

THEME: Borders, Security Technologies, Data Gathering and Data Sharing

PROJECT: Enhancing Human Rights and Ethical Applications of the Law: Stop & Search

Lead Supervisor: [Dr John Topping](#)

Supervisory Team: [Dr John Topping](#), [Dr Deepak Padmanabhan](#)

Primary Location: Mitchell Institute

This PhD proposal seeks to combine the latest technological advance in point-of-contact data capture between police officers and the public in the application of stop and search powers.

The use of stop and search powers across the U.K. have attracted voluminous attention over the past 40 years. Yet focus on use of the powers generally, and specifically 'everyday' powers of stop and search have, until recently, remained marked by their lack of academic or policy attention.

The most recent research indicates PSNI are using stop and search at much higher rates than all other UK police forces (Topping & Bradford, 2018; Topping & Schbotz, 2018). But beyond the general application of the power, this emerging body of research also points to the power as a disciplinary tool, demarcating the boundaries between, and flagging up, young, urban, socio-economic deprived males for special attention relative to the rest of the population. In essence, virtual geographic and socio-economic boundaries exist to influence the use of stop and search above and beyond any crime considerations.

At present, public data around PSNI stop and search remains limited; while organisational recording practices and internal management of stop and search remains siloed, and contributes to little meaningful understanding of how it is repetitively concentrated on certain populations and within certain geographic areas. Drawing on the lessons from existing consultancy work with PSNI by Topping; and those derived from recent technological reform around stop and search by Police Scotland, this PhD will attempt to combine a range of ethical, human rights and accountability frameworks into user-friendly technology for both point of contact and subsequent monitoring / analysis related to use of the power. It is anticipated that once developed, such a system could be modified to include dynamics and variables unique to particular policing jurisdictions.

This PhD will have 3 key stages:

1. Exploring the stop and search landscape in Northern Ireland / PSNI;
2. Examining existing police technologies around recording of stop and search from other jurisdictions;
3. Develop a computer system (including mobile app for police) which actively monitors and flags up stop and search practice, which in turn will provide new data attuned to existing human rights and accountability frameworks unique to

NI

In view of Topping's existing work with the PSNI / NIPB, and current consultancy work with PSNI, significant organisational interest from both organisations in terms of 'buy in' could be expected.

Topping is also involved in an EU COST network grant on stop and search across Europe, providing further opportunities for international interest and contacts for the prospective PhD student.

Primary Academic Discipline: Criminology