

The magazine of the Probation Institute

# PROBATION

Issue 15: March 2020

*Quarterly*

## Knowledge is power Information is liberating

Dame Vera Baird QC, Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales, shares her vision of the role

The challenges of being a  
Probation Victim Liaison Officer

Accidental Liberalism

Building the future of resettlement  
around relationships





# PROBATION *Quarterly*

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# Welcome to PQ15



As we start a new decade, it is inevitably a time for review and reflection. In this issue of PQ, Richard Garside reviews criminal justice policy since 2010 and suggests that, by accident, it may have been a more liberal period than it has often felt. Richard is very skilled at summarizing the 'bigger picture' and he conveys succinctly the very mixed messages that have emanated from government in the past ten years. He warns that things may soon change and that the criminal justice 'footprint' in society may expand again.

In our last issue we began to explore the experiences of victims in magistrates' courts and we are very pleased to continue this theme with articles by Dame Vera Baird QC, the new Victims Commissioner and 'Edith Thompson' (not her real name), a Probation Victim Liaison Officer.

We have not felt it appropriate, so soon after the event, to discuss the impact of the deaths of Jack Merritt and Saskia Jones at Fishmongers Hall, but we are very grateful to Steve Collett and NAPO for allowing us to reproduce his letter and generous gesture which provides a small positive note at a time when sadness and incomprehension are probably still among our dominant feelings.

When Rob Mawby and I interviewed probation workers for our research on occupational cultures, there was only one name that was consistently identified and recognized as the 'public voice of Probation' and that was, of course, Harry Fletcher. Helen Schofield pays tribute to the former Assistant General Secretary of NAPO and criminal justice consultant who died in January.

Sam Boyd reminds us of the importance of recognizing the strengths of small charities and the need for Probation to nurture such partnerships in the interests of working Through the Gate.

After two years as Editor of PQ, I felt a need to review the nine issues that I have had responsibility for and to ask myself the question, 'What is PQ for?' I hope my summary is informative and encourages you to contribute from your own experience and research.

Finally, if you are involved in working with families, please don't miss the next Probation Institute research and practice conference on 11th March in London. It's free of charge but places are limited, so do book soon.

The deadline for submissions for PQ16 (June issue) is Friday 8th May.



# SUBMIT AN ARTICLE FOR THE NEXT EDITION OF THE PQ?

Probation Quarterly publishes short articles of 500 - 1500 words which are of interest to practitioners and researchers in public, private or voluntary sector work with offenders and victims.

These articles can be about:

- the activities of the Probation Institute.
- news about the work of your organisation or project.
- reports from special events, seminars, meetings or conferences.
- summaries of your own research.
- brief reviews of books or research reports that have caught your eye.
- thought pieces where you can reflect on an issue that concerns you.

The articles need to be well-written, informative and engaging but don't need to meet the academic standards for a peer-reviewed journal. The editorial touch is 'light' and we can help you to develop your article if that is appropriate. If you have an idea for a suitable article, let me know what you have in mind and I can advise you on how to proceed.

## Disclaimer

All contributors must adhere to the [Probation Institute Code of Ethics](#) but the views expressed are their own and not necessarily those of the Probation Institute.

**Anne Worrall**  
Editor, Probation Quarterly

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THIS IS  
THE SIGN  
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# Harry Fletcher: A Tribute

