Cronfa - Swansea University Open Access Repository

_____

This is an author produced version of a paper published in:
British Journal of Social Work

_____

Cronfa URL for this paper:

_____

Paper:

_____

http://www.swansea.ac.uk/iss/researchsupport/cronfa-support/

MOVING AWAY FROM SOCIAL WORK AND HALF WAY BACK AGAIN: NEW

RESEARCH ON SKILLS IN PROBATION

Peter Raynor and Maurice Vanstone

Peter Raynor is Research Professor in Criminology and Criminal Justice, and Maurice

Vanstone is Emeritus Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Swansea University.

Both are qualified social workers and former probation officers.

Corresponding author:

Professor Peter Raynor, PhD, FAcSS

Department of Criminology

Vivian Tower

Swansea University

Swansea, SA2 8PP

Wales, UK

p.raynor@swansea.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

Research on social work in the criminal justice system was well represented in the social work literature until the 1990s. Since then, changes in the organisation, training and research base of probation practice, particularly in England and Wales, have all contributed to a separation between probation research and the mainstream social work research literature. However, recent probation research, by focusing on individual practice skills and on the quality of relationships, is producing findings which resonate with traditional social work concerns. The study presented here, based on analysis of videotaped interviews between probation staff and the people they are supervising, shows what skills are used and the effects of skilled supervision. People supervised by more skilled staff were significantly less likely to be reconvicted over a two-year follow-up, and the most effective supervisors combined good relationship skills with a range of 'structuring' or change-promoting skills. In effect this can be regarded as a test of the impact of social work skills used by probation staff, and suggests that a closer relationship between mainstream social work research and probation research could be productive for both.

Background

In recent years probation has moved away from social work both as a subject and as an institutionalised practice towards what is commonly termed community corrections or offender management, and in so doing has taken on a distinctively different identity. It began its life in the philanthropic and charity movements of the 19th century and in particular the early social project (Vanstone 2004). Although in one way or another, probation has always been involved in the administration and management of particular non-custodial sentences, it has retained distinctive social work characteristics not only through its involvement in

adoption, matrimonial and divorce court functions but also through practice founded on the traditional social work treatment model. In the latter part of the 20th century it shed its family court functions and in its current, modern form it focuses exclusively on work with those who appear before the criminal courts and who pose significant risk to the public through their offending, standing apart from social work as a criminological project. At least, this is how it appears. In this paper, through reflections on our study of the practice of probation officers in Jersey (Raynor *et al* 2013) we examine this phenomenon and attempt to distinguish between the appearance and the reality. In the process, we re-appraise the argument that probation should be seen as social work and reflect on how mainstream social work might adapt to accommodate the roles of social workers in criminal justice. We begin with the relevant history.

From social work help to corrections

The full story of probation has been laid out in a variety of ways by numerous historians and for the purposes of this paper, therefore, only requires sketching out (Bochel 1976; Jarvis 1972; Mair and Burke 2012; McWilliams 1983, 1985, 1986, 1987; Raynor and Vanstone 2002; Raynor and Robinson 2009; Whitehead 2010; Vanstone 2004). An outline sketch depicts probation evolving from Christian-motivated philanthropy of the 19th century and retaining its religious agenda well into the 20th century, only succumbing to the forces of professionalised social work and its treatment ideology as training increased its psychology-inspired sophistication. However, adding a little more detail produces a fuller picture which shows that from the first introduction of probation in 1907 practice 'was based on an emerging social work programme influenced by organisations like the Howard Association', state-sponsored moralising, and belief in the fledgling science of criminology's concepts of surveillance and classification (Gard 2007: 939). Of course, probation was a phenomenon

with many international forms and variations (Vanstone 2008) but for the purposes of this paper the more narrowly framed focus on the British Isles will suffice.

In the United Kingdom at least, for most of the 20th century probation was a social work enterprise with a specialist interest in people who come before the courts. By the mid-point of the 20th century, facilitated by the temporary philosophical victory of reform over punishment (Raynor and Robinson 2009), it was established as a significant and influential part of the penal system and it had ushered the influence of social work theory and practice into the courtroom. Although its Christian heritage remained influential beyond that point, the professionalisation of the Service had, as in social work, generally been facilitated by an adherence to theories of psychology and in particular to psychoanalysis and the concept of casework (Biestek 1961; Monger 1964; Foren and Bailey 1968; King 1969). This had not gone unchallenged: Lewis (1971) and Wootton (1959) had made trenchant and significant critiques of the casework model as it was applied in probation and social work generally, but doubts specific to probation surfaced in the intellectual challenge of Bean (1976) and the effectiveness challenge of Lipton *et al* (1975) and Folkard *et al* (1976) whose research findings raised challenging questions about the effectiveness of probation in reducing crime. Whilst the notion that probation was justified by its inherent humanism and moral authority survived (Celnick and McWilliams 1991), theoretical, philosophical and practical dilemmas emerged in critiques which suggested that probation might have problems distinct from its long held social work identity (Bottoms and McWilliams 1979; Bryant *et al* 1978; Harris 1980; Raynor 1978). Moreover, the early signs of a shift away from a court-based social work service to one more focused on challenging and correcting criminal behaviour were identified by McWilliams (1981) and argued for by Haxby (1978). Although probation remained recognisable as a social work agency, by the mid 1980s it became more specifically

focused on reducing re-offending (McGuire and Priestley 1985) with the result that more and more practitioners saw this as the main purpose of their work (Boswell *et al* 1993).

