



Ministry of
JUSTICE

National Offender
Management Service



The Offender Engagement Programme

An overview from programme director,
Martin Copsey.

July 2011

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The Offender Engagement Programme (OEP) has now been running for well over a year. In that time 22 of the 35 Probation Trusts have become involved in pilot projects. Even more have taken an active part in contributing to and testing our products through the initial regional events and through our reference groups.

This newsletter is intended as a round up of the current state of play of the programme, re-visiting the key aims and principles and providing a reminder of the context and purpose.

The central thesis of the OEP is that the one to one relationship between offender and supervisor can be a powerful vehicle for change to reduce reoffending. We are evaluating that thesis and effective ways to address the likely obstacles.

Our central aims are to:

- Reduce offending through more effective one to one engagement
- Enable staff to use their time effectively to balance demands
- Increase public confidence in community sentences

We are making good progress. Our **key achievements** so far:

- The development of National Standards 2011 provides a framework for offender engagement, promoting a shift away from the 'one size fits all' approach which placed too great an emphasis on achieving timeliness targets. The new National Standards will enable practitioners to use their professional judgement more flexibly to improve outcomes.
- We have developed the Skills for Effective Engagement and Development programme and completed the initial phase of practitioner training in pilot Trusts.
- Through the Reflective Supervision Model pilot we are paying attention to the vital role of middle managers in enabling effective offender engagement. We have delivered a programme of workshops to middle managers within the pilot Trusts.
- A number of sentence planning models are being tested by pilot Trusts in order to identify the approaches that best link to improved outcomes.
- We have set up the external evaluation and begun a comprehensive internal evaluation to work alongside.
- Products from the research programme so far include literature reviews, research bulletins and reports from our research partners.

The programme is being taken forward through the following projects.

Project one: Research

The external evaluation is being undertaken by our research partners, Sheffield University and the Institute of Criminal Policy Research, Birkbeck and Leicester University. We benefit from liaison with academics through our academic reference group – acting as a critical friend – and annual research seminars. We are looking forward to the next report on the testing of a revised Offender Management Feedback Questionnaire (OMFQ-r), due in August, which will relate OMFQ-r scores to supervision outcomes.

We are keen to hear ideas from Trusts about content for future research bulletins (contact: sue.rex@noms.gsi.gov.uk).

Project two: Developing evidence based practice

The Skills for Effective Engagement and Development (SEED) pilot is testing out a model of offender engagement and practitioner skills development, based on the desistance research (contact: nigel.hosking2@noms.gsi.gov.uk).

The Sentence Planning Approaches (SPA) pilot is testing out three main approaches: the Web, the Birmingham Treatment Effectiveness Initiative and Stepping Stones. Each approach aims to maximise offender engagement with plans for change (contact: george.barrow@noms.gsi.gov.uk).

Project three: Supervision requirement/the role of the ‘responsible officer’

We are exploring the potential of better targeting of the supervision requirement to improve quality and efficiency. The development of realistic, effective alternatives will work alongside. Being clear about who is best placed to take the role of ‘responsible officer’ for other requirements is also a priority for this project. The project will be informed by Trusts’ ideas and experiences (contact: wendy.hyett@noms.gsi.gov.uk)

Project four: RSM

The Reflective Supervision Model pilot is a core part of the project and is being delivered in eight Trusts. The focus of the model is how middle managers can support practitioners’ professional development. A next step for the project is to give some additional focus to the senior manager and practitioner roles in enabling culture change (contact: wendy.hyett@noms.gsi.gov.uk).

Project five: Quality assurance framework

Over the next 12 months we shall be exploring a revised regime for the holistic quality assurance of work with offenders. 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 (contact: kate.white@justice.gov.uk).

Project six: Stakeholders and communications

We are focused on informing and enabling stakeholder involvement and momentum. We are also working to assist Trusts to incorporate learning from the OEP into their strategic planning. The OEP aims to work collaboratively with Trusts and other stakeholders, so the reference groups play a crucial role within programme development. The wider stakeholder reference group and the practitioner and middle manager reference groups are well established. We are working to develop an equivalent for senior leaders (contact: yvette.ball@noms.gsi.gov.uk).

Project seven: Professional discretion

The exercising and proper recording of professional judgement relies on sufficient space and time to do so; alongside revised national standards, work within this project will focus on the efficiency of processes and technology to enable practitioners to maximise the time they spend on core professional tasks (contact: andrew.blight@noms.gsi.gov.uk).

Project eight: Improving arrangements for recalled prisoners

We are finding out more about the impact that recall has on offender engagement. The next step will be to develop proposals to maintain engagement and continuity of supervision through the recall process to improve outcomes (contact: melanie.smith@noms.gsi.gov.uk).

The response to the OEP has been overwhelmingly positive. The programme has about another 18 months to run, during which time our **key priorities** will be:

- Continuing to support the pilots and delivering the training workshops and discussion groups
- Refining the material in the light of delivery experience and our lessons learned exercises
- Taking delivery of and considering implications of evaluations – both internal and external
- Engaging with stakeholders

Sharing the learning will continue to be at the heart of the OEP. We are grateful for your support in disseminating information from the OEP throughout your organisation to date. We want to ensure that everybody can engage with the debates and contribute to the learning. Working together, we have an opportunity to fundamentally re-focus probation services in line with the emerging evidence about the impact of engagement on supervision outcomes.

Further information on the OEP is available on EPIC http://npsintranet.probation.gsi.gov.uk/index/support_service/noms_change/noms_change_-_major_change_programmes/offender_engagement_programme.htm

Please note that the Offender Engagement Programme email address has changed to:

<mailto:Offender.Engagement@noms.gsi.gov.uk>