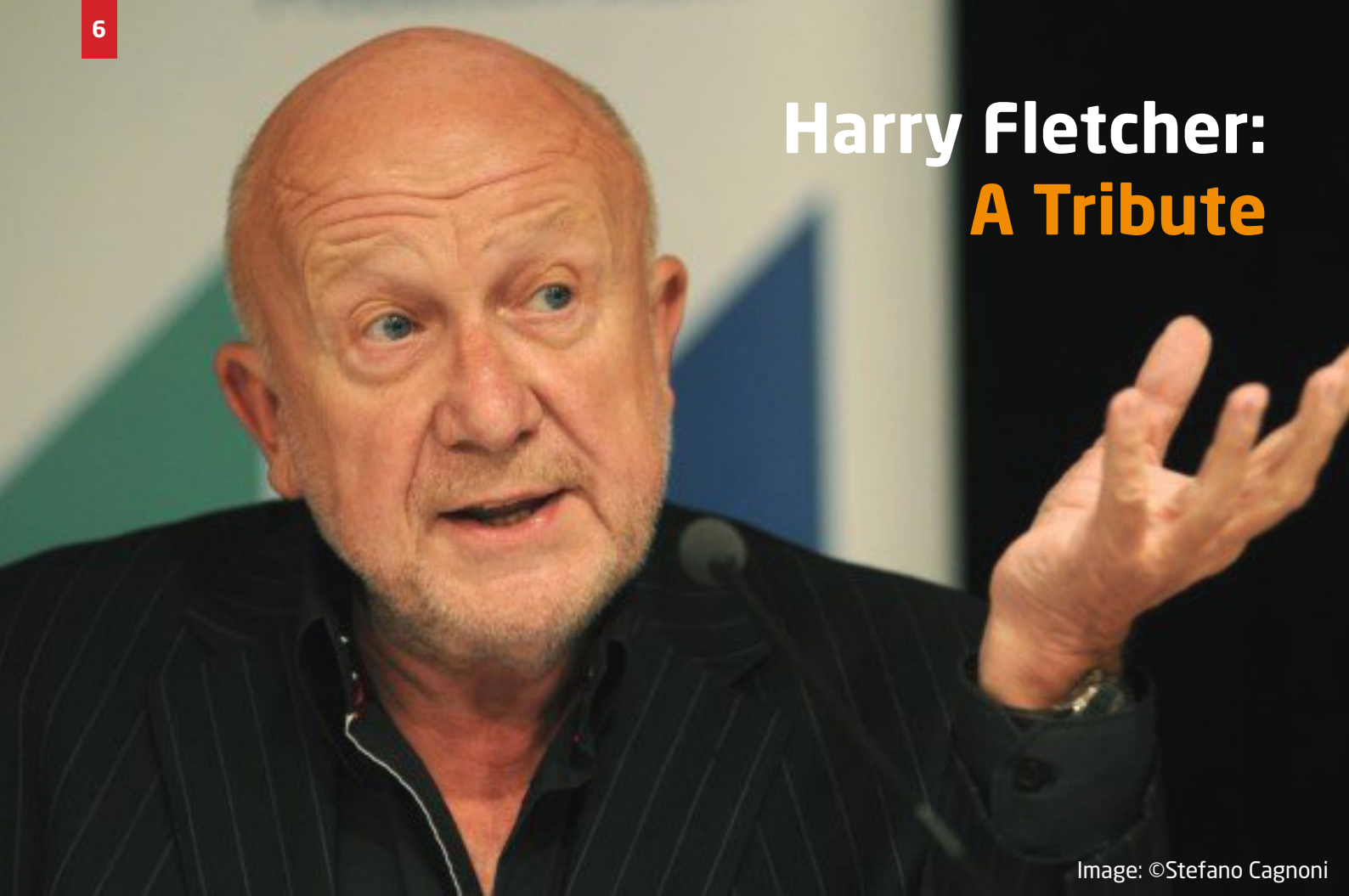


Image: ©Stefano Cagnoni

The Directors of the Probation Institute are greatly saddened to learn of the death of Harry Fletcher on 8th January. Harry had been in regular contact with us about TR and Probation Reforms – most recently just before Christmas.

Many of us have worked with Harry over many years and would like to pay tribute to his immense energy and commitment to a fairer justice system, working at several different levels. For us above all Harry was Assistant General Secretary of Napo from 1984 to 2013. This long period of work for Napo saw massive changes in Probation, advances in practice and values, support for victims, increasing workloads and pressures, restructuring, all of which Harry promoted and defended, organising large rallies at Westminster Hall, Parliamentary Questions and lobbying, particularly in the successful campaign to influence the incoming Labour Government in 1997. Harry was strongly opposed to Transforming Rehabilitation. He was pleased to see the integration plans in 2019 but understood

the real reservations and in an advisory role was seeking to influence the Secretary of State over continuing issues with the new model.

Harry was always available and interested in what you had to say – he was diligent in turning over stones, finding out the detail, and in speaking out openly and clearly about his findings. You could always spot when Harry was behind an investigation. It's hard to think of anyone who can quickly replicate his knowledge of justice combined with investigation and reporting skills – but it's very important that principled journalists try hard to follow in his footsteps.

We would like to pass our deepest sympathies to Kate, William and George in your loss and extend our very warm appreciation of a colleague and friend.

**Helen Schofield**  
**Probation Institute February 2020**





## A letter from Steve Collett, Series Editor, ICCJ Monograph Series

Dear colleagues

In October of last year, The Probation Journal published ***What can we learn from Learning Together*** in its *Issues in Community and Criminal Justice* (ICCJ) Monograph series. Authored by Helena Gosling of Liverpool John Moores University, it describes and analyses the approach of the University to involving those currently or recently subject to community supervision in academic study. Within a matter of weeks, on the 29th November, appalling and tragic events unfolded at the Learning Together Conference organised by the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, at Fishmongers' Hall in London.

Jack Merritt and Saskia Jones died in the attack as did the perpetrator Usman Khan. Jack and Saskia, each highly committed to working in the criminal justice system, lost their lives to an initiative they felt deeply about.

