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Observing Interview Skills: a manual for users of the Jersey Supervision Interview Checklist

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Contents:

1   Introduction: the Jersey Supervision Skills Study

This manual is a product of the research on supervision skills and offender engagement currently being carried out by Swansea University staff in collaboration with the Jersey Probation and After-Care Service. This is one of a number of studies done by Swansea researchers in the Channel Island of Jersey. Previous work has concerned risk/need assessment and the effectiveness of supervision (see, for example, Raynor and Miles 2007), and the present study grew out of a shared perception that developments in evidence-based practice in England and Wales had not yet paid sufficient attention to the impact of skilled one-to-one supervision. Would it be possible, we wondered, to carry out a systematic study of the skills and methods used by probation staff in individual supervision?

The original aim of the study was to collect about 100 videotaped interviews and to develop a checklist which could be used by observers to identify and note the skills and methods used. In particular, we wanted a checklist which would provide a reasonably accurate assessment but was simple enough to be used quite quickly by experienced observers, since we envisaged a possible use for such checklists in the observation of practice for staff development purposes. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the early stages were mainly spent developing the checklist and observing the interviews (for a fuller account of this part of the study see Raynor, Ugwudike and Vanstone 2010). The current version of the Jersey Supervision Interview Checklist, known as version 7C, attempts to strike a balance between comprehensiveness and user-friendliness, and covers the seven skill sets discussed in this Manual: interview set-up, non-verbal communication, verbal communication, use of authority, motivational interviewing, pro-social modelling, problem-solving, cognitive restructuring, and overall interview structure. Some of these we describe as 'relationship skills', used to promote communication, co-operation and trust, and others are 'structuring skills' intended to help probationers to change their thinking, attitudes and behaviour. In total, 63 items are assessed. Eventually we were able to collect and analyse a total of 95 interviews by fourteen different staff. No individual members of staff are identified in the reporting of results.

Early analysis of this material showed that staff did in fact vary considerably in the skills they typically used in their interviews, and that those who used a wider range of skills typically did so across a range of different interviews. Interviewers varied more in their use of 'structuring' skills than in 'relationship' skills, which almost all staff used frequently. We are also interested in whether differences in interviewing practice affected the outcomes for offenders, and so far there are some indications that they do: positive changes in the risk of re-offending, as measured by LSI-R, were found to be on average greater among offenders supervised by officers who had higher than average scores on the checklist (see Raynor, Ugwudike, Vanstone and Heath 2012)[1]. In the meantime there has been growing interest in the possible use of our checklist in staff development, to help people to assess their own interviews and those of their peers. Although the checklist was originally designed with a primary research purpose in mind and some features of the design (such as the emphasis on scoring) reflect this, we also intended to make it sufficiently user-friendly for staff development. With this in mind, the Manual has been produced to provide fuller explanation of the thinking behind the checklist and of the items in it, and fuller advice on how to use it and what to look for than is covered in the brief guidance notes provided as part of the checklist. We hope it does this job, and we hope that users of the checklist and the manual will contact us to let us know about their experiences and to suggest improvements.

Both the checklist and the manual are part of *JS3*, the Jersey Supervision Skills Study, and are copyright documents, but we do not intend to use this status to impose unduly restrictive conditions on their use. People interested in using them should in the first instance contact Brian Heath, the Chief Probation Officer of Jersey.

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[1] Since this manual was written, a fuller account of the outcomes of the study has been published, showing that offenders supervised by officers who showed above average use of skills in supervision had a significantly lower reconviction rate than those supervised by officers who used fewer skills (see 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).

2   Why do interviewing skills matter?

Research into factors associated with desistance from offending has, amongst other things, underlined the importance of employment and family (Sampson and Laub 1993), the achievement of well being (Ward and Brown 2004), increasing social capital (Farrall 2002), maturation (Maruna and LeBel 2010), and change in self-image (Maruna 2001). Without in any way diminishing the importance of these factors, other research has placed emphasis on the crucial role of the helping relationship in supporting processes of change. Rex (1999) interviewed 60 probationers and, rather than asking specific questions about their experience of supervision, encouraged them to tell their stories. She found that 68 percent attributed their increased confidence in their ability to stay out of trouble to supervision by their probation officer, and linked change in their behaviour to the collaborative nature of the supervision and being actively involved in a process in which they were listened to, encouraged, understood, empathised with and respected. Indeed, the responses demonstrated that 'were capable of interpreting advice about their behaviour and underlying problems as evidence of concern for them as people, and were motivated by what they saw as a display of interest in their wellbeing' (375). As if to reinforce these findings, Burnett and McNeill (2005: 233), in their analysis of the marginalisation of the supervisory relationship in probation practice, refer to recent psychotherapy research which shows that collaborative working relationships 'contribute more to positive outcomes than do specific interventions', and they call for more research 'to identify the particular interpersonal skills and processes that complement other professional skills and management procedures aimed at reducing offending'.

The need for such research had been highlighted earlier by Farrall's (2002) finding that desistance seemed unrelated to good or bad practice. Of course, the significance of all the factors referred to above and in Farrall's research is essential to an understanding of desistance from offending, but as Farrall in a later work (Farrell and Calverley 2006: 66) argues it is difficult to imagine that nourishment of the 'seeds' of change can be achieved without a working relationship based on trust, and that support (if and when it is offered) in the desistance process can somehow be devoid of the human qualities and skills highlighted by Rex (1999). As McNeill (2006: 49) asserts in another context, if desistance requires (amongst other things) rigorous self-examination who would take the necessary personal

risks involved in that 'without the reassurance of sustained and compassionate support from a trusted source?'.

