

# Embedding a Culture of Interdisciplinary Open Research in Criminal Justice: A New Partnership for Ireland

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**Summary:** This special edition of the *Irish Probation Journal* celebrates its excellent track record of publishing open access criminal justice research and building links among researchers, practitioners and policymakers on the island of Ireland. Both probation services have expressed strong commitments to partnership working and to using research and evidence to inform their practices and decision-making, using the Journal to facilitate these discussions. With this in mind, it is important to consider how we can build on this open, collaborative approach to research, evidence-based policy and practice and publishing into the future.

This article represents the first output from a National Open Research Forum-funded project that aims to embed a culture of interdisciplinary open research in the field of criminal justice. The setting for this project is Ireland. Its authors are among the many research, criminal justice and community-sector professionals who represent their organisations on the new Criminal Justice Open Research Dialogue (CORD) Partnership, launched as part of the funded project. The article was developed collaboratively during the CORD Partnership's first event in Maynooth in January 2024, and then subsequently via an open authorship process through which partners could become named authors. It contextualises the establishment

of the CORD Partnership, outlining what we mean by a 'culture of open research' and situating our goals in Ireland's research and criminal justice policy frameworks. The piece then outlines the Partnership's agreed purposes and principles and provides some opening considerations as to the criminal justice sector's open-research needs. It concludes by describing the CORD Partnership's next steps. The views expressed here represent those of the named authors only, not of their organisations, nor of anyone who participates in the CORD Partnership but is not a named author on the article.

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**Keywords:** Criminology, criminal justice, open research, research partnership, Ireland, interdisciplinary, evidence-based policy, evidence-based practice, culture.

## Introduction

There is great potential for interdisciplinary open research to inform criminal justice policy and practice in Ireland, advancing such outcomes as public safety, health, inclusion, equality, trust and confidence in criminal justice, and transparency. At present, however, we have too few opportunities to co-produce research, exchange knowledge and collaborate to apply research findings. By working in partnership, we can explore and determine collectively how we might cultivate and embed an open research culture in criminal justice in Ireland in a locally appropriate way.

This thinking is in keeping with the open, collaborative approach to research–policy–practice engagement that has characterised the *Irish Probation Journal* (IPJ) for the past two decades. As the IPJ celebrates its twenty-first anniversary with this special issue, we are grateful to the editorial committee for including our article in what is otherwise a 'greatest hits' volume. Many of us have written for the IPJ in the recent past; many more of us await its annual publication eagerly, so that we might explore the latest criminological research and professional thinking from across the island. In this context, we are delighted to contribute to and complement this issue, outlining the initial stages from a future-focused project that aims both to transform collaborative criminal justice research in the Republic of Ireland, and to maximise the use of evidence in criminal justice policymaking and practice.

In October 2023, with funding from Ireland's National Open Research Forum (NORF) under its Open Research Call Fund, we began a project to develop and embed a culture of interdisciplinary open research in criminal

justice in Ireland. Over twelve months, the first author received funding to establish a 'researcher-policymaker-practitioner partnership' (R3P), facilitate three workshops for the partners in 2024, and conduct research on partnerships in other countries and disciplines to explore how best to develop open research cultures and partnerships in criminal justice.

In January 2024, 60 people gathered in Maynooth to launch the Criminal justice Open Research Dialogue (CORD) Partnership. This R3P includes a project consortium (Maynooth University, Dublin City University, South East Technological University, University of Limerick) and representatives of seven categories of affiliate partner: research organisations, criminal justice policymakers, agencies and oversight bodies, third-sector and independent services, civil society and advocacy groups, and the wider research ecosystem (such as research funders and university research development offices). At the time of writing, 117 persons represent over 50 organisations on the CORD Partnership, although this article represents the views of named authors only (58 persons working in 32 organisations).

The article aims to contextualise the CORD Partnership and define its purposes and principles. It explains what is meant by an 'open research culture' and analyses the Irish policy context in relation to open research and criminal justice research. It considers the Partnership's development, describing how two disciplines – restorative practices and design thinking – will be used to structure partnership working. The authors subsequently outline the agreements that were co-produced through our first event and the open authorship process. This begins with an explanation of how these processes were used to write this article. The following subsections explain why the CORD Partnership needs to exist, our aims and how we intend to achieve these, the challenges we expect, ten principles for the CORD Partnership, and several themes and questions addressing the sector's open-research needs. We finish by outlining CORD's next steps: two further events at which we will learn about research partnerships elsewhere and discuss the priorities and actions that might help sustain the Partnership after its initial funding period ends.

## **What is an open research culture and partnership?**

The idea of open research (or 'open science') represents a call to arms to disrupt longstanding research practices. The term is frequently used in the health, natural and physical sciences to promote the publication of raw datasets for research validation and replication, and further exploration. It

also refers to ensuring free access to research findings without paywalls so that they can be shared and applied for social benefit (Marsden and Morgan-Short, 2023). This is crucial when research is publicly funded and has the potential to improve people's lives (Suber, 2012) – allowing, for example, practitioners to access up-to-date research to inform their practice.

Changing these established, restrictive practices can be of considerable value in criminology and criminal justice (and in social sciences generally) (Buil-Gil *et al.*, 2023; Tennant *et al.*, 2016). However, this represents only a fraction of what open research practices, broadly interpreted, could help the discipline achieve. UNESCO's *Recommendation on Open Science* (2021, p. 7), adopted in Ireland's open research action plan (see DFHERIS, 2022), defines the concept expansively as including all practices that aim

to make multilingual scientific knowledge openly available, accessible and reusable for everyone, to increase scientific collaborations and sharing of information for the benefits of science and society, and to open the processes of scientific knowledge creation, evaluation and communication to societal actors beyond the traditional scientific community.

