

This bulletin describes the research on supervision skills and offender engagement currently being carried out by Swansea University staff in collaboration with the Jersey Probation and After-Care Service. This is one of a number of studies done by Swansea researchers in the Channel Island of Jersey, which is self-governing with its own legal system and a small Probation and After-Care Service closely aligned with the Courts, as Probation Services in England and Wales were until 2001. Previous work in Jersey has concerned risk/need assessment and the effectiveness of supervision (see, for example, Raynor and Miles 2007), and the present study grew out of a shared perception that developments in evidence-based practice in England and Wales had not yet paid sufficient attention to the impact of skilled one-to-one supervision.

In Jersey we were particularly influenced by the concept of 'Core Correctional Practices' (CCPs) developed by the late Don Andrews, and we had already applied the concept of CCPs in a study of Parish Hall Enquiries, which are a very successful method used in Jersey to resolve offences informally and locally. Would it be possible, we wondered, to carry out a systematic study of the skills and methods used by probation staff in individual supervision?

The study

The original aim of the study was to collect about 100 videotaped interviews and to develop a checklist which could be used by observers to identify and note the skills and methods used. In particular, we wanted a checklist which would provide a reasonably accurate assessment but was simple enough to be used quite quickly by experienced observers, since we envisaged a possible use for such checklists in the observation

of practice for staff development purposes. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the early stages were mainly spent developing the checklist and observing the interviews (for a fuller account of this part of the study see Raynor, Ugwu-dike and Vanstone 2010). The current version of the Jersey Supervision Interview Checklist, known as version 7C, attempts to strike a balance between comprehensiveness and user-friendliness, and covers seven skill sets: interview set-up, non-verbal communication, verbal communication, use of authority, motivational interviewing, pro-social modelling, problem-solving, cognitive restructuring, and overall interview structure. Some of these we describe as 'relationship skills', used to promote communication, co-operation and trust, and others are 'structuring skills' intended to help probationers to change their thinking, attitudes and behaviour. In total, 63 items are assessed. Eventually we were able to collect and analyse a total of 95 interviews by fourteen different staff. No individual members of staff are identified in the reporting of results.



Results so far

Analysis of this material is still continuing, but some interesting findings have already emerged. Staff varied considerably in the skills they typically used in their interviews, ranging from some with average checklist scores below 40 to others close to 60. Most were quite consistent in their scoring, indicating that those who used a wide range of skills typically did so across a range of different interviews. Staff varied more in their use of 'structuring' skills than in 'relationship' skills, which almost all staff used frequently. This possibly reflects the social work training that most of the participating staff had received: in Jersey, as in England and Wales before 1997, it is normal for probation officers to hold a social work qualification. Both 'relationship' and 'structuring' skills are addressed in the Offender Engagement Programme's current SEED

(Skills for Effective Engagement and Development) project. This aims to equip practitioners with skills of engagement and for those practitioners to receive follow up support through training, coaching, action learning sets and observation and feedback (continuing professional development) to ensure that these skills are continually refreshed and built upon.

We are also interested in whether differences in interviewing practice affected the outcomes for offenders. So far we have been able to examine changes in assessed risk levels in the caseloads of those officers in the study who supervised probation orders. Jersey uses LSI-R (the Level of Service Inventory Revised) rather than OASys, and people on probation are routinely re-assessed. Past research has shown that changes in LSI-R scores in Jersey

are related to differences in actual reconviction rates: reductions in risk lead to lower reconvictions. In the skills study, results so far indicate that officers with above average checklist scores also have, on average, greater reductions in assessed risk within their caseloads (average reductions of 2.37 points on LSI-R scores, compared to an average of 1.3 for officers with below average checklist scores. A reduction of 2.37 points is approximately equivalent to an 11% reduction in the average LSI-R score at the start of probation supervision in Jersey, or very approximately a reduction of between 4% and 5% in expected reconviction). Owing to small sample sizes these results fall short of statistical significance, and more analysis is planned including, after a suitable period, a reconviction study. We are also interested in

encouraging wider use of the checklist (for staff development purposes only, not staff appraisal or management) and sharing of data. Any organisations interested in using the checklist should contact Brian Heath, the Chief Probation Officer of Jersey.

References:

Raynor, P. and Miles, H. (2007) 'Evidence-based probation in a microstate: the British Channel Island of Jersey', *European Journal of Criminology* 4 (3) 299-313.

Raynor, P., Ugwuodike, P. and Vanstone, M. (2010) 'Skills and strategies in probation supervision: the Jersey study', in McNeill, F., Raynor, P. and Trotter, C. eds. **Offender Supervision: new directions in theory, research and practice**, Abingdon: Willan, pp. 113-129.

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