As for practitioners, two recent books (Deering 2011; Fitzgibbon 2011) demonstrate that some still recognise face-to-face contact with probationers as the cornerstone of rehabilitative work. Implicit in this recognition is acknowledgement that contact has to be based on qualities and skills associated with effectiveness. These qualities include, creativity, openness, enthusiasm, respect, likeability, warmth, genuineness and empathy (Truax and Carkhuff 1967; Dowden and Andrews 2004), whilst the skills (broadly, socio-cognitive) encompass the ability to motivate, the capacity to model effective reasoning and problem-solving, sensitivity to discrepancies and distortions, cognitive restructuring and reinforcement, role-playing and rehearsal, modelling and graduated practice (Ross and Fabiano 1985; Antonowicz and Ross 1994).

However, the research evidence is not without its uncertainties – for instance, in the conclusion to their work, Truax and Carkhuff (1967:375) acknowledged that '[when] thirty or one hundred more concepts are studied in attempts to predict what kind of patients lead to what kind of therapeutic outcome, with few systematic replications and extensions of positive findings, we cannot claim that scientific knowledge has been accumulated' and they could only point to the 'promise of more systematic programmes'. More recently, Trotter (1990) showed that high levels of empathy were not necessarily effective and that pro-social approaches sometimes compensated for lower levels of empathy.

Bearing all the above in mind, the checklist has been designed to add to the knowledge base and to contribute to the identification of what constitutes good and bad practice and how it might be linked to the likelihood or otherwise of future reconviction. More specifically, the checklist is meant to assist in the process of observing and identifying what have been described as the 'core correctional practice skills' (CCPs) and qualities required for implementing cognitive, behavioural and social learning models of intervention shown by studies (including large-scale meta-analysis) to reduce recidivism (Andrews and Kiessling 1980; Dowden and Andrews 2004; McGuire 2007). Their successful implementation is dependent on practitioners possessing sufficient interpersonal and intellectual abilities to relate naturally to people in an official setting, and at the same time to engage them in purposeful, collaborative interviews focused on learning and change – what Andrews and

Bonta (2003:313) have described as 'high quality relationships'. Among other things, such relationships will involve using authority effectively, modeling pro-social skills, problem solving, making appropriate referrals, and communicating directly and clearly.

In the process of observing, the judgment that the working relationship (or its development) is of high quality often is formed quickly and almost intuitively. It may be we are observing what basic counselling manuals have described as being real, where as a result of the worker responding to the person rather than conjuring up a good response the interaction has 'become less studied and more genuine' (Kennedy and Charles 1990: 63). This is what Truax and Carkhuff (1967: 142-143) have described as 'being *what we are* in our human encounters [and] communicating in personal encounters an outgoing, positive warmth, communicated in a total, rather than a conditional manner' (italics in the original); and what Egan (2002: 53) identifies as being 'at home' and comfortable with oneself rather than '[taking] refuge in the role of the counsellor'. But what seems intuitive is inference drawn from observation of a complex mixture of actions, applied skills, expressed emotions and other factors, and unravelling that complexity is a central purpose of the checklist. Accordingly, the decision to focus on specific factors in the checklist, informed as it was by the relevant theoretical and empirical literature, was based on an assessment of their functionality in assessing the use of CCPs (and the practice relationship) during routine supervision and the delivery of accredited programmes.

This manual is meant to complement rather than replace the guidelines in the checklist itself, and should be used in conjunction with those guidelines. It mirrors the organisation and structure of the checklist, and inevitably, some of its guidance and clarifications will overlap. Hopefully, this will serve the purpose of reinforcing core messages.

The checklist itself is applicable to visual recordings or live situations, but of course local negotiations will be needed to determine which is to be used. The design is specific to practice situations in which probation workers are supervising or assessing people, and whichever mode of observation is used the consent of the subject of the interview is needed. If visual recordings are to be used care should be taken in deciding what is to be filmed. Ideally, both worker and subject should be in view but use of the checklist will not be undermined if only the worker is in shot. If on the other hand live observation is agreed then careful consideration should be given to the respective positions of observer and observed.

As stated above, the decision about aspects of practice to be included in the checklist was informed by research evidence about what an effective practitioner might do in an interview. Their inclusion in the checklist does not imply that they should occur in every interview or that their absence constitutes bad practice. Obviously, practice is more complex. Situations and the required responses will vary but, that said, there are aspects of practice which are a prerequisite of high quality, such privacy, appropriate confidentiality and active listening.

By using the checklist to observe the practice of a number of different practitioners, observers should be able to form a general impression of how they function, and in particular what practices, methods and skills they utilize. This should not only include a sense of how flexible, imaginative, and responsive they are, but also how consistent their practice is with known effectiveness principles.

The emphasis is placed on observation of the behaviour of the practitioner, but where possible the behaviour of the probationer should be taken into account in order to gauge whether or not the practitioner's approach is having the desired effect (for example, if the probationer is relaxed in the interview it might be reasonable to assume that the actions of the practitioner are contributing to that effect).