By implication, an open research approach is one where researchers collaborate with each other and with others across society to ensure that research processes are more inclusive, and that research data and findings are more discoverable, accessible, reusable and transparent, *and used for the benefit of society* (Hampson *et al.*, 2020). A review of literature on open science (Arza and Fressoli, 2018) points to three categories of benefits: enhanced research efficiency and novelty resulting from the impact of collaboration and resource sharing; the democratisation of research and its outputs through shared access to information and knowledge, with spillover effects for public education and empowerment; and relevance to public needs including through the inclusion of historically marginalised stakeholders and the collective, rather than private, ownership of knowledge assets and goods.

UNESCO's framing is suitable for criminology because many researching in this discipline aim to inform criminal justice policy and practice. In relation to UNESCO's focus on academic collaboration (which is common in criminology, if seldom straightforward or incentivised), criminologists often work across disciplines and borders to understand better how to improve community safety, meet the needs of those affected by crime and justice processes, and improve the working lives of justice professionals. Relatedly,

researchers who wish to use their findings to benefit society often collaborate with some or all of the diverse actors – from policymakers and practitioners in public, private and third-sector services, to oversight agencies and civil society groups – who are in a position to co-produce research and utilise the knowledge derived in their work to help the public. Further, criminologists recognise that persons who interact with criminal justice in some way can make a valuable contribution to research processes – and, according to Diaz-Gil et al. (2023), that they have the right to do so if they wish.

UNESCO's definition of open research goes beyond narrower goals of enabling researchers to replicate each other's work and open access publishing, to encompass the cross-sectoral partnership working needed in our field. As Nosek et al. (2015, p. 1422) observed, without an 'open research culture' that facilitates, incentivises and rewards the use of open practices throughout the research process, it is easier and more common to agree in principle that open research practices are important, than it is to enact the approach in reality. Certainly, researchers cannot achieve this cultural change alone. As Kowalczyk et al. (2022) and Steinhardt et al. (2023) argue, the research ecosystem – research funders, professionals and managers – should participate to facilitate a structural shift in research leadership, resourcing and evaluation. Moreover, in applied policy areas there is a need to involve policymakers, practitioners and civil society in networking, research co-production, knowledge translation and other activities that would, in UNESCO's framing, make research processes inclusive and ensure that findings are applied for social benefit. A 'culture of open research' would therefore create a situation whereby the structures which shape the work of researchers, policymakers and practitioners, and the attitudes that underpin and reflect our behaviours and the discretionary choices we make within the structures, systematically encourage, enable and align with open research principles and goals.

One mechanism that might contribute to the necessary cultural change is a thematic research partnership that brings together all the actors working in a given area of research and policy, and that emphasises open research principles and practices. Although few research partnerships in the social sciences and humanities are explicitly open research oriented, we can learn much from the structures, goals and methods of existing R3Ps. With reference to examples in childcare and education, Supplee et al. (2023) argue that R3Ps help build relationships that enable the development, interpretation and use of evidence. They cite Farrell et al. (2021, p. vi) who, in educational contexts, define an R3P as

a long-term collaboration aimed at educational improvement or equitable transformation through engagement with research [...] intentionally organized to connect diverse forms of expertise and shift power relations in the research endeavor to ensure that all partners have a say in the joint work.

This type of collaboration – bringing together the persons who conduct research with the persons who can apply its findings in their work – can, if it is submitted, contribute towards an ‘open research culture’ in criminal justice. It increases opportunities for researchers, policymakers and practitioners to speak and engage with varied forms of knowledge that can inform their work, on the shared understanding that these collaborations will benefit others in the sector, stakeholders, policymakers and civil society (Bastow *et al.*, 2014). Partnership working makes it more likely that research will be co-produced and have buy-in from stakeholders at the outset. In turn, this should improve access to data for researchers, to research processes and knowledge for those who are historically excluded from these, and to research findings for policymakers, practitioners and civil society, resulting in greater use of research to achieve social justice goals (Bastow *et al.*, 2014; Marsden and Morgan-Short, 2023). Moreover, partnership working is considered an enabler of the effective implementation of change (Fynn *et al.*, 2022).

This does not mean that any form of partnership will necessarily achieve these goals. Research has identified the features of successful partnerships, some of which, such as relationships among the persons involved, are discussed later in the article. Still, in a small jurisdiction with positive pre-existing relationships between many of those working in criminal justice research, policy and practice, there is scope to explore whether a partnership can help us understand what a cultural shift towards an open research approach should look like and identify the steps we can take to move in that direction.

## **Irish policy context**

Recent developments in both research policy and criminal justice policy align closely with the CORD Partnership’s plans. The National Open Research Forum (NORF), which provided the funding for this project, is underpinned by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) *National Action Plan for Open Research 2022–2030* (DFHERIS, 2022). This followed *Impact 2030*, a national research and

innovation strategy (Government of Ireland, 2022), and preceded the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's (DPER) second five-year *Open Data Strategy 2023–2027* (DPER, 2023). Each policy document recognises the social value of research and its potential to inform public policy. The *Open Data Strategy* says that providing access to high-quality government data promotes public trust, while *Impact 2030* includes having a positive social impact and improving social wellbeing among the elements of its five strategic pillars. 'Establishing a culture of open research' is a theme in the *National Action Plan for Open Research*, intending to contribute to 'a research system fully aligned with open research principles and practices' (DFHERIS, 2022, p. 6).