Significant as these developments are, it can be argued that the growing distance from social work was also the result of much more powerful, wide-ranging forces operating at a political and societal level. Hudson (1996: 109), whilst acknowledging uncertainty about whether economic depression prompts an increase in crime, argues that during such economic downturns as occurred in the 1980s 'the vocabulary of justice becomes harsher' and the central concern of justice becomes punishment rather than help. In a similar vein Garland (2001) describes the development of a 'culture of control' and traced its specific implications foir the probation service in a seminar at the Probation Studies Unit (Garland 1997). It is, perhaps, no coincidence that during the 1980s the declaration of governmental interest in remoulding the shape of probation in the Statement of National Objectives and Priorities (Home Office 1984) heralded an era of unprecedented, direct political control which led to the regularisation of probation practice through National Standards (Home Office, 1992, 1995), accountability expressed in the Effective Practice Initiative (Underdown 1998), the removal of probation officer training social work courses (Aldridge and Eadie 1997), and the creation of a National Probation Service in 2001. Of course, not all this change was negative but the combined effect of political populism, prescriptive managerialism, and the end of the benign world of political consensus which probation had inhabited throughout its history was to make probation a criminal justice service rather than a social work agency (Garland 2001).

This is what James and Raine (1998: 23) describe as the 'new politics of criminal justice' through which its purposes were redefined as a result of a change in public and political attitudes towards crime, and the emergence of 'new criminological theory' which together

produced 'a context sympathetic' to the tough stance on crime simultaneously unfolding in the USA. So, the tough rhetoric of politicians resonated with a changed public imagination, the new managerial function of government sat uneasily alongside market philosophy, and criminological theory focused on the act rather than the personality. All of this was accepted as a welcome inheritance by the New Labour administration of 1997 which pursued ever 'increasing and deepening' changes in the probation service with apparent relish (Mair and Burke 2012: 159). Whitehead (2010: 115) neatly terms this 'a more neoliberal political and neoclassical criminological context' but counsels us to beware of a romantic rewriting of history, pointing out that in the past probation officers recommended incarceration inappropriately, increased social control by encouraging courts to make inappropriate probation orders, excluded people from supervision, and responded inappropriately to domestic violence.

Despite the growing separation between probation and social work on several levels these changes encompassed a period in which both experienced very similar pressures exerted by cultural, societal and political transformations. Fitzgibbon (2011) has provided a vivid account of how these shifts have impacted on both agencies. She compares the reactions to the relatively recent scandals associated with the torture and murder of two French students by Dano Sonnex and Nigel Farmer and the killing of 'Baby P' with the earlier cases of Maria Colwell and Graham Young in the 1970s. The former led to the 'assisted' resignation of David Scott, the Chief of London Probation and the dismissal of Sharon Shoesmith, Head of Children's Services in Haringey, whereas blame and documentation was less important in the earlier cases than wider concerns about policy, about responses, and about the balance between the offender's rights and the public's right to protection. In addition, the earlier cases were not the focus of the kind of populist media campaigns which played a major role in the

more recent cases. She attributes this to the politicisation of crime, changes in attitudes, the relationship between the media and the public, the relationship between the media and politicians, the shift from welfare to security, what she calls the 'hollowing out of democracy' (media driven moral panics replace the articulation of political opinion), crisis management by dismissal, a crisis of resources, the demise of informal, voluntary liaison and communication between relevant agencies, and changes in the structure of poor communities (the weakening of 'social glue'). She alludes to 'English Exceptionalism' (Tonry 2004) by referring to different responses to similar occurrences in other countries and concludes that social welfare and criminal justice have become different branches of the same apparatus for the punishment of the poor, characterised by a drift away from rehabilitation to the coercive management of perceived risk. Instead of risk assessments being used to focus rehabilitative efforts, they have often simply increased perceived needs for control (Raynor 2010). However, far from bringing probation and social work closer together, these common experiences have contributed to crises of identity and to the separation described above.

The changing relationship between probation research and mainstream social work research is vividly illustrated by the changing coverage of criminal justice social work in the British Journal of Social Work. Table 1 shows the proportion of articles concerning social work in criminal justice settings published in the first two years of each decade of the Journal's life, representing a 20% sample which is adequately representative of the whole. Substantial coverage in the first two decades declines rapidly from the 1990s onwards, dwindling to almost none. (The trend continues: the criminal justice percentage for 2013 was just 1.2 per cent.) This has happened in spite of a substantial *growth* in research on probation work and offender management, published mainly in criminology and criminal justice journals and sometimes in psychology journals. Not surprisingly, this also reflects some divergence in

preferred styles and methodologies of research: while much probation research has tried to measure impacts and outcomes in an attempt to support the development of evidence-based practice, much social work research has been descriptive, qualitative, theoretical and/or concerned with the empowerment of research subjects. So does this divergence in organisational arrangements, training, research focus and publishing habits indicate an irretrievable breakdown in the relationship between probation and social work, to be followed by a full-blown divorce? As probation researchers and former probation practitioners with, between us, over ninety years of relevant experience, who have always seen probation as an activity firmly within the social work tradition, the authors would regret such an outcome. One purpose of this article is to show how a convergence is beginning to emerge between some probation research and traditional social work concerns.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