As can be seen from the guidelines in the checklist, the observer should not be looking to tick every item: there will be some non-occurrence (and, therefore, blanks) from which (for the most part) no inference of bad practice should be drawn. However, the absence of some items is likely to be detrimental to the overall quality of the interview. These are, assurance of privacy, assurance of appropriate confidentiality, facing the probationer, and attentiveness to the probationer. The impact on quality of all other absences will need to be judged within the overall context of the interview, and this judgment (along with that of whether to tick an item or not) should rest on considerations drawn from professional experience and common sense. When making such considerations, the observer should have in mind relevance, applicability, and the extent of occurrence. In effect, by the end of the process, the observer should have made a recording of all the practices, methods and skills present in the interview; made notes which clarify the impact or otherwise of the absence of a particular practice; summarised the overall impression of each section; and produced a score for each section and an overall score.

3.   Set up of interview

It is, perhaps, stating the obvious that how an interview is set up will have an impact on whether the interviewee is likely to feel comfortable enough to engage in a meaningful relationship and, if appropriate, reveal relevant, personal information, express anxieties and worries, describe problems and explore their personal history, or whether they will feel inhibited and constrained. Privacy (with limited distractions) and awareness of the boundaries surrounding confidentiality are fundamental to this, and if these are not present the likelihood of there being a detrimental effect on the interview is high. The interview should take place in a soundproof, comfortable room and precautions should have been taken against interruption by telephone or knocks on the door. Of course, there will be occasions when this kind of preparation has been missed, and then apology and quick remedial action should be looked for.

The issue of seating arrangements is more open to interpretations. It is important to remember that sitting close to, or at a distance from a person is an aspect of non-verbal communication which will vary culturally and personally so it is important that people feel free to adjust the space. The relevant literature emphasises that seating should be on the same level and not positioned so that the worker has some kind of psychological advantage or conveys some unintended messages about power in the relationship, and that the space between the parties should not be so great or small that it inhibits the crucial combination of intimacy and relaxation (Egan 2002; Nelson-Jones 2011). Observers should firstly, reflect on their overall impression of the interview when deciding if this aspect of the set up has contributed in a negative or positive way and secondly, bear in mind that seating arrangements will impact on people differently depending on the relationship itself (for example, the proximity of the parties might be more crucial at a first meeting). Also, as indicated in the guidelines, uses of technological aids such as computers or flip charts may have an effect on seating arrangements and this should be taken into account.

4.   Quality of Non-Verbal Communication

If they are to be successful in their supervision, as well as being optimistic about people's capacity to engage in the process of change, committed, genuine, humorous, empathic, and respectful, practitioners have to possess good interpersonal skills (Dowden and Andrews 2004; 2005; Taxman et all 2004). These skills underpin all the others focused on in the checklist, and they include the non-verbal. The non-verbal aspect is particularly important but in some ways is the most difficult to observe and assess.

We know from early literature that the analysis of non-verbal communication is very detailed and includes what is termed paraverbal or non-linguistic aspects of speech such as tone of voice, speed of delivery, and loudness (Argyle 1972). Accompanied by attitudes and values such a respect and empathy – what Egan (2002: 68) describes as 'what's in your heart' - the non-verbal behaviour of the worker can have a direct effect on trust-building, levels of intimacy, and openness to collaborative problem solving, so while observing it is important to be sensitive to the detailed nuances of such communication. Having said that, the purpose of the checklist is to make the task of observing as easy as possible and accordingly we have utilised the acronym SOLER (squarely facing the client, open posture, leaning forward, eye contact and relaxed) developed by Egan (2002: 68), always, of course, bearing in mind his caveat that 'communication skills are particularly sensitive to cultural differences'. In essence, use of the checklist should help assess the degree the practitioner's level of attentiveness and the degree of congruence between the practitioner's non-verbal behaviour and the objectives of the interview. However, before examining the detail of SOLER it is important to bear in mind a further caveat set down by Nelson-Jones (2011: 51):

> The concept of rules is very important for understanding the appropriateness of body messages. However, rules governing behaviour in helping situations should not be straightjackets and, sometimes, you may need to bend or break the rules to create genuinely collaborative helping relationships [and you] require flexibility in making active listening choices.

Facing the probationer *Squarely* is a way of indicating involvement, but as Egan indicates it should not be adhered to rigidly. It may be that in some situations facing squarely can be intimidating or appear aggressive, so an angling of seating arrangements might be more appropriate. Commonsense needs to be applied here and judgements made about whether the seating positions re-enforce or impair the quality of the practitioner's presence.

Adopting an *Open* posture is a way of conveying non-defensiveness and demonstrating open-mindedness to the probationer and a readiness to listen to what they have to say. Again, however, flexible interpretation should be used here: for instance, many people cross their legs when talking and listening to others so that in itself should not be a reason to assume that the practitioner is being defensive. In this respect, it can be argued that openness of the upper part of the body is more important here.

Leaning towards the probationer at appropriate times may be an important way of communicating concern and interest. As Nelson-Jones (2011: 51) puts it, 'in moments of intimate disclosure, a marked forward lean may build rapport, rather than be perceived as intrusive'. When observing it might be worth considering how often and how far the practitioner leans in order to assess whether the effect is inhibiting

Keeping appropriate *Eye Contact* may be the most important way of conveying active listening and attending. Again, culture plays an important part here but generally it is reasonable to assume that if practitioners are not maintaining regular eye contact with the probationer their own discomfort in the situation or their lack of interest in, and commitment to, the content of the interview will be conveyed. Of course, observing visual recordings may at times make it difficult to see the detail of eye contact, and the observer should then concentrate on the direction or aim of the gaze.