The operationalisation of Irish national open data strategies over the past decade is evidenced by the (upwards of) 15,000 datasets that are available on the governmental open-source portal (DPER, 2023). However, Ireland has yet to sign the Open Data Charter (ODC), a joint civil society and government initiative seeking to enhance government data accessibility for evidence-informed policymaking (ODC, 2024). The European Union's most recent Open Data Maturity Assessment ranks Ireland ninth among the EU27, down from first in 2019. In the EU classification, Ireland is categorised as a 'fast-track' nation, but not a 'trend setter'. Ireland has some ground to make up in data provision, in evidencing the impact of open data, and on some measures of data quality (Data Europa EU, 2023).

Other policy developments align with CORD's activities by supporting researcher–policymaker engagement. At the time of writing, for example, we are awaiting the government response to a public consultation meant to contribute towards a 'framework for engagement' which 'focused on enhancing connectivity between government departments and the research system' (DFHERIS, 2023, p. 5). This also cited the *Civil Service Renewal Strategy* (Government of Ireland, 2021, p. 15) which proposed to establish a new Civil Service Research Network and stated an aspiration to

develop mechanisms in conjunction with higher education institutions and research funders to exchange evidence and research insights between the Civil Service and the research community in relation to policy priorities and major societal challenges.

'Exchange' is the operative word here, reflecting the two-way learning that can take place. These fora should enable both the dissemination and the



application of research findings, and help researchers to understand better the challenges and constraints the public and community sectors face in applying research, informing future knowledge production and dissemination processes (Phillipson *et al.*, 2012).

Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) and the Irish Research Council (IRC) have both recognised the urgency of facilitating greater engagement between researchers and policymakers, given the need for the former to contribute to the latter and, as noted, for those involved in both enterprises better to understand each other's knowledge, processes and constraints (Doyle, 2021; Irish Research Council, 2024; Science Foundation Ireland, 2023). Doyle (2021) contends that there should be new architecture to ensure that research findings inform policymaking. She urges civil servants, government and research-performing institutions to 'enhanc[e] the modes of connectivity and dialogue across the research and policy communities' and establish 'strong and profitable research-policy networks' (Doyle, 2021, p. 3). A recent OECD (2023, p. 8) report on strengthening public policy in Ireland likewise proposes that the civil service pay 'stronger attention to data-based reform initiatives' and develop 'data sharing networks through external partnerships'. Increasing contact frequency and relationship quality to place research at the centre of policymaking are recurring themes across these varied sources. Open research is not mentioned in the Research and Innovation Bill, 2024, which will merge the IRC and SFI into one body, Research Ireland. However, the Bill's stated objectives do include to 'strengthen engagement between the research and innovation system' on the one hand, and 'enterprise, government and public bodies, the voluntary sector and society' on the other (DFHERIS, 2024). This indicates that there could be scope to embed open research ideals in the structures and culture of the new agency.

In Irish criminal justice, Hamilton (2023) observes a recent growth in research-active scholars, improvements in the quality of criminal justice data, and increased opportunities for state funding for research. Still, significant gaps in justice data availability remain, while Ireland has much work to do to catch up with the stronger traditions of collaboration between higher education and state institutions elsewhere in Europe (see also Healy *et al.*, 2016; Lynch *et al.*, 2020; Marder and Hamilton, 2023).

Recent developments in these areas, Hamilton (2023) continues, include funding calls from the Department of Justice, Sentencing Guidelines and Information Committee, and the Policing Authority (including co-operation with the IRC and, most recently, An Garda Síochána), as well as investments

in data collection infrastructure and analytics in the Department of Justice and criminal justice agencies. In the justice sector, a *Data and Research Strategy* (Department of Justice and Equality, 2018, p. 7) stated the desire to see ‘strong research partnerships developed with the external research and evaluation community’. In 2022, the review of penal policy (Department of Justice, 2022) included several actions that either involved commissioning research, or that were assigned to the Department’s Research and Data Analytics team. In Autumn 2023, the Department of Justice collaborated with the Courts Service and Probation Service to organise a one-day event on evidence-informed policy. Moreover, the Association for Criminal Justice Research and Development has long provided a forum for research-policy-practice engagement through its annual conferences and other activities. Overall, there is a clear trend towards greater engagement between policymakers and researchers in this field.

At the same time, studies involving access to justice institutions’ data, professionals or people who have interacted with criminal justice are being published with increasing frequency (e.g. Daly et al., 2022; Doyle et al., 2022; Gagliardi and Rice, 2023; Gagliardi et al., 2023; Garrihy et al., 2023; Gulati et al., 2021, 2022; Haynes et al., 2023; Haynes and Schweppe, 2017, 2019; Joyce et al., 2022; Marder, 2022; Marder and Kurz, 2023; O’Connell, 2016; Skinnis, 2019). Still, the challenges that other countries have overcome – including, but not limited to, data protection – are often understood to be barriers to independent research and the collection and publication of new datasets.

Ireland has a clear policy direction towards open research and the greater use of research and evidence in policymaking. It is unlikely, however, that this is achievable without bottom-up initiatives that enable researchers, policymakers and practitioners to consider the exact steps by which a culture of open research can be embedded in each discipline and policy area in practice. Given the volume of criminal justice reforms currently under consideration, the time is now for Ireland’s research, criminal justice and community sectors to think strategically and collectively about which priorities they might share and how and on what they might collaborate in the coming years.

