Research to assist in the investigation of criminal and terrorist activity

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Police and security services will benefit from new research aimed at improving the investigation of criminal and terrorist activity. Scientists at The University of Nottingham are collaborating with experts at four other universities to develop techniques that combine technologies for location based games and analysing communication signals with forensic psychology techniques for detecting deception during interviews with suspects.

Professor Mike Jackson, Director of the Centre for Geospatial Science (CGS) and Associate Professor Gary Priestnall, will lead research on the positioning and tracking of mobile devices and the systems architecture that will host the location-based games that will be used by the consortium. Dr Bai Li (Computer Science and Information Technology) will undertake games design and data analysis research.

The project, led by Lancaster University, has received £900k of funding from the UK Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council to investigate whether deception can be identified reliably from suspects' movements, communications and behaviours.

Professor Mike Jackson said: "This contract builds on the strength of the University and CGS for multi-disciplinary research. Results should not only be relevant to national security but also to a wide range of commercial and leisure-based applications where individuals want to use routing, navigation or location-based services or play location-based games."

The three-year project will deploy and develop technologies that allow the tracking of individuals and the monitoring of communications between team members. Researchers will test the technology using 'treasure hunt'-style exercises. One team representing the suspects will compete against another team representing the police. Mock interviews with team participants will then take place in which evidence from tracking and communications is presented to interviewers. The interactions will be studied by psychologists and analysed by data-mining specialists to determine where the team participants are applying deception or where the account of their activities is true. The researchers will also conduct interviews to assess public awareness of, and response to, monitoring and surveillance in counter-terrorism.

Professor Tom Ormerod from Lancaster University, the project's principal investigator, said: "The extreme risks and rapid time frames associated with terrorist activities add to the difficulty of gathering evidence that might prevent an attack or lead to successful prosecution. It is vital that the police and security services are provided with tools that help them make reliable decisions about who to treat as a suspect and whether there is sufficient evidence to secure a prosecution, since immense damage can be caused by wrongful arrests based on misinterpretations of weak evidence."

Source: University of Nottingham

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