From approximately the mid-1990s to the early 2000s probation research tended to concentrate on new projects which were introduced in an attempt to apply the lessons of international research on effective rehabilitation – in some ways a clumsy attempt, undertaken with too much managerialism and too little time for practitioners to adjust (Raynor 2004), but driven by a sense of urgency about transforming probation to ensure its survival in the demanding political context outlined above. The 'Risk-Needs-Responsivity' (RNR) model developed in Canada (Andrews et al. 1990) was a fruitful source of ideas about evidence-based effective practice, and remains so today, but the co-option of the evidence-based approach by a particularly directive and centralised managerialism arguably reduced its impact, and helped to prepare the ground for some of the more recent criticisms of RNR as a deficit-focused approach (Ward and Maruna 2007). Some of the Probation Service's new

projects were called 'Pathfinders', and central to the Pathfinder programme were cognitive-behavioural group programmes which had considerable potential if implemented correctly, but often fell short in practice. The authors carried out one of the first evaluations of such programmes in British probation, and reported that its effectiveness could be enhanced if supported by consistent individual supervision (Raynor and Vanstone 1997), but awareness of this was somewhat undermined when the Home Office commissioned a review of offender management by a businessman, Patrick Carter. His report (Carter 2003) introduced, alongside many good ideas, a distinction between 'offender management' and 'interventions': individual supervision was part of 'offender management', primarily a process of assessment and allocation, while the job of changing offenders' attitudes and behaviour was to be done by 'interventions' (for example, group programmes). This distinction, although criticised by some criminologists (for example Robinson 2005), tended to divert official attention away from the rehabilitative potential of individual supervision, in spite of the fact that this was actually the main form of contact with most people under supervision, and for many the only form of contact.

In 2007 a number of researchers, dissatisfied with this state of affairs, came together to form CREDOS (the Collaboration of Researchers for the Effective Development of Offender Supervision) to promote the *empirical study of individual offender supervision*. This brought together researchers from seven countries (now eleven) representing both the 'what works' effective practice tradition and the newer focus on the process of desistance from offending (a representative selection of research within CREDOS can be found in McNeill, Raynor and Trotter 2010). The remainder of this paper focuses on findings from just one of the studies carried out within CREDOS, the Jersey Supervision Skills Study (known as JS3) undertaken in partnership with the Probation and After-Care Service of the British Channel Island of

Jersey. This is a modern, well-developed and comparatively well-resourced Service with a commitment to evaluation and effective practice, and most of its probation officers hold a social work qualification. The findings suggest there is still a considerable overlap between the concerns of probation-based research and those of mainstream social work research.

The JS3 study

The study (fully described in Raynor, Ugwudike and Vanstone 2014) was based on a collection of 95 video-recorded interviews between probation staff and people supervised by them as a consequence of offences. These interviews were a normal part of the supervision process, not specially staged for the study. Staff volunteered to be included in the study (a small minority preferred not to be involved), consent was obtained from interviewees, and ethical approval was sought both from the Jersey Probation and After-Care Service and from the relevant Department of the authors' University. The identities of all interviewers and interviewees are confidential. Our aims were to categorise and describe the skills used by probation staff in their meetings with those they supervise and to assess whether levels of skill had any significant bearing on the effectiveness of supervision. In order to achieve these aims we constructed an observation checklist with the dual function of research instrument and staff development aid for probation staff (Raynor, Ugwudike and Vanstone 2009; Vanstone and Raynor 2012).

Although the process of producing and testing the checklist involved numerous revisions, its basic purpose of observing and identifying 'core correctional practices' (CCPs) and qualities closely associated with the reduction of re-offending (Andrews and Kiessling 1980; Dowden and Andrews 2004; McGuire 2007) remained consistent. Moreover, that purpose was inspired by the re-emerging recognition that without the foundation of skilled face-to-face

work with troubled people based on genuine and committed relationships effectiveness is likely to be fatally flawed (Deering 2011). Deering's study provides confirmation of Andrews and Bonta's (2003) earlier finding of a close relationship between the effectiveness of practitioners and their propensity for quality relationships with those they supervise. Influential as these studies were, our decisions about the inclusions of specific skill elements were informed by wider relevant theoretical and empirical literature and also by a desire to add to knowledge of what constitutes effective probation practice. This led to a specific breakdown of the quality relationships underpinning CCPs into 63 items, grouped into nine skill clusters (listed in table 3). Although all these components of practice are included in the checklist not all will be appropriate in any one interview, and therefore in the process of observation no judgements were made about quality based on the absence of a skill: rather the focus of the checklist is positive and records those aspects of practice judged to be present, scoring each section and arriving at an overall total. Three assessors were used, with a reasonable level of consistency maintained by undertaking a number of joint assessments of the same interview and comparing results. Both the checklist and the associated manual are freely available on the Jersey Probation and After-Care Service website at www.probation.je/reports .