## **Building an open research partnership for criminal justice in Ireland**

### ***Inspirations from UK policing research***

The genesis of the CORD Partnership was inspired by two policing research partnerships from the UK. In recent years, Ireland has hosted the Scottish

Institute for Policing Research's (SIPR) Director at the North–South Criminology Conference in 2023 and the (then) Director of the N8 Policing Research Partnership (N8PRP) at an online event organised by the Policing Authority in 2021.

These partnerships both focus on policing research, with partners drawn mostly from police organisations and universities in Scotland and Northern England, respectively. Although the CORD Partnership relates to the criminal justice sector as a whole, SIPR and the N8PRP provide useful models of sustainable and action-oriented partnership working. For example, they include researchers from many disciplines and criminal justice organisations in research co-production. They have existed for many years after their initial funding cycles came to an end. They also extend far beyond a single research project, instead encompassing a geographical area, broad theme and period of time.

Finally, they both operate small grant schemes to which partners can apply to co-produce, conduct, publish and apply original research (Crawford, 2020; SIPR, 2024). Their approaches tally with findings from the nascent literature exploring the dynamics that make research partnerships effective. For example, they have dedicated infrastructure to support administration and governance, while their durability enables trust and understanding to be built over time and means that partners can decide together how to respond to changing circumstances (Pesta *et al.*, 2019; Supplee *et al.*, 2023).

### ***Working structures: Restorative practices and design thinking***

Given that CORD's initial funding neither extends past 2024 nor covers new empirical research projects, our goal in 2024 is to explore whether partners can align around an exciting direction and to agree how best to sustain our collaboration in the future. The grant provides funding for three events, which will be structured using restorative practices and design thinking. Using these methods will help us to build relationships, participate equally in dialogue and think creatively. We can build consensus on certain issues, while retaining a distance and remaining 'critical friends'. This approach is underpinned by research evidence indicating the constituent features of successful research partnerships – positive relationships and shared aims and goals – and makes our work unique internationally.

The literature on research partnerships implies that relationships are an essential component of success. Williamson *et al.* (2019) interviewed researchers and policymakers working in partnership. They found that 'the most frequently mentioned facilitators of co-production were things that

allowed long-term relationships and trust to develop' between the groups (Williamson et al., 2019, p. 7). In Voller et al. (2022, p. 530), after reviewing guidance on research partnerships, the authors concluded that long-term commitments need the 'time to establish and build meaningful relationships at an individual and institutional level'. Newman et al. (2019, p. 35) similarly list 'invest[ing] in the relationship' as one of their eight principles for fair, equitable research partnerships. Reed (2018), an authority in research impact, contends that researchers should prioritise relational approaches. Finally, in criminal justice, Rudes et al. (2014) designate establishing and maintaining relationships as two factors determining the success or failure of R3Ps. As Turin et al. (2022, p. 7) reflect, however, research partnerships seldom consciously prioritise activities that foster 'mutual connection, understanding and engagement'.

Restorative practices are a set of values and skills that help build relationships through group dialogue. They are the first author's main research area, and a concept in which several CORD partners have experience and training. Our events use a restorative process known as a circle process, in which groups sit in circles, a facilitator asks a question, and the right to respond (or to pass) revolves around participants sequentially. This is structured using a talking piece, physically handed between persons to signify whose turn it is to speak without interruption. The aim is to give each participant an equal opportunity to contribute, and to reduce (but not remove altogether) the domination that could result from power imbalances and personality traits in unstructured groupwork (e.g. Pointer et al., 2020). Pertinently, circle processes always begin with relational questions, inviting participants to share their feelings, stories and information about themselves as people. This seeks to build trust and help people get to know each other, creating a positive social climate that encourages openness and participation.

Design thinking is another concept which, like restorative practices, provides both a principled and practical framework for structuring collaborative working. By way of its principles, design thinking assumes that outcomes improve when decision-makers empathise and engage in dialogue with those who are affected by their decisions (Government of Ireland, 2022b; Vaughn et al., 2022). This relates to CORD because, as noted, embedding a culture of open research will require changes and actions from across the research, justice and community sectors. A wide array of persons from these cohorts should therefore be involved to maximise buy-in and realism in planning. Practically, design includes exercises that promote creative thinking, iteration and consensus building in groupwork (Devitt et al., 2021).

In our context, design thinking is suitable for several reasons. Firstly, government policy is that the Irish public sector should use design principles to support collaborations, following the publication of the *Design Principles for Government* (Government of Ireland, 2022b). This policy notes the overlap between design processes and innovation, which is significant because the justice sector is the first to write and publish an innovation strategy, incorporating relevant commitments to engage stakeholders and share knowledge in pursuit of service improvement (Department of Justice, 2023). Secondly, more substantively, design thinking provides the tools to enable a group to consider shared goals. Reflecting on a social welfare research partnership in a 'collaborative centre' in Tilburg University, Numans *et al.* (2019, p. 1) suggest that this succeeded because they enabled 'the participation of multiple stakeholders and a shared responsibility and control over ideas, processes, and outcomes'. Similarly, Williamson *et al.* (2019, p. 7) say that

shared aims and goals were seen as the fundamental building block of successful partnerships, and something that motivated persons to withstand the difficulties and challenges that can emerge over the course of partnerships.