The Editorial Board of the Probation Journal with the full and immediate support of Napo wanted to recognise their contribution by providing open access to the monograph for their colleagues and members of the public. This small gesture was made in memory of Jack and Saskia and to honour them as individuals committed to developing a criminal justice system based on principles of fairness, rehabilitation and compassion.

**Please click to download your complimentary copy.**

Regards

**Steve Collett**



A hand holding a crystal ball that reflects a scene of cherry blossoms and a building. The background is a blurred image of cherry blossoms and a building, with warm, golden light filtering through the branches.

# Accidental Liberalism

Richard Garside, Director, Centre for Crime and Justice Studies reflects on the past decade of criminal justice policy.



Since 2010, the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies has been tracking criminal justice developments through its UK Justice Policy Review programme. This has combined events and publications, including annual reports. UK Justice Policy Review 9, covering the period up to the December 2019 General Election, is due out in the next few months.

We have also sought to assess developments on a longer time frame. The Coalition Years, published in 2015, assessed developments across the UK between 2010 and 2015. The framework it adopted was welcomed by the former Northern Ireland Justice Minister, David Ford, as a helpful way to understand the distinctive national and regional approaches.

Later this year we'll be publishing a report covering developments between 2010 and 2020. What are we likely to find? I am beginning to wonder whether, from the standpoint of ten years hence, we might look back on the decade just ended as a period of relative liberalism in criminal justice.

Consider, for instance the prison population in England and Wales. Under the Major government between 1992 and 1997, the prison population grew by over 15,000. The three Blair/Brown governments between 1997 and 2010 built on this legacy, expanding the system further. In that thirteen year period, the numbers in prison grew by close to 25,000. Over the course of a generation between 1992 and 2010, the prison population in England and Wales nearly doubled, from just under 45,000 in 1992 to nearly 85,000 in 2010.

Had this trend continued over the past decade, the prison population in England and Wales would now stand at over 100,000. In fact, at the end of January 2020 it stood at 83,329, slightly lower than it had been in 2010.

Or consider another measure: the politically sensitive issue of police officer numbers. Under the Major government, officer numbers remained stable. The Blair and Brown governments increased police officer numbers, as part of its 'tough on crime' agenda, by around 17,000. The coalition and Conservative governments of Cameron and May reduced police officer numbers back roughly to where they stood under Major.

Police stops and arrests are the entry point for hundreds of thousands of people into the justice system. Many are unnecessarily targeted and criminalised in the process. With falling police officer numbers over the past decade, we have seen fewer stop and searches (which disproportionately target young black men) and arrests. Prosecutions, convictions and sentences have also fallen, and to good effect. More than 3,000 children under 18, for example, were in prison at any given time in 2010. Currently, the figure is comfortably under 1,000.

If the past decade does become seen as a period of relative liberalism, it was a distinctly accidental, incomplete, and problematic version.

The dangerous and disgusting conditions far too many prisoners and prison officers across England and Wales are currently being forced to live and work in are, quite rightly, regularly condemned. Access to criminal legal aid has been drastically curtailed, leaving tens of thousands of people wiping out their savings, or running up huge debts, to defend their innocence in court.



While the number of children and young people in prison has fallen, it is largely white young people who have benefited. The proportion of young black prisoners has grown significantly. As David Lammy's report of 2017 highlighted, institutional racism and discriminatory practice continues to scar the operation of the justice system at various points.

And then there is the matter of the destruction of the probation service. In her final annual report as Chief Inspector, Glenys Stacey launched a stinging critique of the "irredeemably flawed" changes to probation, under the 'Transforming Rehabilitation' programme. Probation leaders, she wrote, had been "required to deliver change they did not believe in, against the very ethos of the profession". The changes had delivered a "deplorable diminution of the probation profession and a widespread move away from good probation practice".

Last year, the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee concluded that the programme had "left probation services underfunded, fragile, and lacking the confidence of the courts". Probation services, it stated, had *"inexcusably... been left in a worse position than they were in before the Ministry embarked on its reforms"*. The failure of the government to listen seriously to, and act on, these concerns, does not bode well for the implementation of the new probation model.

Probation arrangements in Scotland and Northern Ireland are not without their problems and challenges. Yet in neither jurisdiction has the service faced the state-sponsored sabotage visited upon the service in England and Wales.

Yet however accidental, incomplete and flawed the liberalism of the past decade, the next decade looks set to be very different. After a decade of no prison growth, the new government looks set to pick up where the Major, Blair and Brown governments left off, with plans by Boris Johnson's government to build 10,000 new prison places, while also keeping open those dilapidated old Victorian prisons the Cameron and May governments had planned to close.

Those familiar with the Ministry of Justice prison population projections will know that the latest projection, looking forward to 2024, estimates that the prison population will remain flat at around 81,000 - 82,000. If this is the case, why is the government planning to build 10,000 new prison places?

