



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

HM Inspectorate of Probation

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Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice
Minister for Prisons and Probation
Minister for Victims and Safeguarding
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Justice
Chief Inspectors of Criminal Justice
HM Chief Inspector, Ofsted
Chief Executive, Care Quality Commission
Chief Inspector, Estyn
Chief Executive, Healthcare Inspectorate Wales
Chief Executive, Care Inspectorate Wales

22 November 2023

Re: Consultation on our thematic inspection and research programmes for 2024/2025

1. Background

- 1.1. Under the Police and Criminal Justice Act 2006, we are required to consult key stakeholders on our inspection frameworks and programmes. It is our practice to consult more widely, with those we inspect and associated bodies who can provide valuable insight and information as we develop our framework and programmes.
- 1.2. This consultation sets out proposals for our upcoming thematic inspection programme and research programme for 2024/2025 in sections 2 and 3. These are the proposals that we are consulting on.
- 1.3. We would very much welcome your comments on these proposals by Wednesday 6th December.

Core programmes

- 1.4. We are beginning our new cycle of probation inspections this month, where we will be rating both probation delivery units (PDUs) and regions. Key changes to our probation inspection programme include:

- introducing new regional standards
 - inspecting and rating each region over a three- to four-year timeframe
 - introducing updated probation delivery unit (PDU) standards
 - publishing regional inspection reports in addition to individual PDU reports
 - inspecting all PDUs in the region, before we complete a regional inspection
 - extending PDU fieldwork to two weeks, with cases being inspected in the first week and meetings being held in the second
 - extending regional fieldwork to two weeks
 - rating desistance and public protection at regional level, based on PDU case inspection data
 - rating court work and resettlement work at regional level, based on data gathered from inspected PDU cases
 - inspecting and rating victim work and unpaid work, as part of the regional inspection.
- 1.5. Our current youth justice services (YJS) inspection cycle is due to finish in late 2024. We are now starting to design our new and future youth inspection programme. We will shortly be launching a consultation on our future inspection process for YJS inspections.

Thematic inspections

- 1.6. Under our current thematics programme (2022/2023), we have carried out thematic inspections of the following:

Adult

- Offender Management in Custody (OMiC)
- Meeting the needs of victims in the CJS
- Counterterrorism
- Domestic abuse
- Racial equality in probation
- Imprisonment for public protection (IPP) review
- Women in probation

Youth

- Youth remand
- Young adults

- 1.7. We apply a number of criteria to identify and prioritise our thematic topics as follows:

- Has this been identified as an ongoing area of weakness/concern in our core inspections?
- Is this a ministerial priority?
- Are there major change programmes or major national changes being applied to the operating model that require external oversight and assurance?

Research programme

- 1.8. We are committed to reviewing, developing and promoting the evidence base for high-quality probation and youth justice services. We will add value through our research programme by: making valuable contributions to the policy and operational evidence base; ensuring that our inspection standards, frameworks, organisational positions and effective practice products are evidence based; and by providing technical advice so that our inspections are robust and impactful.
- 1.9. Under our current research programme (2023/2024), we have undertaken or are undertaking the following:

Primary research

- Exploring Contextual Safeguarding in youth justice services
- Effective management in probation and youth justice
- Interventions across the probation service
- Care-experienced children in the youth justice system
- Transitional Safeguarding

Secondary analysis

- Examining the links between probation supervision and positive outcomes – early progress
- Examining the links between probation supervision and positive outcomes – completion and proven reoffending
- The role of engagement for positive outcomes
- Examining the links between youth justice supervision and proven reoffending

- 1.10. To help us prioritise topics for our research programme, we apply the following criteria:

Current level of risk

- Significant changes to policy, service delivery or caseloads
- Risks to public protection/ safeguarding
- Findings from inspections, research and other forms of evidence

Potential impact

- Potential impact of our findings
- Ministerial and other key stakeholder interests
- Quality of current evidence
- Development of inspection standards

Other

- Suited to research or inspection
- Estimated resource requirements and timescales

- 1.11. During 2023/2024, we have also continued to publish Academic Insights papers on a range of topics; see: <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/research/academic-insights/>.