Being *Relaxed* is a good indicator of the level of the practitioners comfort in the working situation, and if the practitioner is relaxed there is a greater chance that the probationer will be relaxed, have lower anxiety, and higher incentive to participate. As well as observing the practitioner's body language it will be useful to read the degree to which the probationer is at ease as a way of assessing the practitioner's skills of relaxation.

Scoring in this section should reflect the degree to which the officer's body language demonstrates attentiveness, interest and the desire to stimulate effective dialogue with the probationer; and in this section particularly it is worth remembering Egan's (2002: 70) assertion:

> …people are more sensitive to how you orient yourself to them non-verbally than you might imagine. Anything that distracts from your "being there" can harm the dialogue. The point to be stressed is that a respectful, empathic, genuine, and caring mind set might well lose its impact if the client does not see these internal attitudes reflected in your external behaviours.

5.   **Quality of Verbal Communication**

The second of the generic range of interpersonal skill is verbal communication. The observer should be looking at how the practitioner engages the probationer and encourages participation in a two-sided, open and enthusiastic dialogue. Another way of looking at this is to assess how far the practitioner helps the probationer tell their story, adopt new perspectives on their situation, and identify what needs to be changed and how. Egan (2002) stresses the importance in this process of starting where the probationer starts, helping the clarification of key issues, assessing the level of problem, helping productive talk about the past which makes sense of the present, frees them from it and prepares them for future action. The telling of a story is more likely to happen if there are not too many questions and the balance of the interview is towards the use of open-ended questions, for example:

What keeps you from trying?
How can you respond to that?
How do you feel when in that situation?

Questions of this kind will help the probationer think and explore, and fill the gaps. The point here is balance. Closed questions invite yes/no responses, but at times in an interview a closed question may be required to obtain a specific piece of information. However, if those gaps are to be genuinely filled by the probationer, the practitioner needs to avoid not only closed but also leading questions. Leading questions, even at a subtle level, suggest a particular response or content, for example:

What makes you angry?
Why don't you try?

Obviously, people are much more likely to be encouraged to tell their story if they feel understood and respected by a warm human being whom they like and who is optimistic about the possibilities of change and progress. When observing, evidence of understanding includes empathic listening (does the probationer confirm the perceptions and inferences of the practitioner?), reference to the probationer's personal and social context, awareness of the

gaps in the story, accurate responses to the feelings being expressed, accurate responses to non-verbal messages, communication of understanding of the probationer's point of view and reasons for their decisions, attempts to recover from inaccurate understanding, accurate summarisation, and minimal interruptions. A further clue might be the balance of the dialogue. Is the practitioner doing more listening than talking rather than dominating the dialogue? Does the dialogue flow?

Farrall and Calverley (2005) stress the importance of demonstrating a belief in the individual's capacity to change in the process of influencing self perception and encouraging desistance, so the observer should look for such things as expressions of encouragement, positive reinforcement of self-perception, positive decision-making, and constructive problem-solving. Finally, the observer should judge whether the overall atmosphere of the interview is friendly with evidence of appropriate humour and mutual respect.

6.   Effective/Legitimate Use of Authority

This section has been constructed from what is known about motivational interviewing and pro-social modelling techniques and the link between the perceived legitimacy of authority and compliance. Put at its simplest, the effective, skilled use of authority is not telling people what to do but rather:

making roles and responsibilities in the practitioner/probationer relationship clear and transparent;

avoiding argument, negative criticism, attribution of blame, personal abuse, confrontation (as opposed to challenging), and negative use of power (Andrews and Bonta, 2003; Dowden and Andrews 2004; Trotter 2007).

This might be described as 'the proper exercise of *formal authority* [in which the practitioner] might exercise an influence over the offender's behaviour in and through the recognition that her authority is legitimate and moreover that its exercise is fair and reasonable' (Robinson and McNeill 2010: 372, italics in the original).

If authority is being used legitimately, the working relationship is more likely to be collaborative, based on respect for the probationer and their views and feelings, viewed as fair by the probationer who in turn will be cooperative and show evidence of trusting the practitioner (Tyler 2003). Specifically, the observer should assess whether:

the probationer has a chance to state their viewpoint;

is involved in any decision-making and goal-setting;

seems to have some control over the focus of the interviews; and

the practitioner is self-critically responsive to the effect their behaviour might have on any defensiveness shown by the probationer;

works effectively to develop rapport and empathy;

places emphasis on the probationer's control over what is discussed or disclosed;

actively involves the probationer in decision-making and any problem-solving activites;

clarifies boundaries and patrols them firmly and fairly.

7.   **Motivational Interviewing**

In their review of 'controlled trials of individually delivered interventions incorporating the basic principles of motivational interviewing' – what they acknowledge as adaptations rather than pure applications of motivational interviewing - Burke et al (2002: 218) concluded that they 'have proven superior to no-treatment control groups and less credible alternative treatments, and equal to viable comparison treatments'. Some eight years later, Rollnick et al (2008: 5) asserted that a variety of clinical trials have shown that patients who have experienced motivational interviewing are 'more likely to enter, stay in, and complete treatment; [and] to participate in follow-up visits'. Although, as this suggests, the empirical support for the efficacy of motivational interviewing techniques is derived from within the field of therapeutic health care, there is encouraging evidence of its applicability to interventions in criminal justice settings (Miller and Rollnick 2002). So, what is it?

A useful way of understanding the subtlety of motivational interviewing is to think of the practitioner helping the probationer to shift the balance away from ambivalence and uncertainty about change towards decisions and actions for change (Miller 1996: Miller and Rollnick 2002). The three components of what Miller and Rollnick (2002: 34) term the 'spirit' of motivational interviewing are:

Collaboration or what might be better described as 'a meeting of aspirations' which involves exploration and support, and which is conducive to change.