The implication is that for the CORD Partnership to stand the best chance of sustainability, we should make use of the first year to enable partners to participate meaningfully in a process by which shared aims and plans are identified. Finally, research has implied that restorative practices and design thinking are complementary: the former facilitates participation from persons who might otherwise remain quiet; the latter can help turn large volumes of information into a consensus on specific, context-responsive and achievable actions (Marder *et al.*, 2022).

As all those who have organised or attended a workshop know, it can be challenging to deliver events that make the most of any time spent together in person by facilitating people to have the right conversations. Combining restorative and design approaches will give us a good chance of delivering events that enable meaningful participation in decision-making and foster both dialogue and action. CORD has funding for three workshops in 2024. At the first (in January 2024), restorative and design approaches were used to enable partners to contribute to the development of the CORD Partnership's purposes and principles and consider the criminal justice sector's open-research needs.

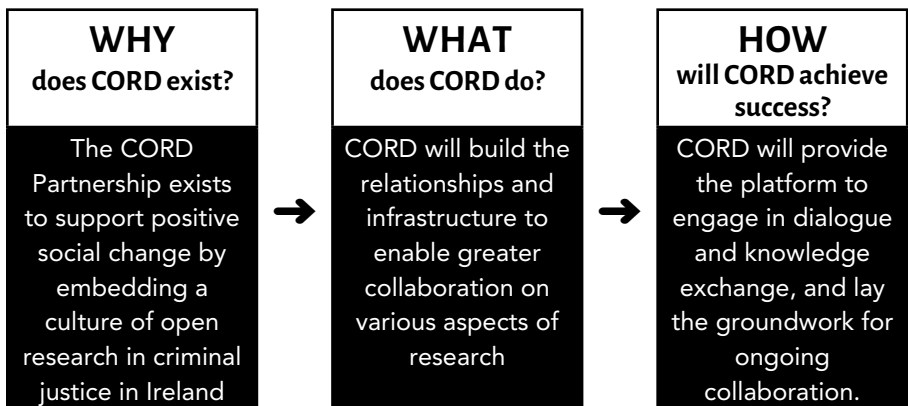
## Agreeing the purposes and principles of the CORD Partnership

### *Pre-survey, workshop and open authorship processes*

Our first event took place in January 2024. It aimed to build relationships and understanding, discuss and agree upon a set of principles for the Partnership, consider its aims and explore the sector's open-research needs. It was an opportunity to discuss our aspirations – or, as Martin (2014) says, to develop and agree on a statement of strategy which, for all its likely imperfections and imprecision, makes the logic of our work explicit. The event was facilitated using restorative circle processes: eight trained partners facilitated groups of six to eight persons. These discussions did not focus on actions, which will be discussed at the Partnership's third workshop in summer 2024 and published separately in a project report.

Before the event, we circulated a survey so that partners could contribute their views regarding the Partnership's 'why', 'what' and 'how' (see Figure 1), and the challenges it is likely to face. This reflects the design process, in that we collected participants' views before coming together for a collaborative workshop (Vaugh et al., 2022). Generating and exploring ideas are time-intensive activities. Collecting and analysing these beforehand means that participants have more time, with less pressure on their mental space and energy, when physically present (Schelle et al., 2015). This streamlined co-creation during our event by allowing us to discuss ideas that participants had already produced.

**Figure 1:** *The 'why', 'what' and 'how' of the CORD Partnership*



Supported by the third author, the first and second authors synthesised the 70 responses into a narrative form. This was presented at the event. A further draft of these sections, incorporating feedback collected at the event, was circulated in an editable shared document afterwards. Feedback that was incorporated included the need to explain further the desired impact on society, and provide more information on the ways in which we will work together and the value that partnership working will add, and how we will understand and recognise each other's constraints in our efforts to promote engagement. Three drafts of this article were then circulated as a shared document. This open authorship process invited all partners to propose additions and other edits to the article and to join as authors, before the third version went only to the named authors for any final observations prior to submission. What follows is the text – our aims, principles and open-research needs – on which the named authors of this article have agreed through this collaborative process.

### ***Why does the CORD Partnership exist?***

The CORD Partnership exists to support positive social change by embedding a culture of interdisciplinary open research in criminal justice in Ireland. This will contribute towards an Ireland in which everyone is safer from harm and can access inclusive justice services which meet their needs. The Partnership is needed to facilitate opportunities for stakeholders to discuss how they can best collaborate to design, conduct and make use of research, and learn from each other's experiences and knowledge.

We believe that the co-production of new research and datasets and the wider communication of research findings can combine to provide the evidence base needed for future criminal justice policy and practice. This will help us to challenge and transform aspects of academic culture that are frequently individualistic and limit the knowledge produced by research to academic audiences, so that academic researchers work more collaboratively across institutions and disciplines, and with persons who might apply research findings. This will also underpin more transparent, inclusive approaches to developing evidence-based policies and practices by making data and research more accessible, and enabling the incorporation of evidence and diverse sources of knowledge into policy formulation, implementation and evaluation processes.

In short, the more we collaborate, the stronger we will be in our efforts to meet the needs of the increasingly global community in which we live, and of

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any individuals for whose welfare we bear specific responsibility in the context of our professional roles. Adopting an open research mindset will help us to co-operate and problem-solve the many issues to which research and evidence can contribute.