2. Thematic inspection programme – Proposals

- 2.1. We will be looking to carry out up to five thematic inspections during 2024/2025.
- 2.2. Having considered the criteria set out in 1.7 we plan to conduct thematic inspections on the following topics in 2024/2025:

Unpaid work (adult)

A thematic inspection on unpaid work would enable an in-depth look at post-pandemic recovery. Whilst our core programme work shows some pockets of good practice, it has also shown other more worrying aspects and uncertainty around how the backlog figures for unpaid work are being recorded.

Recruitment, retention and training (adult)

Recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and the effective implementation of probation unification have been impacted by staff shortages, among other factors. Despite the recent recruitment drive, probation inspections have repeatedly shown that almost all PDUs inspected have been struggling with understaffing. While the number of practitioners has been increasing over the past 12 months, there are still further staffing challenges which are impacting the service, including retention of staff and addressing a newly experienced workforce. A thematic inspection will provide an opportunity to look in depth at these issues.

Pre-court disposals (youth)

The volume of pre-court disposals work has increased significantly. There is little national guidance and lots of variation in approaches. This thematic inspection could

focus on community resolutions and the diversion options to fill a gap in knowledge and evidence.

- 2.3. We would also welcome views on further topics for thematic inspections for our consideration, from the below suggested list:

Adult

- a) **Court and pre-sentence reports (PSRs):** There have been several changes in the way PSRs are prepared and delivered since we last focused on this topic. PSR pilots and new intensive supervision courts have now been rolled out. Not all relevant checks are done at court and we see programmes being proposed that turn out to be unworkable. Pre-sentence safeguarding and domestic abuse enquiries are starting to improve but the information received is not being sufficiently analysed. *There is also scope to consider this topic as a research project.*
- b) **Sexual offenders/ behaviours (adult and/or youth):** In 2019 we carried out a joint inspection with HMI Prisons on the management and supervision of men convicted of sexual offences. Here we found that planning for release wasn't good enough and staff struggled to balance a positive, forward-looking approach with one focused on public protection. We also found that the needs of children and victims should be given greater priority. A thematic inspection in this area would enable us to see what progress has been made since 2019.

Youth

- c) **Youth justice services (YJS) and social care:** This topic was widely supported following our previous statutory consultation around thematic topics. A thematic inspection on this would allow us to shine a light on barriers to joint working and highlight where improvements could be made to enhance outcomes. Our YJS inspections show a disconnect between the services, despite YJSs increasingly being absorbed into children's services.
- d) **Leadership and partnership in the YJS:** This topic would promote cross-sector learning and would complement the work we have done around leadership in probation.
- e) **Mental health:** This would be an opportunity to do our first thematic on our own around the response by youth justice services to mental health.

Consultation questions – thematic inspections

The topics described under 2.2 are thematic inspections that we intend to conduct unless an exceptional case is made by respondents. Where additional suggestions are proposed, please outline the following in support of your proposals:

- What is the compelling evidence to suggest your proposal needs to be covered as a thematic inspection in this next financial year?

- If you offer more than one proposal what priority order do your suggestions take and why?
- Which project(s) described above would you replace with your proposal(s) and why?

Q1: Do you have any preferred thematic inspection topics from our list set out in 2.3 for 2024/2025?

Q2: Do you have any additional proposals for thematic inspection topics for 2024/ 2025?

3. Research programme – Proposals

3.1. Having considered the criteria set out in 1.10, we plan to carry out primary research on the following during 2024/2025:

Approved premises

Approved premises (APs) remain one of the least visible and well-known parts of the criminal justice system, yet they are a key mechanism in the transitional risk management and support for people leaving prison who are assessed as high risk of serious harm. The research will consider how APs can maximise their potential for supporting desistance and rehabilitation whilst managing any safety concerns. In other words, the ways in which APs can meet all three limbs within their current 'Statement of Purpose' to:

- a) provide the highest levels of community based public protection
- b) provide an environment which is rich in opportunities for rehabilitation
- c) support an individual plan for independent and offence-free living.

As part of the scoping for this project, we will consider the full range of APs including the new Recovery Focused APs.

