

A Probation Service Fit for the Future



The Probation Institute has been engaging with HMPPS, partners, Fellows and members following the publication of the Target Operating Model (TOM) by HMPPS and the recent White Paper from the Ministry of Justice. This note draws together some key themes from these discussions including a recent Fellows Meeting that asked the question:

“What Kind of Probation Service Do We Want?”

1. PURPOSE

The answer to the question above must flow from a definition of the purposes of Probation. The Probation Institute believes these to be:

- The provision of pre-sentence reports to the Courts to facilitate appropriate sentencing.
- The rehabilitation of those who have committed offences by working with them towards desisting from future offending.
- The enhancement of public safety through the reduction in risk of re-offending and the risk of harm to others associated with it.
- The delivery of sentences imposed by Courts. These include Community Orders for which Probation is primarily responsible and supervision of those released on licence from custody.

2. FULFILLING PROBATION'S PURPOSE

To do so requires the following:

- **Recruit the right staff** - the ability to build, maintain and develop relationships with service users is the fundamental building block of Probation work. This ability can be developed and enhanced but it should be evident in those we recruit. We are more likely to identify and recruit the right staff if we have flexible routes into a Probation career that facilitate access for all groups in society.
- **Developing confident professionals** - all Probation staff must have access to training and continuing professional development. Training and development should build practice skills, disseminate evidence from research regarding best practice and facilitate the application of this evidence. Continuing professional development should be provided and/or facilitated by the employer but staff should take responsibility for their own development. This approach fosters an outward looking, professionally curious and confident staff and should be promoted through the establishment of an Independent Professional Regulator.
- **Creating and sustaining a culture based on professional ethics** - [see Probation Institute Code of Ethics](#) - such a culture will be facilitated by effective recruitment and training, but these are not sufficient in themselves. Employers should encourage an open culture where peer support and learning are encouraged, where skilled professionals are valued and listened to. In turn professionals should promote a culture that involves service users in their supervision and wherever possible in the process of organisational development and planning. Such a culture will be inclusive and will take positive action towards minority groups; and is unlikely to be achieved if Probation staff at all levels do not reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. This should involve the active recruitment and inclusion of those with lived experience of the criminal justice system.

- **Integrate deployment of technology** - healthy culture that supports well-trained practitioners should welcome the effective application of evolving technology that assists in the achievement of professional aims whilst taking account of digital exclusion. Integration of technology will be most effective where practitioners and service users are involved in design and application. This includes co-ordination with other CJS systems (Courts, Prisons, Police), case management systems, the use of technology to facilitate remote contacts where appropriate, the use of apps to support specific interventions and the integration of electronic monitoring into the planning and delivery of supervision.
- **Stable and adequate funding** - it will not be possible to achieve the above without adequate and stable funding. HM Inspectorate of Probation has documented the damage done to Probation practice by under-resourcing and unsustainably high workloads. The Probation Institute believes that re-investment away from imprisonment and towards community provision would facilitate effective resource distribution. It is also a far more efficient application of public funds.

3. DESIGNING DELIVERY STRUCTURE

Probation delivery structures have undergone frequent change over the last 30 years. The most effective organisational model will be designed from the bottom up based on a consideration of how best to achieve its purposes and to facilitate the key elements required to do so.

Probation has never been, nor ever will be, a monopoly provider. The core business of public sector Probation is case management, advice to courts and the delivery of interventions requiring enforcement on behalf of courts. To succeed in its broader rehabilitative task, it must work effectively with a range of statutory, voluntary and independent partners. Doing so requires:

- access to and participation in local commissioning structures.
- identifiable credible local leadership that builds relationships with key local partners and participates in key local forums (e.g. Local Criminal Justice and Reducing Re-offending Boards).
- partnering with and supporting the sustainability of organisations that work with those communities most at risk of alienation from the criminal justice system.
- cross departmental commitment at a national level that requires key statutory partners such as housing providers, health services, benefits agencies and Police to work co-operatively to reduce re-offending.

4. OUTCOMES

A Probation Service that is well designed to achieve its purpose can expect to deliver the following outcomes:

- Reductions in predicted rates of reoffending.
- Fewer victims of crime.
- Increased public confidence in the management of potentially dangerous people.
- High levels of sentencer confidence.
- The rehabilitation and re-integration into society of a significant proportion of service users.
- A virtuous circle of continuous improvement where confident professionals develop and challenge their practice based on research and on co-production with its service users.