This is where the pledge to recruit 20,000 more police officers is significant. The criminal justice system is an interconnected set of institutions. Changes in one part have knock-on effects elsewhere. Giving evidence to the House of Commons Justice Committee in October 2019, Sir Richard Heaton, the Ministry of Justice Permanent Secretary, made explicit the link between increasing police officer numbers and the government's plan to expand prison capacity:

*"The other factor inflating the prison population will be the 20,000 additional police officers. It is hard to convert those into prison places because we do not know exactly what they will be doing in policing terms. Assuming that they arrest and charge people, we can expect the charge rate to go back closer to what it was in 2010. There is a very low charge rate at the moment. That is the thing driving the prison population, as well as the sentencing changes."*



# CENTRE FOR CRIME AND JUSTICE STUDIES

In its 2019 General Election manifesto, Labour committed to expanding the police force by even more than the Conservatives. Had it pulled off an unlikely victory last December, a resumption of prison and criminal justice growth would have been likely. For all its radicalism on social and economic questions, an ongoing fidelity to key aspects of New Labour's criminal justice world view remained one of Corbynism's guilty secrets. Only time will tell whether, under a new leader, this will change.

Overlaying, and influenced by, these underlying policy agendas are all the immediate events and happenings any government has to respond to. These include, at the time of writing, controversial proposals retrospectively to extend the time in prison of those convicted of terrorism offences. I also am very concerned that we are at risk of slipping into a situation where shoot-to-kill becomes the default policing response to suspected terrorists. This must be resisted. We face a return to much more explicitly tough and punitive criminal justice policies.

An expanding criminal justice footprint – including more police officers and a growing prison population – is a sign of failure. The criminal justice system all too often picks up, through arrest, prosecution and punishment, many problems that would better be prevented or resolved through our health, education, housing and social welfare systems.

There will, though, be opportunities in the months and years to make the case for shrinking the criminal justice footprint, rebuilding trust, and developing a more balanced and holistic set of social policies to underpin a safer society. A government overtly committed to the opposite might, paradoxically, help to clarify the issues at stake.

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The UK Justice Policy Review series of publications can be downloaded from <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/uk-justice-policy-review>



**Richard Garside**

Director  
Centre for Crime and Justice Studies



# Knowledge is power. **Information is liberating.**

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Dame Vera Baird QC, Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales, shares her vision of the role.





I was appointed Victims Commissioner for England and Wales in June 2019. I am responsible for championing the interests of crime victims and witnesses and reviewing the operation of the Victims Code of Practice.

I regularly meet with Ministers, heads of Criminal Justice agencies, Chief Constables, Police and Crime Commissioners, the judiciary, victims and victim organisations and voluntary groups. And I also do in depth research reviews into victim services and report on how agencies are complying with the Code.

In undertaking this important and exciting role, I am able to draw upon a wide range of experience, combining political, legal and police expertise. I have a lifelong interest in fighting injustice and believe our criminal justice system can only be considered successful if it delivers justice to both victim and offender.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to write for Probation Quarterly as it gives me the opportunity to reflect upon how victims are supported before and after an offender has been sentenced.

I take a close interest in the Victim Contact Scheme, which is managed by the National Probation Service, as well as victim engagement within the parole process. It is always a pleasure to meet with those responsible for the scheme from the NPS to discuss its operation and senior members from the Parole Board to discuss parole. I welcome their commitment to victims and their desire to consider how the victim experience might be improved.

So what role should victims have in the criminal justice system and how should they be treated?

For some, any mention of victim involvement prompts the claim that you are seeking to take away the rights of the offender. There is a view that any rights given to victims can only be at the expense of the offender's rights.

I disagree. The right of a defendant to a fair trial is sacrosanct. It is not affected by the changes which are needed to greatly improve the way that victims and witnesses are treated by the criminal justice agencies from report to court and, importantly in this context, after the court process has ended. It is long overdue that the rights of victims and witnesses are assured and the move to a new Victims Code which the government is proposing should be a key step in the right direction.

A former head of the United Nations, the late Kofi Annan once said: "Knowledge is power. Information is liberating." These are wise words from a wise man.

All crime has an impact on the victim. That is likely to range from a minor setback, perhaps causing the victim to feel that they are less safe than they had thought right up to a need for lifelong post-traumatic support for victims of serious physical or sexual assaults. It is imperative, if the criminal justice system is to be fair to all those victims, that they are treated with dignity and acknowledged as having an important role to play in the process. Victims and witnesses need to be given clear easily understood information about the criminal justice system and how it will work and, it is essential that they are kept up-to-date on the progress of the specific case in which they are involved.