Evocation or the 'drawing out of motivation from the person' as opposed to imparting solutions, wise words or opinions.

Autonomy or ensuring that the responsibility for change lies with the individual and that the individual not the practitioner puts forward arguments for change.

The observer should remember that the polar opposites of these components are confrontation, education and non-legitimate authority. Adherence to the spirit of motivational

interviewing will make it much more likely that the practitioner will adapt to the clients' level of motivation and draw out self motivating comments from the probationer.

In addition, the checklist focuses on the four basic principles of motivational interviewing.

expressing empathy involves accepting that ambivalence is normal and that other people's perspectives are both understandable and valid. It is not about agreement: instead through 'skillful reflective listening, the counselor seeks to understand the client's feelings and perspectives without judging, criticizing, or blaming' (Miller and Rollnick (2002: 37). In other words, the practitioner should be trying to view the world through the eyes of the probationer (Arkowitz et al 2008).

developing discrepancy is part of the process of helping people to move from ambivalence to change by heightening awareness of the incongruity between current behaviour and personal values (Arkowitz et al 2008) and the difference between where the probationer is in life and where they want to be (Miller and Rollnick 2002).

rolling with resistance means not being 'an advocate for change' (Arkowitz et al 2008: 5) but resisting the lure of argument and the temptation to confront resistance, and instead encouraging the probationer to re-evaluate their thinking whilst acknowledging the client's ability to effectively contribute to the change process.

supporting self efficacy relates directly to the notion of personal responsibility for change and recognises that change is difficult without hope and belief in its possibility. Essentially, self-efficacy is 'a person's belief in his or her ability to carry out or succeed with a specific task' (Miller and Rollnick 2002: 40), and the practitioner should be encourage it. This is an important aspect of motivational interviewing and if self efficacy is achieved that chances of successful change is significantly enhanced.

In their explanation of motivational interviewing in health care, Rollnick et al (2008) have added to and reworked these principles and consideration of these should help the observer when applying this section of the checklist.

resisting the Righting Reflex or the urge to divert people on to a different course. 'If you are arguing for change and your patient is resisting and arguing against it, you're in the wrong role' (8).

understanding your patient's motivations means being interested in 'the patient's own concerns, values and motivations' (9).

listening to your patient involves finding the answers within the individual.

empowering by exploring how the individual can make a difference using their own ideas and resources and ensuring that the individual is active and thinking aloud.

The main skills underpinning both the spirit and guiding principles of motivational interviewing for the observer to look out for are:

Reflective listening
Open-ended questioning
Affirmation
Summarising
Eliciting self-motivating change talk

8. **Pro-Social Modelling**

Trotter (2007) has acknowledged the difficulty of giving a clear definition of what is meant by pro-social modelling. In attempting to clarify what is being looked for in this section of the checklist it might be helpful to think about Andrews and Bonta's (2003:312) description of anti-social expressions as 'the specific attitudes, values, beliefs, rationalisations and techniques of neutralisation that imply the criminal conduct is acceptable'. The practitioners, therefore, should be helping the probationer away from the kind of belief system that supports and legitimises criminal activity towards a pro-social alternative, and using themselves as a pro-social model. Trotter (2007: 222) specifies this as supervision involving 'modelling pro-social values, comments and actions, re-inforcing pro-social values, comments and actions of offenders and appropriately confronting pro-criminal values, actions and expressions'. This is closely linked to the legitimate use of authority and should be conducive to motivational interviewing, so emphasis should be placed on praise and affirmation. The practitioner should be mindful of the principles of motivational interviewing and thus not be drawn in to argument and resist the *Righting Relex*, but instead model alternative behaviour and thinking in an immediate, concrete and vivid way, and encourage the probationer to re-evaluate their own thinking and challenge their own anti-social thinking and behaviour; and when they do so offer the rewards of praise and affirmation. In this way, the practitioner will be acting as a guide not an admonisher.

Trotter (2007: 216-217) refers to some research associating the effectiveness of probation officers with a focus on the positive thinking and behaviour of their probationers and very little or no use of confrontation: as he puts it, 'people are more likely to learn from positive reinforcemnt rather than negative reinforcement'. Therefore, the observer should assess whether the emphasis is on encouragement as opposed to discouragement, and look for specific examples of modelling (apologising for being late or interruptions, admitting mistakes, and being polite and respectful), examples of praise relating to specific behaviour or thinking ('that's very honest of you', 'that's very insightful', 'that's a big achievement' 'thank you for explaining and apologising for last week's absence'), and examples of encouraging pro-social behaviour and thinking ('it's good that you resisted having a drink

when faced with that difficult situation' 'admitting feeling guilty about letting your partner down was a big step'.

9. Problem Solving

As far as problem solving is concerned, the checklist focuses on how the practitioner and probationer engage collaboratively in the process of identifying of problems, goals and solutions. Although not referred to specifically in the checklist, the skills underpinning effective problem-solving include reasoning; self-reflection; consequential thinking; informed decision-making; means-end thinking; perspective taking; distinguishing fact from opinion; and assessing alternative courses of action. The skill level of the practitioner will be reflected in the degree to which these skills are modelled in the interview, so that the practitioner as well as encouraging the use of these skills by the probationer will be applying them herself or himself to the problem in hand.