3.2. We would also welcome views on additional primary research topics from the following list:

- a) **Serious further offence (SFO) reviews and learning culture:** Our [effective practice guide](#) for SFO reviews highlighted the importance of embedding learning across the probation service with the view to improving future practice. Research in this area would explore how findings from SFO reviews can best be utilised as part of a wider learning culture (which requires a culture of both support and critical reflection).
- b) **Youth justice work with victims:** YJSs have a statutory duty to comply with the [code of practice for victims of crime](#). There is a renewed focus on this work through the Victims Bill 2023 and many victims that the YJSs work with are children themselves. Research in this area would explore

how well YJSs are complying with the code of practice and seek to identify good practice and key lessons.

- c) **The interventions landscape in youth justice:** Research in this area would seek to increase understanding of the current youth justice interventions landscape, with a focus on what is working well and what is not working well, and the key enablers and barriers to the delivery of a sufficiently comprehensive range of high-quality interventions.
- d) **Intermediate outcomes:** This research would continue the exploration of the most appropriate outcome measures linked to desistance from offending. Attention needs to be paid to ensuring that the outcome measures are sufficiently timely, can be sufficiently tailored to the individual, and can support claims of attribution.

3.3. In terms of secondary analysis of our inspection data, we are exploring the following topics:

Probation

- The quality of public protection work over time
- The quality of pre-sentence information and advice provided to courts
- An examination of the differing age groups of people on probation
- The voice of people on probation

Youth

- The voice of children under supervision
- Impact of organisational inputs upon the quality of delivery
- Impact of local socio-economic factors upon the quality of delivery

Probation and youth

- Comparing the quality of youth justice and probation delivery for 16/17- and 18/19-year-olds

3.4. During 2024/2025, we will explore potential typologies/groupings of probation delivery units and youth justice services to further assist with analysis of our inspection data.

3.5. We will continue to commission leading academics to contribute to our Academic Insights series. These publications present key insights on selected topics, assisting with informed debate and aiding understanding of what helps and what hinders probation and youth justice service delivery. The topics already commissioned include:

- A framework for relational working in youth justice
- Sport-based interventions in youth justice
- Desistance theory and lived experience
- Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements

- Domestic abuse interventions
- 3.6. We will also continue to publish five-minute reflections from research videos; see:
<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/research/reflections-from-research/>

Consultation questions – research programme

The projects set out under section 3 are those we intend to prioritise unless an exceptional case is made by respondents. Where alternative suggestions are proposed, please outline the following in support of your proposals:

- What is the compelling evidence to suggest your proposal needs to be covered by HM Inspectorate of Probation, as a research project, in this next financial year?
- If you offer more than one proposal, what priority order do your suggestions take and why?
- Which project(s) described above would you replace with your proposal(s) and why?

Q3: Do you have any preferred research topics from our list set out in 3.2 for 2024/2025?

Q4: Do you have any alternative proposals on research topics for 2024/2025?

4. Conclusion

In this consultation we have set out our priorities in relation to thematic inspection topics and research projects, along with other suggestions for 2024/2025. Ministers may ask us to conduct specific pieces of work or investigations over the course of 2024/2025, and we will respond to these and any risks as they arise.

We would very much appreciate your views on our thematics and research programmes for 2024/2025 by Wednesday 6th December.

Please direct your responses and any queries to: Amelia.Johnson-Manley@hmiprobation.gov.uk

Yours sincerely,



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Youth

Keith Fraser, YJB Chair
Jacqui Belfield-Smith, AYM Chair
Pippa Goodfellow, Alliance for Youth Justice
Dame Rachel de Souza, Children's Commissioner
Leroy Logan MBE, Transition to Adulthood
YJS Managers

CJS

Baroness Helen Newlove, Victims Commissioner

Other interested parties

Sir Robert Neil, Justice Select Committee
Jenny George, National Audit Office
Chris Purnell, User Voice
Pia Sinha, Prison Reform Trust
Anne Fox, Clinks
Helen Schofield, Probation Institute
Simon Shepherd, Butler Trust
Nicola Carr, Probation Journal
Magistrates Association
Kevin Wong, British Journal of Community Justice
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