The study was carried out in two stages. First, an overall assessment of the quality of the interviews was obtained from the checklist scores of the 88 interviews carried out by staff who had at least five interviews in the sample. This part of the study is fully described in Raynor, Ugwudike and Vanstone (2010): in summary, we found that staff varied quite widely in their scores; that the higher scorers in particular showed very consistent results, indicating the use of a wide range of skills across a range of different kinds of interviews with different people; and that the largest differences were in the use of 'structuring' skills (see table 3)

rather than 'relationship' skills, which most staff used well. Some implications of this difference are discussed further below: we speculate that this may reflect the social work training which most Jersey probation officers have received, and it would be interesting to repeat this exercise with differently trained probation staff in other jurisdictions.

The next step in the JS3 study was to find out if different skills produced different outcomes, particularly in relation to reconviction. Some interviewees were interviewed more than once, and to avoid double-counting only the first interview in these cases was included in the reconviction study. This reduced the interviews available for the follow-up analysis to 75, and all findings reported in the remainder of this paper are based on this sample. Table 2 shows the reconviction rates of interviewees supervised by staff who were assessed as using an above average range of skills, compared to those using a below-average range. The figures show a substantial and statistically significant difference in favour of those interviewees who were supervised by higher-rated staff. Fortunately almost all people supervised by Jersey probation staff also undergo an initial 'risk and need' assessment, the Level of Service Inventory – Revised (LSI-R: Andrews and Bonta 1995) which has been shown to be a useful reconviction predictor in Jersey. This means that although our sample is not random but in effect a convenience sample, it is possible to introduce an element of quasi-experimental control when comparing outcomes for those supervised by staff who scored high and low on the checklist, because LSI-R scores (assessed before any quality measures were applied to the interviews) allowed us to determine whether the two groups were initially comparable in terms of reconviction risk. In fact the average initial risk score for those supervised by lower-scoring staff was slightly *below* the score for those supervised by higher-rated staff (LSI-R scores of 17.6 compared to 20.1), which would lead us to expect the opposite of the observed result. Overall, whilst replication of this study in different settings and with different groups

of staff is highly desirable, these results lend support to the belief that skills matter, and that staff who are able to deploy more skills more consistently achieve better results. Of course this might also be partly attributable to other characteristics or skills which we did not measure (for example, helping to build social capital or supportive social networks) but if so, this evidence suggests that success in aspects of practice which we did not examine may also be more readily achieved by the staff who scored well on our checklist. It is also important to note that staff assessed as using *on average* fewer skills often produced *some* interviews in which more skills were used, suggesting potential for improvement through training. In an interesting recent development, the staff involved in the study are now using our research instruments to support observation and peer supervision of each other's work.

TABLES 2 AND 3 ABOUT HERE

The skills used in the study

The results of the study are very interesting in themselves, with a larger effect size than most studies of the effectiveness of probation, and suggesting strongly that skilled probation supervision can make a substantial contribution to the reduction of re-offending. We hope that similar studies can be carried out to see if these findings are replicated. The remainder of this paper looks more closely at the skills used, and how far they might be considered to be social work skills. Has probation really become detached from its social work roots? The first two columns of Table 3 show the average checklist scores on each skill cluster for the interviewers in the reconviction study, together with the maximum possible score on each cluster. The table also shows the distinction between 'relationship skills' and 'structuring skills' discussed above.

The first group, relationship skills, illustrates those aspects of the interview which demonstrate the commitment and genuineness of the interviewer and includes such things as high quality communication, creating an environment conducive to helping, listening attentively, responding positively and optimistically, being clear about roles and responsibilities, and expressing respect, understanding and concern. In the checklist these are clustered under set up of interview, non-verbal communication, verbal communication, and effective and legitimate use of authority. The second, structuring skills, includes skills such as reflection, challenging, addressing problems, drawing out motivation (through expressions of empathy, developing discrepancies, rolling with resistance and supporting self efficacy), positive re-inforcement, and challenging irrational beliefs. These are clustered under motivational interviewing, pro-social modelling, problem solving, and cognitive restructuring.

As Table 3 shows, the average profile of interviews in the reconviction study shows a higher preponderance of relationship skills than structuring skills. On the one hand, therefore, staff scored highly in such matters as ensuring privacy and confidentiality, minimising distractions, and putting interviewees at ease with considerate seating positions. They conveyed attentiveness to the interviewee through appropriate body posture and adequate, non-threatening eye contact; and facilitated fluid communication by asking open questions, avoiding leading questions, displaying warmth, understanding, enthusiasm, and optimism about the possibilities of change. Moreover, they were skilled at keeping firm but fair boundaries within a clear context of roles and responsibilities, avoiding the trap of dead-end arguments, encouraging collaboration and placing the emphasis on positives. On the other hand, average scores were lower in more specialised skill areas and these provided the

clearest distinction between higher and lower skilled staff. Thus the latter scored lower on the key components of:

- motivational interviewing, such as expressing empathy, rolling with resistance, developing discrepancies, and promoting self-efficacy;

- pro-social modelling, such as highlighting risky behaviour and its consequences, discouraging rationalisations, challenging effectively, modelling pro-social behaviour and attitudes, and effective affirmation;

- problem-solving, such as maintaining a focus on criminogenic need, involving the interviewee in the assessment and setting of targets, making effective referrals to other helping agencies and community resources, following them up, and using advocacy and brokerage skills to address real problems; and

- cognitive restructuring, such as identifying anti-social thinking, suggesting and modelling alternative thinking skills, and encouraging and providing the opportunity to practice those skills.

