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## RESEARCH PROJECT

We are continuing to see products from our research programme. We have just circulated the first report from the Institute of Criminal Policy Research (ICPR) and Leicester University on the project looking at offenders' and offender managers' perceptions of the quality of engagement and its impact, and are expecting the second report - linking that with supervision outcomes - later this Summer. Some highlights from the first report are:

- Offenders scores suggest that:
  - o Females have stronger relationships with probation than males
  - o Those with longer experiences of probation have stronger relationships with probation and perceive that they have acquired more skills
  - o Those on licence and those with multiple experiences of probation have weaker relationships

- Offender managers' scores suggest that the offender managers' perception of the offender's relationship with probation is not related to demographic features of the offender
- Those who had the same offender manager for their entire order, whose offender manager discussed their sentence plan with them and those who were involved in their sentence planning were found to have significantly stronger relationships with probation and to perceive greater acquisition of skills
- Offender managers perceived an improved relationship between offenders and probation when offenders were involved in their sentence planning

The second project - an in depth study of practitioners' views of what makes for quality supervision by Sheffield University - has made good progress with the fieldwork, and we have received an initial report. We will soon be circulating a literature review on quality in probation supervision by the Sheffield research team.

Our series of Research Bulletins is continuing well. The seventh Offender Engagement Research Bulletin was sent out in May. This was written by Will Hughes, a Practice Development Assessor from Hertfordshire Probation Trust who completed a study of practitioners and offenders views of sentence planning with support from the Graham Smith Bursary. For service users, by far the most significant factors in terms of engagement and compliance were relational. Most identified the positive conduct of staff as influential. In the near future, we'll have bulletins from Faye Taxman

on a US project on proactive community supervision, and from Peter Raynor on his study of probation in Jersey. Peter is a member of our Academic Reference Group which acts as a critical friend to the research programme. The group had a good second meeting at the beginning of May, at which it received presentations from the research teams at ICPR and Sheffield and provided advice on the continuing research. We have also successfully set up the external evaluation of our pilot work, which is being undertaken by our research partners. Trusts will be hearing very soon from us about our plans for internal evaluation to ensure we maximise the learning from the pilot work. Thank you to all concerned for your continued support for the research work.



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## EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

Through training, the **Skills for Effective Engagement Development (SEED)** project aims to refresh and develop practitioners' skills of engagement with their offenders in one to one work. Those practitioners in the pilot will receive follow up training, coaching, action learning sets and observation (continuing professional development) to ensure that these skills are continually refreshed and built upon.

During March and April the first phase of the project was completed with eleven teams from eight Trusts taking part in three day training workshops. The vast majority of participants have responded positively and enthusiastically to the training, finding it a welcome opportunity to refresh existing skills, learn new ones and share knowledge with colleagues. One practitioner said the training was 'Brilliant – it has

thoroughly inspired me. It has reminded me why I came into probation'. The workshops have given staff the confidence to be more strategic in their approach to supervision and to use specific evidence based interventions which are responsive to individual needs.

Early feedback following the initial training suggests that the action learning sets are a useful way of sharing knowledge and ideas. Offender managers are responding positively to being observed by their line managers in one to one sessions and receiving feedback on their practice. Particularly encouraging is the feedback from some offenders who have noticed a more structured and purposeful approach to supervision sessions. We now look forward to the first series of one day follow up training events commencing in June.

All seven trusts involved in **Sentence Planning Pilots (SPA)** have now started applying new sentence planning approaches, following training and the preparation of new documentation. Already there has been anecdotal feedback on the benefit of more visual forms having the ability to engage people more directly, the advantages of the extended, six week, period to prepare the sentence plan and the more collaborative style the approaches demand. The pilots involve four approaches; the Web (North Yorkshire and London), Stepping Stones (Warwickshire, Essex and Nottinghamshire), Birmingham Treatment Effectiveness Initiative (Leicestershire and Rutland), and in Humberside their own locally developed approach of setting bite-sized objectives. All pilots have local steering groups, most involving practitioners, and discussion groups will be held to find out how practitioners are managing with the new tools.

We continue to work on exploring the duties of the offender manager when they are undertaking the specific role of the **Responsible Officer** (as defined by the 2003 act). Some trusts have been exploring using accredited programmes without an accompanying supervision requirement for some time, finding that the responsible officer is able to deal with issues as needed; some trusts have used specified activity requirements (for varying amounts of days) to cover either pre- or post-programme activity and this too has worked for them; some trusts have used specified activities to undertake certain kinds or other change work for example on finance, gambling, vehicle crime. Changes in established practice however do need local policy support, change management and communication approaches and we would welcome hearing from trusts willing to share information about this with us.

**'Brilliant – it has thoroughly inspired me. It has reminded me why I came into probation'.**

Feedback from practitioner at the SEED training



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In recent weeks members of the OEP team have been around the country delivering **Reflective Supervision Model (RSM)** workshops to managers in Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, Staffordshire & West Midlands, Northumbria and Surrey/Sussex. We will be visiting Wales, South Yorkshire and Hampshire during May and early June to complete the round of workshops.

The aims of the RSM workshops are to provide managers with:

- A refreshed understanding of the principles and practices associated with desistance and offender engagement
- An opportunity to think about their own professional development and how they support practitioners in developing skills and practice
- Information on best practice relating to the model; including reflective supervision, observed practice and feedback and action learning sets

- An opportunity to practice the skills needed to implement this model with peers
- Clarity about how they will take the pilot forward in their local area.

