

*This note records the main points raised in discussion at the second OE Research Seminar held in September 2011 at London Probation Trust HQ. The main presentations from the seminar are available as Powerpoint presentations. They are being written up as articles for publication in EuroVista, an international journal linking research and practice in probation and community justice throughout Europe.*

#### **Introducing the seminar**

The purpose of the seminar was to develop the evidence base for the offender engagement programme through input and discussion by senior academics, building on the research seminar in held July 2010. The discussion enabled us to hear about the most recent academic work prior to publication, and receive feedback to inform our own programme.

Ian Porée Director of Commissioning, NOMS, opened the event by saying it was a priority to understand the evidence base behind the activities that reduce reoffending: those activities that make someone stop and change direction.

An incredible effort had gone into the measurable reduction in reoffending over the last decade. Achieving a similar impact in the next decade represented a significant challenge. OEP had started with the fundamental hypothesis about the value of one-to-one engagement and the approach taken had been to test this hypothesis in collaboration both with the academic community and probation trusts.



**All the Powerpoint presentations from the event are available to download from the Offender Engagement page on EPIC.**

Click on this [\*\*link\*\*](#) to navigate to the presentations.

#### **Session 1 - OEP Findings; future research and evaluation**

- **Summary of OEP Research Programme,**  
Sue Rex, Offender Engagement Programme, NOMS
- **Investigating Quality**  
Gwen Robinson, University of Sheffield
- **Developing OMFQ**  
Paul Turnbull, ICPR Birkbeck College London
- **Using NOMS Data to Evaluate OEP pilots**  
Elaine Ellis, Offender Engagement Programme, NOMS

In the discussion of the findings highlighted in Gwen Robinson's presentation about the staff response to the use of Appreciative Inquiry it was acknowledged that there was a tendency to negativity in the Service. It was noted that feedback given to practitioners was frequently confined to what is not going well, and a culture of individual recognition was lacking, for instance through awards. London Probation had introduced an award for which offenders could nominate probation staff; this had generated useful feedback about the qualities valued by offenders. Participation by staff had improved but was still not as enthusiastic as in other disciplines.

It was suggested that the nature of the work could lead to a more pessimistic outlook for staff. The exception was those staff working in close partnership with other professionals who saw their expertise valued by others, leading to greater professional self-esteem. However, there remained a question over wider public confidence in the work of the probation service, which might be more responsive to a different model based on reintegration rather than crime control. On the other hand, there was a broader paradox of public service, by which better outcomes raised expectations of what could be achieved. At the same time, the efforts to provide evidence and to build on it were welcomed, following decades in which practitioners were working with virtually no evidence.

A question was asked about whether an integrated OE approach was planned, combining the approaches being piloted separately. Sue Rex responded that this was indeed the intention, on which there would shortly be a letter to chiefs setting out the plan.



#### Session 2 - Challenges in Engaging Offenders

- **Engaging Mentally Disordered Offenders**

Eddie Kane, University of Nottingham

- **Staff Skills in Approve Premises – Working with Sex Offenders**

Francis Cowe, University of Wales, Newport

- **Offender Engagement and Offending Behaviour Programmes**

Rosie Travers, Interventions Research, NOMS

Introducing the discussion, Martin Copsey identified three themes from the presentations: wider staff skills; what success looks like; and the role of leaders and managers. The discussion initially picked up on the important skills of approved premises (APs) staff in roles with fewer or no professional responsibilities (eg cleaners and cooks), for example in providing a more rounded understanding of residents and potential risk issues. It was also noted that the added purpose of APs – health and change, on top of control – had been insufficiently recognised, with managers tending to focus on short term success during residence rather than longer term outcomes such as rehabilitation .

The important of the working environment, such as reception areas and interview rooms, to facilitate engagement was discussed, illustrated by an initiative in London to make improvements with relatively modest changes (for instance changes to the furniture and the introduction of books and bookcases). Linked to this, Eddie Kane’s presentation was seen as focussing on the importance of the whole system and the therapist in promoting readiness to engage, which was not solely the responsibility of the service user. It was agreed that there was scope for considerable shared learning between this initiative in mental health and the offender engagement programme.

Inspections by HMI Probation had confirmed that there was “congruence” between the quality of practice and informal settings and the physical environment. The conclusion drawn was that the activities and purposes of community supervision (e.g. change and control) were complementary rather than alternative.



#### Session 3: Lessons from Elsewhere

- **Change Programme in New Zealand**

Andrew Bridges, former HM Chief Inspector of Probation

- **Engaging with politically motivated prisoners**

Tim Chapman, University of Ulster

- **Judicial Engagement – problem solving courts**

Gill McIvor, University of Stirling

- **Desistance Knowledge Exchange (DesKE) Project**

Fergus McNeill, University of Glasgow

Discussion started with the applicability of Tim Chapman's work with politically motivated prisoners to other types of offender; gang members were seen as raising similar issues. The approach developed in Ulster was seen not as a programme but as a framework in which prisoners were engaged on the basis of mutual respect, and in which the learning outcomes were developmental.

It was agreed that some of the debates over programmes and other types of interventions or between academic disciplines were illusory; the aim should be a common language and shared learning built on a range of approaches.

An important lesson from the New Zealand Change Programme was the need to be clear about what the programme was intended to achieve and the success measures. Otherwise, there was a danger that the excitement of transformation overshadowed what we were trying to achieve, so that different people saw themselves as getting different things from the programme.



#### Session 4: Emerging Methodologies

- **Observing Supervision in Jersey**

Peter Raynor, University of Swansea and  
Pamela Ugwudike, University of Swansea

- **Desistance Case Studies**

Anthony Bottoms, University of Cambridge

- **Supervision - Long Term Impacts~**

Stephen Farrall, University of Sheffield

- **Reanalysing the Dynamics of Compliance,**

Trish McCulloch, University of Dundee

The discussion was limited by the amount of time available. The day concluded with an acknowledgement from Ian Porée that knowledge-sharing would continue to be valuable and that the day had given several clues to other networks with which offender engagement could usefully get involved.

There was currently a great deal of thought going into system reform, requiring NOMS to think carefully about the evidence base and the role of practice reform.

If you would like to contact the OEP team  
please email us at  
[offender.engagement@noms.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:offender.engagement@noms.gsi.gov.uk)