This is not to suggest that these skills were wholly absent from the work of lesser skilled staff, they just occurred less often. As the majority of probation officers in Jersey had undergone social work training with its traditional emphasis on relationships, this finding should not come as a surprise. It is in post-qualifying training that they would have encountered those skills associated with restructuring. Although this is a small sample in a probation service different in some ways from that operating on the mainland, the different

emphasis given to areas of skill is mirrored in other research focused on their counterparts on the mainland. Deering (2011), for example, found that officers highlighted relationship skills as the cornerstone of their practice:

> 'Respondents were also clear about why their relationship needs to be as described. All being well, rapport, trust and empathy were seen as the basis of the relationship as they would be most likely to result in the individual offender investing in the relationship themselves. This in turn would mean they would feel able to discuss in depth their problems, needs and causes of offending, which would hopefully lead to a reduction in their problems, with a consequent reduction in the risk of both re-offending and harm.' (p. 127)

This resonates with other research which shows that probationers link desistance from offending to collaborative relationships with officers who took a genuine interest in them, empathised with their problems and encouraged positive attempts to change (Rex 1999). Similar points about the importance of relationships are made by desistance theorists (for example Burnett and McNeill 2005). Even Farrall (2002) whose research initially suggested that the quality of practice had no bearing on effectiveness, subsequently acknowledged that success in helping people to desist from offending was difficult to imagine outside of the context of a solid human relationship (Farrall and Calverley 2006). This fits with the recent research by Mawby and Worrall (2013: 142) which finds that probation workers' motivation to do the job (and, therefore, a significant part of the culture of the probation service) is underpinned by a set of values 'which [includes] a belief in the possibility of change and their ability to effect it [and] a faith in both offenders and colleagues'.

Finally, Table 3 also shows which skills were found to be significantly correlated with desistance from (known) offending at 12 months and 24 months' follow-up. It is important to note that all the skill clusters identified in our checklist showed positive correlations with desistance, but in most cases these were not statistically significant. Where they were significant, this is indicated in the table. It is suggestive that the greatest short-term impact appeared to be associated with some of the 'structuring' skills, whereas longer-term desistance shows more correlation with some of the 'relationship' skills: only problem-solving (which includes effective use of other agencies and community resources) and the overall score appear significant in both columns. Too much should not be made of such small-sample results, and further studies are needed: however, our preliminary conclusion is that both groups of skills are interdependent and need to be employed together for best results.

One other finding which deserves further investigation is that the eight female interviewers in this sample tended to score higher than the six male interviewers, with an average checklist score of 48.2 for women compared to 41.7 for men. This difference was significant (p measured by t-test = 0.012). Differences in reconviction rates were also found, but not at a significant level. This partly reflected the fact that female supervisors tended to have more female clients among their interviewees than male supervisors had, and female interviewees were less likely to be reconvicted. Female interviewers had, on average, higher scores in all the skill clusters, but differences were statistically significant (p<0.05) in non-verbal communication, effective use of authority, motivational interviewing, and cognitive restructuring. This interesting result from our small sample points to a possibly productive line of investigation in other staff groups.

Discussion: probation as social work?

Studies such as this, which show a connection between the use of appropriate interpersonal skills and better outcomes for service users, are clearly of interest to probation services, and research on skills has now been carried out in several countries (for some examples, see McNeill, Raynor and Trotter 2010). One purpose of this article is to suggest that this kind of research also has implications for mainstream social work, and for the relationship between probation work and the wider social work enterprise. Some of the skills observed in our study, such as relationship skills, are clearly part of the skills repertoire traditionally valued and taught in social work. Probation officers in Jersey, unlike most in England and Wales, are normally qualified in social work; the same is true in other jurisdictions, notably Scotland, where social work in criminal justice is professionally and organisationally a branch of social work. However, good outcomes in our study are also connected with the use of 'structuring' skills to facilitate change and to develop new thinking and behaviour. The results are consistent with the idea that relationship skills are a necessary condition for positive influence in individual work, but may not on their own be sufficient to bring about change in problematic attitudes or behaviour. This kind of change usually seems to require more structured forms of learning.