Whilst the focus should be on the probationer's assessment of their problems, those problems given priority should be relevant to the probationer's offending: in other words they should be criminogenic. This is the need principle. Andrews (1995) has identified what he terms promising targets for rehabilitation programmes (for example, anti-social feelings and attitudes, anti-social peer associations, and lack of pro-social models). Other typical criminogenic problems relate to:

accommodation

employment and education

substance abuse

family relationships

finance

emotional stability and mental health

recreation and leisure

religion and spirituality

health

lack of self-control and self-management

poor problem-solving skills

poor risk assessment

antisocial behaviour

family and marital problems.

Observation of the process of tackling these problems should centre on the degree to which plans, objectives and actions are discussed, agreed and specifically solution focused with clear targets; and importantly, whether they are achievable and based on optimism.

If an assessment interview is being observed a judgment should be made about the adequacy and functionality of the assessment instrument in use; and if it is a compliance meeting whether authority is being used legitimately, and whether the principles of pro-social modelling and motivational interviewing are being applied.

## 10.	**Cognitive Restructuring**

An additional section which aims to identify some basic cognitive restructuring techniques was introduced in 2008 after studying the use of cognitive restructuring items in the Correctional Program Assessment Inventory (Gendreau and Andrews 2001).

Cognitive restructuring is drawn from the theory and practice of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (Ellis and Dryden 1997) and is part of the process of challenging irrational beliefs. Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy distinguishes between rational beliefs which are flexible and facilitate the achievement of goals and irrational beliefs which are rigid and dogmatic and impede successful achievement of goals. Lipton et al (2002) refer to the application of what they term Rational-emotive therapy to personal problems caused by negative or irrational beliefs which have to be exposed and challenged. Ellis and Dryden (1997) term this the 'disputing of irrational beliefs' and they outline three stages:

detecting – exploring irrational beliefs, so the practitioner guides the probationer through structured processes that aim to encourage the client to re-evaluate their antisocial comments, attitudes or thought processes;

debating – questioning irrational beliefs, so the practitioner aids the exploration of alternative ways of thinking; and

distinguishing – helping to understand the difference between wants and needs, so the practitioner assists the replacement of irrational beliefs with pro-social thought patterns.

In their description of rational-emotive therapy, Lipton et al (2002) stress that its application requires special training, so in this section it important to bear in mind that practitioners may not have received such specific and specialised training. This section of the checklist, therefore, simplifies matters by concentrating on the identification of anti-social thinking and its replacement by alternative, pro-social thinking. As is stated in the checklist, in this section observation should be focused on how the practitioner engages with the probationer's attitudes and thinking towards specific problems, whether they discuss costs and benefits,

explore alternative, less risky or offence-prone ways of thinking and behaving, and whether they help the acquisition of new skills in thinking involving, model those skills themselves, provide the opportunity to practice, and give specific feedback and affirmation.

11. Overall Structure of the Interview

Overall quality of work will, in part, be determined by how well structured the practice being observed is. Perhaps, the simplest way to think about the structure is to ask whether there is a beginning, middle and end, but this might be overstating simplicity! Although somewhat aged, task-centred casework provides some help here (Reid and Epstein 1972). The model outlines three aspects to structure:

communication about purposes, problems, actions and plans

 agreement on the problems and how and when work will be undertaken

guidance through exploration, questioning, prompting etc

A well structured interview, therefore, will begin with a recapitulation of the work undertaken, agreements made, and outstanding issues in the previous meeting (unless, of course, it is the first meeting) and a process of confirming or agreeing the focus of the interview. The practitioner should then act as the facilitator of the agreed work using the skills outlined in the checklist, summarise what has or has not been achieved, identify and feedback on positive achievement, agree action or tasks for the interim, and set the time and date of the next meeting (Taxman et al. 2004).

It is at this point that the observer should make an assessment of the overall quality of the relationship (using clues such as well balanced dialogue, use of humour, level of engagement, openness etc), and add up the scores to make a final total.

12.   Using the checklist in staff development: some tips on feedback

When using the checklist in staff development, observing the interview and recording your observations are not the final purpose of the exercise: the point is to use this material as the basis of helpful communication which can assist people in thinking realistically about their own interviewing style, whether they want to change anything, and if so how they might try to do it. Thought is needed about how to give feedback to interviewers: when we used similar methods to train social work students, we found that feedback itself involved skills which often needed to be learned. Useful things to remember are:

Feedback should be *wanted* and *constructive.* If it has no constructive purpose it is better not to give it at all.

Focus on description rather than judgement: 'I noticed you did x and y' rather than 'I thought you handled that badly'. Unnecessarily evaluative language invites defensive responses which block learning.

Focus on what you can see or hear, rather than interpretations or assumptions about what lies behind it.

Focus on specific identifiable and, if possible, verifiable aspects rather than global judgments.

Focus wherever possible on things which can be changed ('I noticed you didn't understand what he was doing with his Smartphone') rather than things which cannot be changed (e.g. 'It would help if you were younger.')

Focus on the behaviour not the person – what they do, not what you assume they are. Using adverbs, which describe action, may be better than using adjectives which imply personal qualities: 'you spoke quite frequently during that discussion' rather than 'you spoke too much'.

Try to provide a balance of positive and negative feedback. This is often a fault in systems of assessment, inspection and audit: feedback which is consistently negative, or on the other hand consistently uncritical, will not usually be effective.

Try to avoid overload: feedback which covers too much or is too general is usually less helpful than feedback which concentrates on two or three points where a change would really make a difference. People usually remember only two or three points anyway.