So, I want victims to be better informed about the criminal justice system and able to challenge those who hold power when appropriate. This will help victims to cope and recover from crime, which is in everyone's interests, but especially that of the criminal justice agencies who may need their help in the future. It will also help to deliver a fairer justice system in which victims and witnesses feel confident.

Lately, there have been some positive moves towards openness. Following a High Court judgment in 2018, the government scrapped the privacy requirement in the Parole Board Rules and victims can now be given high level reasons for Parole Board decisions. Last year, the government introduced a parole "reconsideration mechanism" whereby victims have the opportunity to challenge parole release decisions. The government has also announced its intention to place all eligible victims into the Victim Contact Scheme with a right to opt out, reversing the current practice.

These changes are all to be welcomed.

But sadly, there is still so much more we need to do to make the criminal justice system more transparent. In this article I offer just a handful of examples.

I want all victims to know what to expect as a case progresses through the system and have an understanding of the rationale behind decisions. This knowledge will empower them to make informed choices at appropriate points in the process.

When a defendant is sentenced, I want to be sure victims (and defendants) understand what the

sentence actually means in practical terms. Our sentencing laws are somewhat opaque and it is little surprise so many victims are confused.

With this in mind, I have been calling for victims and defendants, in serious cases to be given transcripts of judges sentencing remarks so that they can absorb the information away from the pressures of the court, at a time of their choosing and seek advice where appropriate. I welcome the recent announcement by the Lord Chancellor to bring cameras into courts to film judges handing down sentences. Ultimately that should lead to victims, witnesses and the public being able to access the reality of sentences that concern them and the reasoning behind them by viewing them online.

Another important element to transparency is victims being provided with sufficient information to help them understand an offender's progression through a prison sentence, to the point of release.

For example, I want victims in the Victim Contact Scheme to be notified when the offender has been re-categorised, perhaps explaining in general terms how such a decision is taken and by whom and the factors likely to have been taken into account. I understand this has been considered and there are some concerns as to how much information may be shared legally, but it is about the victim understanding the process rather than receiving personal data about the prisoner. Victims can be told when an offender is transferred to Category D conditions now, so it is hard to understand why this is permissible, when sharing information about transfers between categories A - C is currently said not to be. I have asked that the current position be reviewed.





I hear victims' frustration with the annual contact letter, which invariably gives them very little information.

I accept that the primary purpose of the letter is to retain ongoing contact with victims prior to the offender approaching release. This is important. However, I believe there is scope to go further and use the letters to explain in general terms the opportunities which are given to prisoners to promote their rehabilitation whilst they are in custody.

For example, there is a section in the letter that refers to "significant developments". In nearly every case, the letter advises victims there have been "no significant developments". Evidence from our victim engagement exercise in 2018 suggests victims interpret this as meaning there has been no change in the risk, attitudes or behaviour presented by the offender. So, when the victim receives a parole decision stating the offender is safe to be released, this comes as a terrible shock. In reality, a great deal of progress may have been made, but the victim will never be told.

I accept that precise details of the offender's rehabilitation cannot be shared, but equally, we should avoid the misleading impression that there has been no rehabilitation and no progress.

Ultimately most prisoners will be released and it is in everyone's interests that those who s/he has harmed in the past at least to understand the processes which have led to that.

And finally, I want victims to be given more information on how an offender will be managed within the community. Many victims do live in constant fear of release, particularly when the offender is an ex-partner or family member. Yet the steps that can be taken by criminal agencies to manage the offender in the community and monitor their risk of doing harm are often extensive. If fully explained to a victim, they might provide reassurance.

So, Kofi Annan's dictum "Knowledge is power. Information is liberating" neatly and succinctly sums up why we need to do more to open up our criminal justice system and share information with victims. By doing so, we help victims to cope and recover from the trauma of crime and we make our justice system fairer, without undermining the rights of those who have offended.

If you would like more information please contact the Office of the Victims' Commissioner CEO: [Russell.acourt@victims.commissioner.org.uk](mailto:Russell.acourt@victims.commissioner.org.uk)





# The challenges of being a **Probation Victim Liaison Officer**

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Edith Thompson\* discusses the importance of the role of the VLO.

\* not her real name



It's Monday morning. An Offender Manager emails me to ask if I can take on a case. He has asked the police to obtain contact details for the victims and the details for the last victim has just been received. Can I contact him?

You may wonder, well what is so difficult about that? As a Probation Victim Liaison Officer, surely you speak to people every day about the Victim Contact Scheme? Yet, as with much of probation work, nothing is ever simple.

The offence was a rape. The offender threatened the young victim with a weapon. It happened nearly 30 years ago. The offender was convicted in the 1990s for the offences against him and others. The Victim Contact Scheme was not in place when the offender was sentenced. Shortly after the scheme started, in 2001, efforts were made to trace the victims, but this was unsuccessful. Multi Agency Public Protection meetings have recently taken place and it was decided that further efforts should be made to trace the victims.