Studies of the impact and outcome of professional intervention have been central to improvements in the effectiveness of probation work in the last two decades. Arguably this has been a less consistent emphasis in broader social work research. Reasons for this include the fact that probation work lends itself to the use of reconviction rates as a (relatively) straightforward outcome measure, since the purposes of probation usually include a reduction in offending, in the interests of both the service user and the wider community. Probation can

of course have other valid purposes, such as reintegration into the community, resettlement, and the pursuit of a wide variety of individualised forward-looking intermediate goals in particular cases, but most of the time reconviction can be used as a rough-and-ready proxy measure which is congruent with the societal purpose of probation services. Other sectors of social work have more diverse or less standardized goals and more ingenuity may be needed to identify appropriate outcome measures. However, the effort may prove worthwhile. Social work education is under attack both politically and from other professional sectors: Michael Gove, the responsible Minister and a leading figure on the right wing of the current ruling coalition, argues that if trainee social workers are taught that their service users are 'disempowered by society' this makes them likely to explain away and excuse problematic behaviour rather than trying to change it (Gove 2013). Martin Narey makes rather similar points from a more professional and less politicized point of view in his report on the preparation of social workers for child and family work (Narey 2014). Essentially the argument is that commitment to an anti-oppressive stance makes it difficult for inexperienced social workers to challenge problematic behaviour. From such a perspective, probation work may seem too controlling or coercive to be part of an empowering vision of social work. However, such a view, if it exists, rests on a fundamental misunderstanding.

One former Chief Probation Officer with whom both authors worked used to define his job as 'helping offenders to help themselves to stop offending' (Sutton 1996). This has more to do with empowerment than oppression: even if people are not responsible for the problems they face, improvement is likely to require some action on their part. Even cognitive-behavioural offending behaviour programmes, which worried some practitioners who saw them as a form of coercive behaviour modification, are better understood as a way of facilitating change through social learning (Raynor and Vanstone 1997). The successful probation staff in our

study helped their clients by eliciting co-operation and engaging collaborative effort, not by one-sided authoritarianism. This is entirely consistent with our experience of effective probation over many years. Mainstream social work might benefit from a more consistent focus on outcomes, and from probation's experience of trying to use evidence from outcome studies to develop and improve practice. Social work's defence against Gove's attack has so far concentrated on exposing his ideological assumptions and political motivation (for an example, see Social Work Action Network 2014), but more focus on evidence of positive outcomes would also help to add weight to the argument. In the last century the education and training of most social workers included some coverage of crime and of social work in criminal justice, but this is less prevalent in the social work degree courses offered since 2003.

Qualitative research alone will not find it easy to provide evidence of effectiveness. As a recent discussion of policy-related research (Blackman 2013, p. 334) pointed out: 'Qualitative research is often advocated as the best way to capture the complexity of social phenomena, but even rich case studies full of insight about how things happen are very limited in answering 'why' questions without the systematic comparison of cases that would enable us to understand causation, which is essential to policy intervention'. In other words, without qualitative research there is not much *social* science; without measurement and comparison, there is not much social *science.* In our study of skills and outcomes we have used both approaches, and the results could not have been obtained without doing so.

Finally we would suggest that probation work itself could benefit from closer integration (or re-integration) with the wider social work profession. This is hardly innovative: any study of the early history of social work will find plenty of examples of work concerned with what

was usually called juvenile delinquency (for some examples see Raynor and Robinson 2009).

Probation in England and Wales is smaller than other welfare institutions, and since coming under the direct control of the Home Office in 2001 it has been something of a political football. Politicians preoccupied with a need to appear tough have obstructed development and made probation more punitive. The current Government is in the process of implementing a wholesale privatisation programme (Ministry of Justice 2013) which virtually all informed commentators believe will make matters worse. Social work may feel itself threatened but has not (yet) faced anything like this. Although several commentators have written about difficulties in maintaining traditional social work commitments and values in the modern social and political environment (for example, Parton, 1994 and 2003), social work has not experienced, as probation has, a political campaign to substitute punishment for welfare (Author, 2012). Probation might benefit, as in Scotland, from being seen and defended as part of a wider social work movement for social progress and social justice, which in our view is what it should be. However, this argument strays well beyond the scope of this paper. At least we hope to contribute to a more substantial representation and appreciation of criminal justice social work in the mainstream social work literature.

References

Aldridge, M. and Eadie, C. (1997) 'Manufacturing an issue: the case of probation officer training'. *Critical Social Policy*, 17 (50) 111-124.

Andrews, D. A. and Bonta, J. (1995) *The Level of Service Inventory-Revised Manual*. Toronto: Multi-Health Systems.

Andrews, D. A. and Bonta, J. (2003) *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct,* Cincinnati: Anderson.

Andrews, D. A. and Kiessling, J. J. (1980) 'Program Structure and Effective Correctional Practices: A Summary of the CaVic Research', in R.R. Ross and P. Gendreau (eds) *Effective Correctional Treatment*, Toronto, Butterworth.

Andrews D. A., Zinger, I., Hoge, R. D., Bonta, J., Gendreau, P. and Cullen, F. T. (1990) 'Does Correctional Treatment Work? A Clinically Relevant and Psychologically Informed Meta-Analysis,' *Criminology* 28(3): 369-404.

Bean, P. (1976) *Rehabilitation and Deviance*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Biestek, F. P. (1961) *The Casework Relationship.* London: Allen and Unwin.

Blackman, T. (2013) 'Rethinking policy-related research: charting a path using qualitative comparative analysis and complexity theory', *Contemporary Social Science* 8 (3) 333-45.

Bochel, D. (1976) *Probation and After-care: Its Development in England & Wales.* Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.