### ***What will the **CORD Partnership** do?***

The Partnership will build the relationships and structures to enable greater collaboration on various aspects of research – conducting new primary, empirical research, improving access to existing data (such as existing administrative datasets), collecting new datasets and developing data collection structures, and providing policymakers and practitioners with better access to researchers and to research findings. This will create a culture of open research that increases the volume, quality and application of research and research opportunities. This will also increase both the research capacity and literacy of the state and community sectors, and researchers' understandings of policymaking processes and different forms of practice. Ireland may be at a relatively early stage in forming an open approach to criminal justice research, but the conditions are present or developing that will help us to become global leaders. We will openly share knowledge and the lessons we learn to avoid duplication and maximise collaboration, support young and emerging professionals, and inform colleagues' work in other fields, policy areas and countries. We will also seek to ensure that research both includes and recognises the importance of lived experience in knowledge creation and co-production.

### ***How might we collaborate to achieve this?***

The CORD Partnership will help us to realise these goals by fostering dialogue and knowledge exchange, and by laying the groundwork for ongoing research collaborations. In relation to the former, the Partnership will create space for open dialogue. This is not about lectures or other monologues, but about people from different disciplines and diverse professional backgrounds listening to each other on an equal, human level. This will build trust and relationships so that partners feel able to be open and honest, are willing to listen deeply, and can learn from and better understand each other. Relationships are a central part of the groundwork the Partnership aims to lay, its events being a space for connection that enables bilateral or multilateral co-operation, either independently of or



connected to the Partnership. The Partnership will be a pool of resources and knowledge into which all partners can tap, and a forum that creates the opportunities to do so.

Our 'knowledge exchange' cannot be only (as the term is often conceived) two-way exchanges between academics and 'non-academics', linked to a single research project. Rather, it must be multi-directional, in recognition of the diversity of knowledge and interests in both the research and criminal justice sectors. The research sector includes academics from diverse institution types and disciplines, as well as independent researchers who often undertake strategic and evaluation research with the criminal justice and community sectors. In addition, the criminal justice sector includes policymakers, state agencies and their oversight bodies; community-sector services of different kinds and civil society and advocacy groups may consider themselves to be part of, or as having a broader or different remit than, the criminal justice sector. Knowledge can be exchanged in many directions – including between those in different roles and disciplines, and with varying priorities and experiences, *within* the criminal justice and higher education sectors – and in an ongoing way. This approach is part of the groundwork needed for the Partnership, as the quality of the agreements we reach, and the extent to which these are likely to meet the needs of society and our sectors, is contingent on the range of thought present in their development. That is, the more people who are involved, the more representative, legitimate and applicable our agreements (on open research priorities and actions, for example) will be.

Some of us have some very specific ideas of what empirical research is needed and what types of infrastructure would help us to 'open up' existing research knowledge. Others amongst us have little experience of research and research partnerships and are unsure as to what contribution we will be able to make, given our specific positions in criminal justice. The Partnership will provide access to the opportunities, people and information to help each of us consider and share our views, irrespective of our starting point.

### ***What challenges will we face?***

Partnership working of any kind can present many challenges (for one example of these and how they were overcome in the drug policy context in Ireland, see Comiskey, 2020). Even research partnerships with limited activities and timeframes between small numbers of people and organisations are difficult to sustain. The CORD Partnership involves dozens of organisations of different types across the entire jurisdiction and aims to continue after the

initial funding period. The sheer number of partners and the likely diversity of our organisational cultures and priorities will make reaching agreement difficult. In addition, power and resource imbalances exist among partners. For example, although researchers do not constitute the majority of persons involved in the Partnership (50 out of 117), they are still the best represented of the seven partner categories and have a significant portion of their professional life dedicated to the task of research, which the vast majority of those who work in policy and practice do not. Moreover, some partners have more or less power because of their size, authority or financial position (or position as a source or recipient of funding). Building consensus in such a context requires working structures that reduce the effects of power imbalances and build trust and relationships that make us more comfortable being open during discussions. It was also posited at the first CORD event that, although a broad range of professionals and academic disciplines were involved, the Partnership needs to consider its ethnic diversity and discuss how to include persons who are overrepresented in, or have lived experience of, criminal justice in its work.

Sustaining engagement is another challenge. Even in the first instance, dedicating time to the topic of research is difficult for partners for whom this is not part of their day-to-day roles. The reality is that the present levels of enthusiasm may wane over time given competing priorities for us and our organisations and depending on the time commitment required to travel to and attend events and to contribute to the Partnership in other ways. If the Partnership loses momentum, and if people change roles and those replacing them do not buy in as quickly, it will likely be difficult to sustain the level and breadth of engagement achieved at the outset. Related to this is the challenge of ensuring an inclusive approach with representation across social groups and among those with lived experience. Moreover, we vary in our level of freedom to engage in different ways. For some partners, for example, there are no barriers to speaking with legislators and the media. Others cannot do this, nor be seen to support others in doing this, because of the specific roles they occupy in the legal system. For academics, there may be institutional pressure to spend time on certain project types or publish in international outlets that do not necessarily align with open research ideals. Balancing collaboration while respecting each other's constraints and pressures is a key challenge in sustaining engagement.

Finally, for many of us, our enthusiasm to engage in open research draws on our professional or personal commitments to social change. Dialogue is

important, but the Partnership must find a way to ensure that this leads to action and makes change happen. This is vastly challenging given that many of the factors that inhibit a culture of open research – including access to data – are beyond the control of any of us. Managing our expectations, celebrating small wins, and recognising the long-term nature of this endeavour will be crucial to create and sustain momentum.