It is 30 December. Normally I would wait until after the festive period to contact someone, but the Parole Board oral hearing to consider the offender's release is in mid January. I consider how the victim will feel. Will he welcome being contacted about this now? Has he tried to forget? Will the thought of this horrify him? It is too late for him to even submit a Victim Personal Statement. What will I do to this man by contacting him?

I speak to the police Risk Management Officer. Thankfully, they have already spoken to the victim. He is interested in the Victim Contact Scheme, so at least I know he wants information. I phone to introduce myself and we arrange to

meet later that week. At this late stage in the sentence, there is so much to inform him of. I am also conscious that the offence has traumatised him and this will impact on his ability to take in information.

When we meet, I explain about the Victim Contact Scheme in more detail. He did not know if the offender had been released and used to worry that he would not recognise him if he passed him on the street. He said that the offence has had a devastating impact on him, and his life as he knew it was taken away.

I go through how a life sentence is structured and break it to him that there is currently a Parole review and that could lead to his release. I explain that the Parole Board will write reasons for their decision and he could receive a Parole Board Decision Summary. Like many Victim Liaison Officers (VLO), I welcome this recent development. As a VLO, you are very restricted on what information you can disclose. Previously we have only been able to tell a victim that the Parole Board has decided to release, or not, or to transfer to open conditions. Now at least they can have some information as to why the Parole Board has come to that decision.

Another recent development is the reconsideration mechanism. Parole Board decisions are now reviewed by the Ministry of Justice and victims can ask that they are reconsidered. The whole process is complex and I am concerned about overloading him with information.

I explain about licence conditions. Understandably, he said he does not want the offender to be located near him. I reassure him that this will be taken into consideration.



It's a difficult meeting for him, but he said he is so grateful to be offered the Victim Contact Scheme now. It feels like a step in the right direction for him.

The oral hearing is adjourned. I know this will be good news for the victim and he is very relieved. It means that we have time now to write a Victim Personal Statement for the Parole Board. We arrange to meet later that week. However, he cancels the appointment via text stating that he is not in the right frame of mind. I can only imagine what he is going through.

He phones me a few days later to discuss the report I have sent him following our meeting. I have also enclosed information on services that may help him to cope with the impact. I ask if he has had any further thoughts about the Victim Personal Statement. He has decided that he wants to write one. The offence has affected him in so many ways. He asks for more information and I explain about presenting the statement at the hearing and the various options open to him, including attending himself. He thinks he needs to face the offender. He thinks this will help him move forward.

He worries that the offender will harm someone else. He thinks if he won't, he will be better able to cope with his release. I said that the information contained in the Parole Board Decision Summary about what work the offender has undertaken to reduce his risk may offer reassurance, together with knowing there will be external controls such as sex offender registration and licence conditions. He ends by saying that "if he can have a life, maybe I can have a life". He says it will help if he knows the offender is remorseful.

For decades he has had no information. He has not known if the offender was alive or dead, in prison or released. He didn't know what the sentence meant and didn't know about the restrictions that would be in place to protect other people. He had also tried to cope with the impact of the rape on his own.

As with many of those I work with, I can see that the more I talk to him about the work of probation, the work that can be undertaken in prison and the management after release, the more reassured he is. It is still incredibly difficult for him, but having that information and knowing that there is support and treatment, to help him recover is beneficial. After all, they do say that knowledge is power.

Equally important is being heard. Sometimes it is the offender who has taken their voice. Sometimes it is the Criminal Justice System. The Victim Contact Scheme not only provides information but it also provides people with the opportunity to be heard.

In a different case, I work with a survivor of domestic abuse. He says that "Opting in to the Victim Contact Scheme has made my journey more bearable at times. My journey continues to be a rollercoaster of emotions when it comes to parole hearings and moves to open prisons. But without the support from my Victim Liaison Officer, I would have little knowledge of what is happening.

After having every aspect of my life controlled by a monster, I feel knowing what happens during his sentence enables me to maintain the control I have now regained of my life. I am a survivor. I am free. I am me."

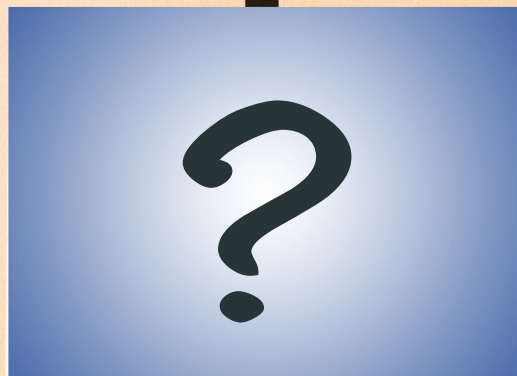
That's why I am a VLO.