Boswell, G., Davies, M. and Wright, A. (1993) *Contemporary Probation Practice*. Aldershot: Avebury.

Bottoms, A.E. and McWilliams, W. (1979) 'A non-treatment paradigm for probation practice', *British Journal of Social Work*, 9 (2) 159-202.

Bryant, M., Coker, J., Estlea, B., Himmel., S. and Knapp, T. (1978) 'Sentenced to social work', *Probation Journal*, 25 (4) 110-14.

Carter, P. (2003) *Managing Offenders, Reducing Crime: A New Approach.* (Correctional Services Review). London: Home Office.

Celnick, A. and McWilliams, B. (1991) 'Helping, Treating and Doing Good', *Probation Journal,* 38 (4) 164-170.

Deering, J. (2011) *Probation Practice and the New Penology. Practitioner Reflections.* Farnham: Ashgate

Dowden, C. and Andrews, D. A. (2004) The importance of staff practice in delivering effective correctional treatment: a meta-analysis. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 48 (2) 203-214.

Evans, C. and Fisher, M. (1999) 'Collaborative Evaluation with Service Users. Moving towards user-controlled research' in I. Shaw and J. Lishman (Eds) *Evaluation and Social Work Practice.* London: Sage.

Farrall, S. (2002) *Rethinking What Works With Offenders.* Cullompton: Willan.

Farrall, S. and Calverley, A. (2006) *Understanding Desistance from Crime: theoretical directions in resettlement and rehabilitation.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Fitzgibbon, W. (2011) *Probation and Social Work on Trial.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Folkard, M.S., Smith, D.E. and Smith, D.D. (1976) *IMPACT. Intensive Matched Probation and After-Care Treatment. Volume II. The results of the experiment*. HORS 36 London: HMSO.

Foren, R. and Bailey, R. (1968) *Authority in Social Casework.* Oxford: Pergamon.

Gard, R. (2007) 'The First Probation Officers in England and Wales 1906-14', *British Journal of Criminology* 47 (6) 938-954.

Garland, D. (1997) 'Probation and the reconfiguration of crime control', in R. Burnett (ed) *The Probation Service: Responding to Change* (Proceedings of the Probation Studies Unit First Colloquium: Probation Studies Unit Report No. 3), Oxford: University of Oxford Centre for Criminological Research.

Garland, D. (2001) *The Culture of Control*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gove, M. (2013) 'Getting it right for children in need', speech to the NSPCC, 12 November. www.gov.uk/government/speeches , accessed 11 April 2014.

Harris, R.J. (1980) 'A changing service: the case for separating care and control in probation practice', *British Journal of Social Work*, 10 (2), 163-84.

Haxby, D. (1978) Probation: A Changing Service, London: Constable

Home Office (1984) *Probation Service in England and Wales: Statement of National Objectives and Priorities*. London: Home Office.

Home Office (1992*) National Standards for the Supervision of Offenders in the Community.* London: Home Office.

Home Office (1995) *National Standards for the Supervision of Offenders in the Community*. London: Home Office.

Hudson, B. A. (1996) *Understanding justice. An introduction to ideas, perspectives and controversies in modern penal theory.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

James, A. and Raine, J. (1998) *The New Politics of Criminal Justice.* London: Longman.

Jarvis, F. (1972) *Advise, Assist and Befriend: A History of the Probation and After-Care Service*. London: National Association of Probation Officers.

King, J. (1969) *The Probation and After-Care Service.* Third Edition. London: Butterworth.

Lewis, C. S. (1971) 'The humanitarian theory of punishment', in *Undeceptions*, London: Geoffrey Bles.

Lipton, D., Martinson, R. and Wilks, J. (1975) *The Effectiveness of Correctional Treatment*. New York: Praeger.

Mair, G. and Burke, L. (2012) *Redemption, Rehabilitation and Risk Management. A History of Probation.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Mawby, R. C. and Worrall, A. (2013) *Doing Probation Work. Identity in a criminal justice occupation.* Abingdon: Routledge.

McGuire, J. (2007) 'Programmes for Probationers' in G. McIvor and Raynor, P. (eds) *Developments in Social Work with Offenders',* London, Jessica Kingsley.

McGuire, J. and Priestley, P. (1985) *Offending Behaviour: skills and stratagems for going straight*. London: Batsford.

McNeill, F., Raynor, P. and Trotter, C. (eds.) (2010) *Offender Supervision: new directions in theory, research and practice.* Abingdon: Willan.

McWilliams, W. (1981) 'The probation officer at Court: From Friend to Acquaintance' *Howard Journal*, 20 (2) 97-116.

McWilliams, W. (1983) 'The Mission to the English Police Courts 1876 - 1936,' *Howard Journal*, 22 (3) 129 - 147.

McWilliams, W. (1985) 'The Mission Transformed: Professionalism of Probation Between the Wars,' *Howard Journal*, 24 (4) 257 - 274.

McWilliams, W. (1986) 'The English Probation System and the Diagnostic Ideal,' *Howard Journal*, 25 (4) 241 - 260.

McWilliams, W. (1987) 'Probation, Pragmatism and Policy,' *Howard Journal*, 26 (2) 97 - 121.