### ***Principles of the CORD Partnership***

Another task undertaken at the first event was to develop a set of principles to which we can commit as we interact and collaborate in research contexts in the future. Both restorative practices and design thinking involve beginning with principle development. Restorative practitioners (e.g. Hopkins, 2015; Pointer, 2019) believe that when a new community forms, agreeing a set of principles can clarify members' expectations of each other and represent something to consult when making decisions in the future. Similarly, in design-thinking processes, a set of working principles can both represent the group's ambitions at a given time and inform members' mindsets as they work together (Government of Ireland, 2022b). The Government of Ireland (2022c) has also published a set of values and principles that aim to guide its collaboration with the community and voluntary sector. In our workshop, participants were shown the Government of Ireland (2022b) *Design Principles for Government* for inspiration – not least, because of their brevity.

The process used Padlet, an education technology service, to enable participants at the event to complete the sentence 'The CORD Partnership will...' using their mobile devices. Contributions were anonymous and could be seen live by all participants as they were being submitted. Next, participants were asked to review all submissions and vote for up to three. The first and second authors then spent fifteen minutes counting votes, synthesising popular and recurring themes and, ultimately, drafting six principles. These were presented back to the full group, who were then asked, in circles, if they felt that anything was missing, if there were any changes they wanted to be made, and if there was dissent or consensus on the draft principles. Circle facilitators collected and presented this feedback, with the group determining that a consensus had yet to be reached and additions and changes were necessary. The feedback noted that the draft principles omitted a sense of what the Partnership aimed to achieve and was collaborating towards, and that it should include the need for research processes to be ethical in their engagement with people beyond the Partnership, as well as the need for shared action.

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Following this process, when working together to embed a culture of open research in criminal justice in Ireland, we have agreed to:

1. Connect and discuss criminal justice on an equal footing
2. Respect each other's skills and knowledge
3. Build a culture of trust and openness
4. Create a safe, inclusive space to share and learn
5. Understand each other's capacities and constraints
6. Maintain the highest ethical research standards
7. Create opportunities to share knowledge
8. Take actions that affect people's lives positively
9. Collaborate on shared activities
10. Contribute to evidence-based policy and practice.

These are principles, loosely defined: they represent 'general norms that leave considerable room for judgment in many cases' (Beauchamp and Childress, 2001, p. 13), but they are not necessarily all norms of the same 'type', as defined by the ethics literature. For example, some, such as 'respect each other's skills and knowledge' refer to how we should treat each other within the partnership. Others are more outward-looking, relating to how we should treat others in research settings, not least as we 'maintain the highest ethical research standards' when collecting and using data. Some represent our aims (e.g. 'take actions that affect people's lives positively'), or relate to the processes by which we will achieve those aims (e.g. 'create opportunities to share knowledge'). Arguably, what is most interesting about these principles is that they closely reflect open research, focusing on creating space for engagement and participation through mutual commitment to the responsible sharing of resources. Certainly, they will be of value in informing future work to consider shared actions, while representing (as restorative and design literatures suggests) statements that reflect where we are now, and that we can reference later as we work together – bilaterally or multilaterally – to achieve the aims outlined earlier.

### ***Exploring the sector's open-research needs***

In the final session at the event, participants began to explore the open-research needs of the criminal justice sector. They initially wrote and, in circles, shared the research needs that related to their own day-to-day work, before a second round of circles aimed to help participants think beyond

their own roles and agree three open-research questions or needs relating to the biggest issues in Irish criminal justice at that time. Facilitators recorded the issues, questions and needs on which the groups agreed, and presented these back to the full group. At that stage, the group agreed that these notes would be collated and that this paper would include a short analysis of the themes and questions that emerged on the day, cutting across criminal justice. This analysis was conducted by the first and fourth authors, and circulated within a draft article. The analysis produced seven themes that partners expressed an interest in considering, discussing and exploring. Alphabetically, these are:

- 1. Collecting and using data:** What data do criminal justice institutions and victim services collect about crime, sentences and the services provided? What datasets are missing, and how might we collect them and make them available for research? How can we ensure that these data – including qualitative data on lived experiences – and research evidence from other countries inform policies and practices?
- 2. Prejudice and social division:** What were the causes and consequences of recent riots? What are the implications for public order and protest policing and human rights? Could restorative justice help to repair the harm done? What are the levels, causes and consequences of prejudice in Ireland? What communication methods and strategies will help us to reduce social division?
- 3. Privacy in criminal justice:** How can we ensure that privacy rights are respected in the context of proposals to use new technologies, such as artificial intelligence and facial recognition?
- 4. Public attitudes, policymaking and criminal justice:** What are Irish public attitudes to criminal justice? To what extent do these inform political decision-making? What methods or strategies will help us to use evidence to inform public knowledge about crime, victimisation and justice?
- 5. The future of Irish criminal justice:** In which justice interventions and community and social services should we invest to have the greatest positive impact on society and crime? What is the role of (mental) health and education services in preventing and reducing the impact of crime, or helping people who interact with criminal justice? How can justice/non-justice agencies align to prevent and respond to gender-based violence? How can we reduce the prison population? What

resources are needed to 'future proof' our justice system, and to ensure consistency and availability of services around the country? How should drugs be regulated in Ireland?

6. **Understanding criminal justice practices:** What does the day-to-day work of the practitioners working across the criminal justice process look like? How can we analyse the reoffending rates of different interventions, such as diversion, probation supervision and imprisonment?
7. **Young people:** How can we support young people to avoid and desist from crime and problem drug use? What should be the role of schools, (mental) health services and other community services and civic organisations in this context?