Give the other person an opportunity to respond, and see if you can agree on what the key points which come out of the discussion are (perhaps try to produce an agreed summary).

Again, we are interested in feedback ourselves: if you are using the checklist in staff development, we are interested to know how this goes. You can contact us at mauricevanstone@aol.com or p.raynor@swansea.ac.uk .

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The Jersey Supervision Interview Checklist

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Designed by Peter Raynor, Pamela Ugwudike and Maurice Vanstone

Guidelines for scoring this instrument

This checklist is designed for use by observers of video-recorded or live interviews involving a probation officer/offender manager (referred to for convenience as 'the officer') and a person under supervision or assessment, normally as a result of offending (referred to for convenience as 'the probationer', although not all will have this precise legal status).

The checklist identifies a number of different things which might happen in an interview, or which the officer might do. Not all of them will be appropriate in a particular interview, and there is no assumption that an interview which does not contain them all is necessarily a bad interview. The aim is to develop an overall picture of the range of practices, methods and skills used by officers in a range of interviews. The items in the checklist are drawn from a wide range of research on skills and methods used in the supervision of offenders.

Individual items in the checklist are either ticked (if present in the interview) or left blank (if absent). Observers are encouraged to use their common sense and professional experience in judging whether to tick an item: some items are relevant only at particular points in an interview and may be ticked on the basis of one occurrence (e.g. whether there is a summary of previous work); others are assessed on the basis of more consistent occurrence throughout the interview (e.g. whether the officer appears attentive). When an item is not ticked, this simply represents a judgment that it did not happen. This does not necessarily mean it should have happened: it might be inapplicable in the context of the particular interview under observation. On the other hand, an item might not be ticked because the officer did the opposite, e.g. lectured the probationer instead of listening. Because the *absence* of a particular practice, method or skill is not always easy to interpret, the focus of the checklist is positive, aiming to record those practices, methods or skills which are *present*.

Scoring each section of the checklist is done simply by adding up the ticks, and the overall total for the interview is determined by adding the section scores together.

Interview and assessment details:

Officer code:

Reference number:

Date of interview:

Observer:

Date of Observation:

Type of interview:

Length of interview:

33

Set up of Interview	**Notes** • Observe whether seating arrangements are such that both parties appear relaxed with appropriate distance maintained to ensure freedom of movement. • Please consider that the nature of interactions may affect seating arrangements. For instance, where the officer uses a PC for illustrations during the interview, this may alter seating arrangements and levels of eye contact.	
		TICK BELOW:
	Privacy assured to enhance disclosure	
	Confidentiality - assured	
	Seating – appropriate proximity – probationer not crowded or uneasy	
	No distractions (or minimal distraction and the officer apologises)	
	Total for this section (add up the ticks): **Comments**	

Quality of Non-Verbal Communication	**Notes** Observe the officer's body language and apply the SOLER criteria: • The officer *squarely* faces the probationer to indicate involvement, maintains an *open posture* by ensuring arms and legs are uncrossed, slightly *leaning forward* to indicate involvement, intermittent *eye contact* is maintained and officer appears to be *relaxed*, natural not tense. Scoring in this section should reflect the degree to which the officer's body language demonstrates attentiveness, interest and the desire to stimulate effective dialogue with the probationer.	
		TICK BELOW:
	Facing the probationer	
	Open posture / arms legs uncrossed	
	Attentive to probationer	
	Adequate eye contact	
	Appears relaxed	
	Total for this section (add up the ticks): **Comments**	

Quality of Verbal Communication	**Notes** When observing the use and style of questions in the interview, bear in mind the following: • Open questions encourage dialogue and disclosure. • Closed questions invite monosyllabic responses; most closed questions attract yes/no responses. • Leading questions pressure the probationer to provide a suggested or specific response. • Count the number of closed questions, open questions and leading questions and score accordingly, **BUT:** • Where the closed questions are appropriate, they should not be counted. For example, information seeking questions and questions to check the probationer's understanding are typically closed questions. These are appropriate and should not be counted. • Where the officer appears to be adhering to a programme manual, count only questions not contained in the manual. • Observe the probationer's response as well as the behaviour of the officer.	
		TICK BELOW:
	Mostly Open Questions	
	No Leading Questions	
	Officer shows understanding	
	Displays warmth (not stiff / cold / formal)	
	Enthusiastic dialogue	
	Officer is polite / respectful (e.g. not sarcastic, rude, dismissive)	
	Promotes flexible dialogue (e.g. does not dominate or interrupt)	
	Uses humour to engage	
	Optimistic about possibility of change	
	There appears to be mutual liking	
	Total for this section (add up the ticks): **Comments**	

Effective/Legitimate Use of Authority	**Notes**	
	Legitimate use of authority requires fairness and a willingness to give the other party the chance to state their case.	
	Effective use of authority suggests that where the probationer becomes defensive/resistant, the officer could:	
	• Consider how the probationer's defensiveness / resistance may stem from the officer's approach / actions / body language	
	• Avoid argument	
	• Avoid an authoritarian stance- warning, criticising, blaming, lecturing, talking/forcing people into change etc.	
	• Aim to develop rapport & empathy by using reflective listening and by using reflective & open questions to change focus. E.g. the question: *'You said...tell me how you feel about that?* may discourage resistance by 'redirecting focus'/ 'changing track' and encouraging the probationer to re-evaluate the discrepancies in their line of reasoning	
	• Highlight the probationer's control over their actions / disclosure	
	• Ensure that the probationer's problems, views, concerns are taken into account during decision making	
	Scores in this section should also reflect:	
	• The officer's response to defensiveness / resistance (consider the officer's verbal and non-verbal behaviour)	
	• The officer's decision making approach (is it collaborative?)	
	• The officer's clarification of roles and responsibilities	
		TICK BELOW:
	Does not argue / 'changes track' with reflective question	
	Encourages collaboration during decision making	
	Positive comments outweigh negative	
	Firm but fair	
	Clarifies roles/responsibilities	
	Total for this section (add up the ticks): **Comments**	