Ministry of Justice (2013) *Transforming Rehabilitation.* Consultation Paper CP1/2013. London: Ministry of Justice.

Monger, M. (1964) *Casework in Probation.* London: Butterworth.

Narey, M. (2014) *Making the Education of Social Workers Consistently Effective.* London: Department for Education.

Parton, N. (1994) 'The nature of social work under conditions of (post) modernity', *Social Work and Social Sciences Review* 5 (2) 93-112.

Parton, N. (2003) 'Rethinking professional practice: the contributions of social constructionism and the feminist ethics of care', *British Journal of Social Work* 33 (1) 1-16.

Raynor, P. (1978) 'Compulsory persuasion: A problem for correctional social work', *British Journal of Social Work*, 8 (4) 411-24.

Raynor, P. (2004) 'The probation service 'pathfinders': finding the path and losing the way?' *Criminal Justice* 4 (3) 309-25.

Raynor, P. (2007) 'Risk and need assessment in British probation: the contribution of LSI-R'. *Psychology, Crime and Law* 13 (2) 125-138.

Raynor, P. (2010) 'Usages et abus du risque dans la justice pénale britannique'. *Déviance et Société*, 34 (4) 671-687.

Raynor, P. (2012) 'Is probation still possible?', *Howard Journal* 51 (2) 173-189.

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., Ugwudike, P., and Vanstone, M. (2014) 'The impact of skills in probation work: a reconviction study'. *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 14 (2) 235-249.

Raynor, P., Ugwudike, P., and Vanstone, M. (2009) *The Jersey Supervision Interview Checklist, Version 7C.* St. Helier: Jersey Probation and After-Care Service.

Raynor, P., Ugwudike, 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, 113-129

Raynor, P., Ugwudike, P., Vanstone, M. and Heath, B. (2012) 'The Jersey Supervision Skills Study', *EuroVista,* 2 (1) 20-22.

Raynor, P. and Vanstone, M. (1997) *Straight Thinking On Probation (STOP): The Mid Glamorgan Experiment. Probation Studies Unit Report No. 4.* Oxford: University of Oxford Centre for Criminological Research.

Raynor, P. & Vanstone, M. (2002) *Understanding Community Penalties: Probation, policy and social change.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Rex, S. (1999) 'Desistance from Offending: Experiences of Probation', *Howard Journal,* 38 (4) 366-383.

Robinson, G. (2005) 'What works in offender management?', *Howard Journal* 38 (4) 421-33.

Shaw, I. and Lishman, J. (Eds) (1999) *Evaluation and Social Work Practice.* London: Sage.

Social Work Action Network (2014) *In Defence of Social Work: why Michael Gove is wrong.* Paisley: Social Work Action Network.

Tonry, M. (2004) *Punishment and Politics. Evidence and emulation in the making of English crime control policy.* Collompton: Willan.

Underdown, A. (1998) *Strategies for Effective Offender Supervision.* London: HM Inspectorate of Probation.

Vanstone, M. (2004) *Supervising Offenders in the Community. A History of Probation Theory and Practice,* Ashgate.

Vanstone, M. (2008) 'The international origins and initial development of probation: an early example of policy transfer', *British Journal of Criminology,* 48 (6) 735-755.

Vanstone, M. and Raynor, P. (2012) *Observing Interview Skills: a manual for users of the Jersey Supervision Interview Checklist.* St. Helier: Jersey Probation and After-Care Service.

Ward, T. and Maruna, S. (2007 *Rehabilitation.* London: Routledge.

Whitehead, P. (2010) *Exploring modern probation. Social theory and organisational complexity.* Bristol: The Policy Press.

Wootton, B. (1959) *Social Science and Pathology*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

Table 1. Articles on criminal justice topics in the British Journal of Social Work

Years	All articles	Articles on criminal justice topics:	
		number	%
1971-2	54	7	13.0
1981-2	47	11	23.4
1991-2	67	5	7.5
2001-2	127	6	4.7
2011-2	161	3	1.9

Table 2. Two-year reconviction rates of people interviewed by 7 staff with below-median skill ratings, compared with interviewees of 7 staff with above-median skill ratings (N of staff = 14; N of interviewees = 75). Adapted from Author's own, 2013.

Interviewed by staff using:	Not reconvicted:	Reconvicted:	% reconvicted:
Below median range of skills	15	21	58%
Above median range of skills	29	10	26%

Significance: p = .004

Table 3. Skills used, and correlations with desistance at 12 and 24 months (N of interviews = 75)

Skill clusters	Maximum possible	Average from 14 staff in recon-viction study	Correlated significantly with desistance at	
			1 yr	2yrs
Set up of interview (R)	4	3.8		
Non-verbal communication (R)	5	4.6		**
Verbal communication (R)	10	7.3		*
Effective/legitimate use of authority (R)	5	4.5		
Motivational interviewing (S)	9	5.8		*
Pro-social modelling (S)	5	3.7	*	
Problem solving (S)	10	5.6	*	*
Cognitive restructuring (S)	7	2.7	*	
Overall structure of interview	8	6.0		
Total	63	44.0	*	**

(Significance: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$)

R = 'relationship' skill or responsive skill

S = 'structuring' skill, intended to prepare for or promote change