The workshops have generally been received well and we have had some very positive feedback. Debbie Piggot, Senior Probation Officer from Surrey & Sussex Probation Trust commented on her experience “Not only did the course clearly outline what the reflective supervision model is and how best to incorporate it within the teams, it also provided a refresher of core probation practice. For this reason alone it was very motivating to complete alongside, for me, developing insight of how this model empowers officers to make defensible decisions around their practice, which in turn will hopefully follow through on their direct engagement with offenders.”

Some of the Trusts have already started to implement the pilot with their Teams. Catherine Solan, Team Manager from Northumbria Probation Trust reports that staff in her team have without exception responded very positively to the greater emphasis on offender engagement and effective practice, “they were keen to hear the detail of the training event undertaken by managers; looking forward to feedback from observed practice which they feel will provide additional support and increase confidence in practice. We have already begun the process of more in-depth case discussions in supervision which is proving to be of great benefit to staff and managers”. Many of the managers involved also identified how this approach could assist them in preparing staff for implementing the new National Standards.

All eight Trusts have set up local steering groups including senior manager, middle manager and practitioner representation. The next steps will be some training for Action Learning Set facilitators and planning for a shared learning event in September.

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Debbie Piggot, SPO in Surrey & Sussex Probation Trust.



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## REDUCING BUREAUCRACY

The 2011 National Standards were published in April 2011 following the development by the Offender Engagement Programme Team. A draft first version of the National Standards Practice Framework document was circulated to Trusts on 28 April and is accessible on EPIC here:

[http://npsintranet.probaton.gsi.gov.uk/document\\_library/Documents/practice\\_framework\\_national\\_standards\\_draft.pdf](http://npsintranet.probaton.gsi.gov.uk/document_library/Documents/practice_framework_national_standards_draft.pdf)

Central to these Standards is the intention of providing offender managers with sufficient scope to exercise their evidence-based professional judgment and skills in the assessment and management of all the risks presented by an offender. Mandatory targets for report timeliness, weekly contact for high/very high risk of serious

harm cases and enforcement are retained, and also the requirements that the service provided to victims meets the requirements set out in The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, and the level of victim satisfaction with the service provided is recorded. In other aspects of work there is greater flexibility to enable work to be completed to achieve quality benchmarks rather than timeliness targets. Probation Trusts will be developing implementation plans over the next year. An implementation event was held on 10 May and was well attended by Trusts. Speeches and presentation are available on EPIC or on request from the OEP team.

**The reduction in prescribed processes in the 2011 Standards enables providers to use greater professional judgement in delivering services, on the basis that practitioners are well trained and capable of making decisions about the most effective approaches to adopt with individual offenders. Reduced prescription also encourages innovation in the delivery of services.**

Excerpt from Practice Framework National Standards for the Management of Offenders For England and Wales April 2011 Draft version 1

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Most Probation Trusts have been actively taking part in the various pilots currently running under the auspices of the Offender Engagement Programme. These look to promote quality engagement with offenders in a number of different ways.

Alongside this work over the next 12 months we shall also be exploring a revised regime for the holistic quality assurance of offender management. The best arrangements for quality assurance both check quality and improve it. We shall be looking carefully at the quality systems already in place in some Trusts and consulting widely. We aim to design something which promotes meaningful interaction with offenders and positive outcomes, without imposing onerous systems of process-checking on managers and practitioners.

## AN EXAMPLE OF LOCAL OFFENDER ENGAGEMENT WORK

Amanda Rawson, Probation Officer notes: "In Humberside we have taken a really proactive approach to Offender Engagement and the Trust is currently aligning its development with research produced in the National OEP bulletins ensuring that offender engagement is an intrinsic part of the Trusts large change project that incorporates performance monitoring and costings. Humberside is motivated to develop a culture of positive engagement with both service users and staff across the organisation. This motivation has been evident in the broad spectrum of support and time that has been given to projects relating to OEP from Offender Managers and the Strategic Leadership Team. These include the Trust's involvement in the Sentence Planning Pilot that has now been operating since the beginning of April with initial feedback being really very positive.

A dedicated steering group led by LDU Assistant Director Ian Ware has enabled the development of an OEP Newsletter that offers all staff regular updates on work going on in Humberside and nationally, discussion boards and focus groups looking at staff members' thoughts and ideas surrounding the implementation of the new National Standards and the formation of Service User Groups where plans are in motion to involve the local Youth Offending Service and Women's Forum. It is hoped that ultimately the service users themselves will chair the groups and feed directly back to SLT any significant issues raised. All in all it is a really exciting time in Humberside to be an offender manager or service user, and a great opportunity to help shape the way in which we work in the future."

**All in all it is a really exciting time in Humberside to be an Offender Manager or Service User, and a great opportunity to help shape the way in which we work in the future.**

Amanda Rawson, Probation Officer,  
Humberside Probation Trust



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## CONTACT THE OEP TEAM

If you would like to contact the OEP please email [OEP@justice.gov.uk](mailto:OEP@justice.gov.uk)

Further information can be found on EPIC at [http://npsintranet.probation.gsi.gov.uk/index/support\\_service/noms\\_change/noms\\_change\\_-\\_major\\_change\\_programmes/offender\\_engagement\\_programme.htm](http://npsintranet.probation.gsi.gov.uk/index/support_service/noms_change/noms_change_-_major_change_programmes/offender_engagement_programme.htm)