# WHAT IS PROBATION

Anne Worrall reflects on two years as Editor

## *Quarterly* FOR?





Probation Quarterly, the magazine of the Probation Institute, aims to provide a bridge of research-based or research-informed communication between individuals and organisations across all sectors working with offenders in the community. It is a 'magazine' rather than a 'journal' because we want to cover issues that are topical and to do so in formats that are accessible to busy practitioners. We believe that good research can be communicated in clear, straightforward and engaging language and that readers can be signposted to full-length reports and journal articles for more detail. We also believe that high quality visual images can make reading more enjoyable and memorable.

In the past two years (9 issues) we have published over 70 articles, excluding those

specifically about the Probation Institute itself. Of these, around a quarter have been contributed by academics and almost as many by voluntary sector organisations. Slightly fewer have been received from HMPPS and CRCs, with the remainder from the private sector, Sir Graham Smith Award researchers, HM Inspectorate of Probation, multi-agency projects and other individuals.

Articles have taken a variety of formats including research findings, personal reflections, book reviews, descriptions of innovative practice, reports from national and international conferences, thought pieces and information about the work of a range of organisations across criminal justice sectors. Here are some examples of the wide range of topics we have covered:



We expect all contributors to abide by the Probation Institute Code of Ethics and to stimulate readers to reflect on their own practice but we are happy to publish a range of views that don't necessarily represent the views of the PI, in the interests of open debate. We want to maintain a positive and forward-looking tone, but we welcome articles that are challenging and have a critical edge.

We've been delighted by the number of experienced writers and senior figures in criminal justice who have supported and contributed to PQ. We have also tried to encourage practitioners to take their first steps in writing by contributing to PQ before tackling the challenges of writing for peer-reviewed journals. Here are just a few of the positive comments we have received from contributors and readers:



It has been a pleasure to work with Richard Rowley who is a talented designer and experienced criminal justice worker. As PQ has grown, we have engaged a small editorial board to assist me in making judgements about submitted articles and I have appreciated their wisdom. The experience of editing such a lively publication has been overwhelmingly positive and I am grateful

to everyone who has supported and contributed to the venture. Long may it continue and if you have enjoyed Probation Quarterly free online, please support the Probation Institute's work by becoming a member. Here's the link:

<http://probation-institute.org/membership/>



A photograph of a woman with brown hair, smiling and looking towards a man whose back is to the camera. She is wearing a dark blue sweatshirt with the word 'SWITCHBACK' in white. The background is a blurred office or meeting space.

## Building the future of resettlement around relationships

Sam Boyd, Head of Policy, Impact and Communications at Switchback, makes the case for the role of small charities in future partnerships.

As a small charity working through-the-gate with young men leaving prison in London, we see examples every day of the commitment and skill of probation staff supporting successful resettlement. Yet very often, from our perspective working 'outside' the system but closely alongside probation, we see the system failing to allow professionals to do this effectively.

Switchback was established in 2008 on the premise that while many services do excellent work in their specialist area, many young prison-leavers lack the confidence, knowledge and continuity of support to realise their options. Switchback Trainees receive intensive 1-to-1 support from a dedicated Switchback Mentor beginning in prison three months before release and lasting for as long as it takes after prison. This runs alongside real work training in the community and support into sustainable employment. Around 40 men aged 18-30 each year become Switchback Trainees in the community, while we support another 250 each year in their preparations for release.

Switchback Mentors aren't volunteers; they are highly-skilled practitioners each working with a

small caseload of young men who make a huge commitment to live life differently. They must be willing to become the most important person in a Trainee's life whilst also working towards that no longer being the case.

In recent years, it has become harder for Switchback's intensive through-the-gate model to work hand-in-hand with an increasingly fragmented and underfunded system of statutory support for prison-leavers. The reunification of offender management into the National Probation Service provides an opportunity to revive through-the-gate support, improve partnership working and give prison-leavers a real chance to leave crime behind and live life differently. For the new system to succeed where TR did not, adequate resource will be crucial. However, a shift in culture and in collaboration will also ensure that probation and local services can work together and enable prison-leavers to build a stable life for the long-term.

## Shifting culture

When it comes to supporting prison-leavers to make real, lasting change in their lives, a culture based on supportive, trusting relationships is what works. This idea is at the heart of Switchback's model - indeed it is something probation professionals will know better than anyone, and which many put into practice every day. When Switchback Trainees have a good relationship with their probation officer, they tell us it is because they show understanding, flexibility and care. It is when they put the interests, needs and aspirations of the person at the centre of their work.

