

Enhancing confidence in policing data through culturally-responsive communication: A pilot study

The project co-designs culturally responsive policing-data communications with minoritised communities, aiming to reduce data fear, strengthen trust and improve ethnicity-data quality for policing analytics.

Key details

Lead institution	Scottish Policing Academic Centre of Excellence (SPACE)
Principal researcher(s)	space@napier.ac.uk
Police region	Scotland
Collaboration and partnership	- Fair Justice System for Scotland (FJSS) Group - Police Scotland
Level of research	Professional/work based
Project start date	August 2026
Date due for completion	August 2027

Research context

Confidence in policing depends partly on people understanding why their personal information is collected, how it will be used and how it is protected. Previous work with the Fair Justice System for Scotland (FJSS) Group identified three connected problems: systemic alienation, fear about how data may be used ('data fear') and community stigma. Together, these can reinforce mistrust and reduce engagement with public services.

This is particularly important for ethnicity data. In 2025, the Scottish Biometrics Commissioner raised concerns that arrest-stage procedures were producing unreliable ethnicity data. Poor-quality ethnicity data can weaken subsequent analysis used for risk assessment, resource planning and monitoring equality. Recent changes in data protection legislation also increase the importance of clearly explaining data collection and use to members of the public.

The project therefore treats data quality as both a technical and a human issue. It will examine how ethnicity and identity information is collected across national policing systems and identify points where clearer communication could reduce uncertainty or fear. Working with minoritised communities, the project will co-design culturally responsive explanations of the purpose, use and protection of personal data.

Aim

The project aims to co-design clear communication approaches and transparency frameworks that explain the purpose and safe use of policing data, strengthening community trust and improving data quality.

Objectives

The project will:

- map where ethnicity and identity data are collected
- understand community experiences of data collection and data fear
- co-design scripts, frequently asked questions and visual explanations
- test whether these materials improve clarity, understanding, acceptability and trust

The findings will be brought together in a pilot evaluation and template toolkit to support future policing practice, training and guidance.

Research methodology

This study will use a participatory service design approach to explore how ethnicity and identity-related data are collected within policing systems and how communication can be improved to increase trust and understanding. The methodology is designed to treat data collection as a service interaction rather than a purely technical process, recognising that communication at the point of

data collection can influence public confidence and data quality.

The research will be conducted in four stages:

- First, a system mapping review will examine standard operating procedures, training materials and system documentation relating to data collection across STORM, Scottish Crime Recording System (SCRS), Custody and Stop and Search systems. This review will identify key 'clarifying touchpoints' where additional explanation or reassurance may be beneficial.
- Second, trauma-informed focus groups will be conducted with a Lived Experience Group (LEG) convened through the Fair Justice System for Scotland (FJSS) Group. These discussions will explore participants' experiences of data collection, perceptions of data use and factors contributing to 'data fear.' Findings will be analysed using thematic analysis to identify common concerns and priorities for improvement.
- Third, the research team will facilitate co-design workshops with the LEG to develop culturally responsive communication resources, including scripts, frequently asked questions (FAQs), pocket guides and visual explainers. These materials will be informed by the principle of purpose limitation under the Data Protection Act 2018, which requires personal data to be collected for specified and legitimate purposes.
- Finally, prototype materials will be tested with community participants using pre- and post-session surveys and qualitative feedback. Quantitative data will be analysed descriptively to assess changes in understanding, clarity and trust, while qualitative responses will undergo thematic analysis. Findings will inform the development of a Pilot Evaluation and Template Toolkit for future implementation and evaluation.

Research participation

The study will involve members of minoritised communities, with a particular focus on Black communities with relevant lived experience of policing, identity-data collection, or concerns about how personal information is collected and used. This focus reflects findings from the earlier project, while recognising that the communication tools developed may ultimately be relevant to a wider range of communities.

Participants will be recruited through the Fair Justice System for Scotland (FJSS) Group, a grassroots community and legal organisation with established and trusted relationships across Black communities in Scotland. FJSS will convene a Lived Experience Group (LEG) and provide

cultural-safety oversight throughout the research. The project budget provides for eight LEG participants, including honoraria to recognise their time and expertise and travel expenses to reduce financial barriers to participation.

Participants will contribute at several stages. They will take part in trauma-informed focus groups exploring their experiences and concerns about ethnicity and identity-data collection, including situations that may create 'data fear.' LEG members will then participate in co-design activities to develop culturally responsive scripts, frequently asked questions, pocket guides and visual explanations. Community participants will subsequently test the proposed materials and provide feedback on their clarity, acceptability and effects on trust and understanding.

Participation will take place in safe, community-based settings rather than during live police encounters, helping to reduce power imbalances and enable open feedback. Police officers are not required as research participants, although limited voluntary practitioner feedback on draft materials may be sought for operational sense-checking if feasible.

No open volunteer recruitment or public survey link is currently proposed. Recruitment will be facilitated through FJSS.

References

Malloch L. (2025, February 25). 'Police urged to rethink procedures after concerns about ethnicity data'. The Herald.