Notes

In completing this section the observer should consider the following components identified in the motivational interviewing literature:

- *Showing empathy* - involves using comments that demonstrate genuine understanding. Comments such as 'that must have been difficult for you', demonstrate empathy. Reflective listening and attending to the probationer also demonstrate empathy.
- *Developing discrepancies* - involves highlighting the difference between the probationer's 'current state and desired state',
- *Rolling with resistance* - entails avoiding arguments by using reflections and open questions.
- *Developing self-efficacy* - involves reassuring probationers of their ability to repeat past successes.

Observe whether the officer uses motivational interviewing skills to identify the probationer's location on cycle of change, overcome resistance and stimulate the change process.

Motivational Interviewing		**TICK BELOW:**
	Paraphrases, nods, maintains eye contact	
	Makes empathic comment/s	
	Avoids argument / rolls with resistance	
	Uses reflections / develops discrepancies	
	Uses reflections to counter resistance or improve understanding	
	Promotes self-efficacy	
	Adapts approach to the probationer's location on cycle of change	
	Elicits self-motivating comments	
	Probationer becomes less resistant as interview progresses	
	Total for this section (add up the ticks): **Comments**	

	Notes	
Pro-Social Modelling	Pro-social modelling skills can be used in a structured manner in order to guide the probationer towards replacing anti-social behaviours / attitudes / thinking with pro-social alternatives. Effective modelling occurs where the officer 'concretely or vividly demonstrates the pro-social behaviour'. Effective praise / affirmation should refer to specific behaviour / attitudes / thinking. Effective challenging involves subtle but firm disapproval of antisocial attitudes/behaviours, examples: • Highlighting risky behaviour and its consequences. • Discouraging rationalisations / refusing to collude with the probationer • Effective challenge should also refer to the specific behaviour and should not be entirely negative. • Observe whether the officer includes positive feedback, highlights reasons for disapproval and provides an invitation to the probationer to consider the inappropriateness of the antisocial behaviour (encouraging 'self-challenge').	
	TICK BELOW:	
	Several examples of modelling	
	Several examples of praise	
	Praise refers to specific behaviour or thinking	
	Challenges antisocial behaviour or thinking in a positive way (e.g. emphasizes strengths) not confrontational or over critical	
	Probationer is encouraged to practice more prosocial behaviour / thinking	
	Total for this section (add up the ticks): **Comments**	

		TICK BELOW:
Problem Solving	**Notes** • If assessment interview: is an adequate assessment instrument in use? • If compliance meeting: particular attention should be paid to evidence of effective use of authority/pro-social modelling / motivational interviewing. • If a programme session: is the probationer actively involved / participating? Observe whether the focus is on criminogenic needs, for example: • Accommodation, employment/education, substance abuse, attitude, family relationship, financial, emotional stability / mental health, antisocial peers, recreation/social, religious / spiritual, health, crime-prone personality traits, antisocial behaviour / attitudes / thinking, antisocial associates, family / marital problems.	
	Officer identifies evident need/s	
	Focus is on probationer's assessment of problem/s	
	Focus is on criminogenic needs	
	Plans / goals / actions / options discussed, evaluated and agreed	
	Target/s set	
	Solution focused	
	Optimistic about possibility of change	
	Acts as advocate / makes referral where appropriate	
	Provides details of access to referral agency where appropriate referral has been made	
	Discusses benefit of referral where appropriate referral has been made	
	Total for this section (add up the ticks): **Comments**	

Cognitive Restructuring

Notes

In this section, observe how the officer engages with the probationer's attitudes and thinking – for example, is the probationer encouraged/enabled to report thinking, attitudes, feelings in relation to a particular problem? Are alternative, less risky or offence-prone ways of thinking identified and practised? Learning new ways of thinking to some extent resembles learning other skills, and the basic steps of skill acquisition are likely to be relevant, for example:

- Defining the skill,
- Modelling or demonstrating the skill,
- Providing the probationer the opportunity to practice the skill - e.g. in role play,
- Evaluating performance and providing feedback,
- Repetition.

	TICK BELOW:
Officer identifies anti-social thinking	
Suggests alternatives to anti-social thinking	
Models alternative thinking	
Encourages probationer to practise alternative thinking	
Probationer has opportunity to practise alternative thinking	
Discusses costs of anti-social thinking	
Discusses the benefits of the alternative thinking	
Total for this section (add up the ticks): **Comments**	

	Notes The observer should consider whether the interview is structured appropriately to ensure the effective involvement or participation of the probationer, bearing in mind the nature and purpose of the interview.	
		TICK BELOW:
Overall Structure of interview	Summary of previous work provided	
	Focus of interview is identifiable	
	Identifiable beginning, middle and end	
	Probationer engaged in proceedings	
	Officer sums up / provides feedback	
	Arrangements made for next interview	
	Tasks given for the interim	
	Good quality overall relationship	
	Total for this section (add up the ticks):	
	Comments	
	OVERALL TOTAL (add up the section scores):	