These themes demonstrate a strong, shared commitment to harnessing data and research findings to understand better and inform criminal justice processes and practices for the benefit of society. They reflect the inherently applied nature of the work we aim to do together, and the shared goal of positive social change, as outlined earlier. The types of work required to answer these questions will vary. Some are questions on which there is already substantial international research, which, drawing on concepts of translational criminology (e.g. Pesta *et al.*, 2019), we can synthesise for application to our context. Answering others will require new empirical research projects to understand human and institutional behaviour, and action research and evaluations that take place alongside developments in policy and practice. At the same time, we can collaborate to maximise the potential use of existing administrative data and develop new data-collection infrastructure. We will not answer every question and complete every task, but this represents a strong basis from which we can decide what to prioritise.

## Next steps

In an article in which the authors analyse their experiences of an R3P involving their university and a legislative committee on criminal justice, Brancale *et al.* (2021, p. 812) conclude:

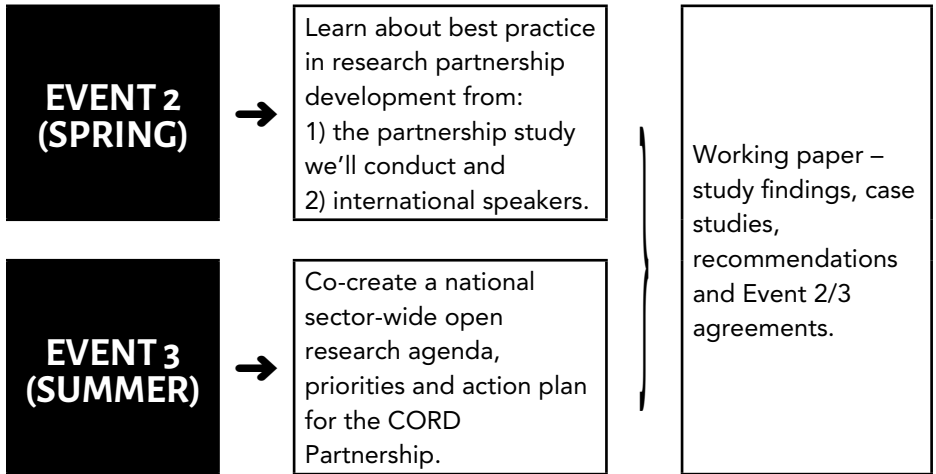
criminology is now on a forward trajectory in its ultimate realization of increased policy relevance. A prominent vehicle for this forward trajectory [is] partnerships between criminal justice researchers and policymakers

and practitioners. RPPs have been identified as a best practice for translating research into criminal justice practice and they can also be used as a mechanism for providing evidence to policymakers.

At the same time, their analysis demonstrates the many challenges involved in the establishment of a partnership that leads to evidence-informed criminal justice policy. They note that their goal to reduce ethnic disparities in criminal justice outcomes was not realised because the time available to research and submit evidence (for researchers) and review evidence (for policymakers) was not conducive to the integration of evidence into policy formulation. Moreover, the (party) politicisation of lawmaking in America, where this R3P operated, meant that many legislators had decided what to support before considering evidence.

Although justice policymaking has been less (if not un-) politicised in Ireland as compared with other countries (Hamilton, 2019), the gap between evidence and policy here is not a product of insufficient evidence production, accessibility and translation alone. The IPJ, in which we are writing, has long played a crucial role in making the most up-to-date research findings from across the island publicly accessible. In so doing, the Journal has also brought together many different voices. The last volume alone features multiple authors with lived experience of criminal justice, as well as members of the academic, probation, judicial and community justice professions. We pay tribute to the IPJ's editorial committee and to the probation services in both jurisdictions on the island for producing and sustaining such an important publication in Irish criminology. Still, if the partnership is to achieve the lofty goals outlined in this article, we must learn from similar entities internationally and develop a contextually appropriate approach that includes, but is not limited to, publishing, and is underpinned by a clear rationale for the purposes of our work and the principles of how we will work together.

The next steps for the CORD Partnership involve two bodies of work (see Figure 2). First, we will learn from partnerships in other countries and disciplines. This will involve a workshop in May 2024 at which speakers from other research partnerships will outline their administrative, governance and funding arrangements and the actions that enable their success. This learning process will also involve a review of international literature on research partnerships, which will be published by the end of 2024 in an open-access working paper, alongside the information gathered at the May workshop.

**Figure 2:** *Next steps for the CORD Partnership in 2024*

Second, we will seek to agree on a set of open-research priorities and specific actions on which, if possible, we will collaborate following the end of the first year of funding. This will involve a second in-person workshop in summer 2024, using design techniques to collect ideas from partners and using restorative practices to structure dialogue to maximise what we can achieve in the short time together and build consensus. Any actions agreed will be voluntary, and could be independent of, or connected to, the Partnership. Actions might involve study visits, seminars, primary and secondary research, and collaborations to tease out the policy and practice implications for Ireland of existing knowledge and international research. If successful, this could help those involved in other areas of social policy, or in the development of Research Ireland, to see how an open research culture can be embedded through partnership working.

Partnership working is something that we know could aid our work, but that we cannot always find the time to do in a systematic and evidence-based way. The CORD Partnership is an invitation to invest a relatively small amount of time, with the potential to reap a high level of social reward. While the challenges have been acknowledged above, there is an early energy and enthusiasm that we hope provides the necessary foundations on which a strong, collaborative, open future can be built.



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