

Some of the main lessons from the programme include:

1) That the public and third sector agencies are willing to engage in constructive discussion and collaboration, even on a topic as heated as online state surveillance. When given a safe space in which to do so, barriers can be broken down.

2) That the public sector agencies are keen to have deeper engagement with the public to inform their work in relation to methods of digital policing, and are seeking opportunities to do so

3) That there remains a low level of literacy among the general public on how to exercise their data rights, both in terms of getting access to their data and to interpret the results they get

4) That the process of creative writing was a unique opportunity for practitioners to see their work from another perspective, and to engage in the emotional side of these issues. This is something for which daily practice does not often offer a space.

Main outcomes and (expected) impact

The main outcome was facilitating deeper connections between the public sector and third sector agencies involved in the work and monitoring of digital policing. Our SUII programme facilitated open discussion and constructive dialogue between key individuals in these groups, which we hope will continue into the future.

In addition, we facilitated the beginnings of discussion between the police and a partner to start work on a deliberative democracy event with the public.

Our main output was the website and chapbook for the sonnets we wrote in Event 4:

https://sites.dundee.ac.uk/fastidious-inquiry/

Key recommendations for end user / policy communities

1) That rather than seeing openness and transparency of practice as a risk, even in the fields of digital policing and online surveillance, that public sector agencies should regard these principles as core to their work. This will not only build confidence in the public; it will facilitate better and more constructive dialog with governance bodies and the third sector.

2) Individual members of the public need more support to exercise their data rights. As these are the necessary safeguard/balancing that complement the assignation of data gathering and collection rights to both private and public sector entities (a fact recognised also in the way in which courts have evaluated the legitimacy of these powers) effective rather than merely "on paper" ability to exercise them is crucial. It can be aided through better education, but also better online tools. These should not just make it easier for member of the public to gain access to their data, but also aid them in interpreting the results.

3) That representatives from the public and third sector are more willing to engage in constructive dialogue than may seem to be the case on the surface. Both have much to gain from increasing and deepening communication with the other. Working towards a common goal may facilitate this.

Planned follow up activities

As indicated above, discussions have commenced between our police partners and a public sector colleague to develop a deliberative democracy event on public confidence in policing. The insights from the public facing event are also now informing an EPSRC-funded project on cumulative data disclosure of which Schafer is a part, and which will try address recommendation 2 above.