Yet often we see pockets of this good practice happening in spite of the system, rather than because of it. By putting skilled, motivational relationships at the centre of the new system, backed up by proper training and support, professionals will have a real chance to play to their strengths.





Secondly, the system needs to be far more realistic with prison-leavers about the realities of release. Switchback Mentors find that managing expectations and being honest about the challenges of change after prison – that it will be a tough, slow process – is usually welcomed by people used to mixed messages and false dawns. Being authentic and clear about what we can and cannot do, and delivering realistic messages about the difficulties that await on the outside, is central to building trust and preparation for making a lasting change after release.

Thirdly, we find that the best way to coach reliability in prison-leavers is to demonstrate it in practice. Switchback has one rule: do what you say you are going to do. Too often people in the system are promised support in prison, be it housing or employment, only to be left high and dry upon release. 42% of Switchback Trainees are released homeless and many leave with no ID, no bank account and no Jobcentre appointment. If prison-leavers breach their licence conditions the result is a recall. Yet when the system doesn't follow through on its promise, there's often no explanation, much less any recourse. We need to focus on building trust and motivation rather than resentment and suspicion.

Finally, by focussing on building stability across all areas of life and recognising how each area interconnects, rather than focussing on one area like employment in isolation, Switchback's model ensures that prison-leavers can make a change that lasts long-term. And by measuring success in terms of stability over time, we find that stopping crime and sustaining work and housing become the natural by-products.

## Embracing collaboration

As well as shifting culture towards honest, supportive relationships, collaboration needs to permeate the new system on every level. We see this happening well in some areas, but often against the odds. Where probation staff see

the value of local charities like Switchback, and make efforts to share information and coordinate support around the person, prison-leavers have a real platform for meaningful change. But often it feels like there isn't the time, resource or incentives to do this. As a result, prison-leavers fall through the cracks of a fragmented system of overstretched support services. Not having a single point of contact makes the situation worse – a position probation officers would appear well placed to fill, given the opportunity and resource.

New, more localised commissioning models are also needed to involve smaller specialist local charities. The only way this can work is to offer multi-year grant funding, targeted at organisations that are relationship-centred, locally embedded and effective at what they do. Switchback, and others like us, have never been part of statutory contracts before because they've never been designed in that way before.



There also needs to be the flexibility for voluntary sector organisations to be involved outside of formal contracts, and the freedom for professionals, who know the needs of their caseload best, to engage with local partners appropriate for the individual. When probation officers know and trust Switchback there is a much easier flow of information and coordination around the person, and far better outcomes as a result.

## Joining the dots

When all of this works well together, radically different outcomes are possible. Only 9% of Switchback Trainees reoffend and 81% of programme finishers move into work. This is because we embrace a relationship-centred approach and form strong partnerships with local prisons, probation, employers and other agencies.

As the new probation system is rolled out, good training, support and development for professionals will also be vital, as well as the time and space to build meaningful relationships. Our full time Switchback Mentors receive regular training and clinical supervision, and work with a caseload of no more than four or five young men at a time. This may not be achievable or appropriate within probation, but key lessons can still be applied in other ways: connecting custodial and community support more closely, taking a relational approach, building bridges between local services, and engaging local voluntary organisations to provide intensive support where needed.

We now have a real opportunity to reshape resettlement around relationships, with probation playing a central role. We know the appetite is there and we've seen a growing number of prison and probation services approach Switchback for training in our methods. By making a real shift in culture and collaboration, we can give prison-leavers a real chance to build a stable, rewarding life as part of society.

*Switchback is an award-winning charity enabling young Londoners to find a way out of the justice system and build stable, rewarding lives. They provide intensive 1-to-1 support through-the-gate alongside real work training after release.*

Find out more at [www.switchback.org.uk](http://www.switchback.org.uk) and follow on Twitter [@switchback\\_ldn](https://twitter.com/switchback_ldn) and [@samboyd1](https://twitter.com/samboyd1).



**Sam Boyd**

Head of Policy, Impact and  
Communications for Switchback



# Research Conference 2020

## Probation and Families

Wednesday 11th March 2020

Resource for London

356 Holloway Rd, N7 6PA

10.30am to 4.00pm

This is an important topic and we are seeking to capture research particularly focussing on probation work with families in the community.

Contributions will include:

- Shona Minson who has completed extensive research on the impact of imprisonment on families.
- FAIR Project - Cambridge University.
- Kent, Surrey Sussex CRC Research Project.
- Research Project with PACT (Prison Advice and Care Trust) on relationship education.

Panel and Break-Out Sessions will provide opportunities for discussion of implications for practice.

The event is funded by NPS so there will be *no charge* but please ensure that you have approval to attend if this is required by your employer.

There are a maximum of 60 places.

For further information please email [Helen@probation-institute.org](mailto:Helen@probation-institute.org)