Early Findings from the National Evaluation of Offending Behaviour Pathfinder Programmes

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INTRODUCTION: THE CRIME REDUCTION PROGRAMME AND OFFENDING BEHAVIOUR PATHFINDER PROGRAMMES

The Crime Reduction Programme, which sought to develop and administer approaches to crime reduction and prevention, drew on the findings of large-scale systematic reviews of research literature on the outcomes of work with offenders (for example, Andrews et al. 1990, Garrett 1985, Gottschalk et al. 1987, Lab and Whitehead 1988, Lipsey 1992a, Lipsey 1992b, Lipsey 1995, Lösel and Koferl 1989, Whitehead and Lab 1989). This literature shows that it is possible to reduce the re-offending rates of persistent offenders by interventions specifically focused on factors associated with the occurrence of offending behaviour. Following upon HM Inspectorate of Probation’s Effective Practice review (Underdown 1998), an initiative was embarked upon to develop and implement programmes of interventions and activities for offenders that were based on this research. Existing programmes within the Probation Service were surveyed and selected according to their suitability for further development to meet standards of design and delivery likely to contribute to their overall effectiveness. These programmes were designated as Offending Behaviour Pathfinder Programmes, and the first cohort of them was announced in September 1998. During 1999, a panel of expert consultants was formed to undertake the task of scrutinising Pathfinders and evaluating them against a set of specially devised accreditation criteria. The new Joint Prison-Probation Accreditation Panel issued a set of Accreditation Criteria for programmes, and also announced a further group of prospective Pathfinder programmes.

A central component of these initiatives from the outset was an emphasis on the importance of ongoing monitoring, research and evaluation. Following a tendering process, a research team from the Universities of Leicester and Liverpool was awarded a contract for conducting aspects of this work on the Offending Behaviour Pathfinder Programmes. The initial evaluation design applied includes four strands:

- An organisational audit to determine the effect of implementation and delivery on the success of the programme.
- Continued monitoring throughout the Pathfinder of offender characteristics, sentence details, attendance, compliance, targeting procedures, programme information, offender and staff feedback and psychometric test scores.
- An evaluation of the programmes’ impact on re-offending at 1-year and 2-year follow-up points.
- A cost effectiveness analysis, both in general terms and comparatively across programmes, to feed into the Home Office cost benefit analysis.
Despite changes to the original research design, the research methodology employed in the full evaluation study involves both cross-sectional and longitudinal/follow-up comparisons within and between each of the programmes included. The data to be collected is both quantitative and qualitative, and focuses on the outcomes of programmes as well as aspects of implementation and process. This is, therefore, a multi-layered, mixed method evaluation approach in which evaluation is seen from a number of inter-related perspectives (Posavac and Carey 1997, Stecher and Davis 1987, Greene et al. 2001).

This article addresses the nature of the process evaluations and details the results from two of the programmes considered; the Priestley One-to-One General Offending Programme, and the version of Aggression Replacement Training (ART) developed by Wiltshire Probation Area.

During 2000, the first aspect of the evaluation, termed the process evaluation, was completed. This involved combining programme and implementation outlines given in documents provided by probation services with in-depth interviews with programme staff: senior managers with responsibility for Offending Behaviour programmes, programme and treatment managers, programme delivery and administrative staff. Descriptive accounts were obtained on aspects of programme design, development and delivery. Organisational issues were explored, including aspects of internal and external communication, programme staff recruitment, allocation, training, supervision, and retention. The data collected was scrutinised using qualitative content analysis, which allowed the evaluation team to identify common and contrasting themes within and between programmes and probation service areas. This article illustrates some of the key similarities and contrasts between the early implementation of the Priestley One-to-One and Wiltshire ART programmes and highlights the points to be considered when implementing new offender orientated initiatives within probation. Further information on results of other programmes can be found at Hollin et al. (2002).

AGGRESSION REPLACEMENT TRAINING (ART)

This information was collected principally from interviews with 17 members of staff including a member of the Senior Management, the line manager and practitioners directly involved in delivery of the programme to offenders. Documents relating to the programme, such as theory manuals, session manuals, staff training materials, and evaluation reports, were also examined.

General description

The ART programme, as delivered now in the UK, was developed in the late 1990s by Wiltshire Probation Service. In 1996-97 Wiltshire Probation Service internal research highlighted a local need for intervention for violent offenders. The Service discovered that violent offences accounted for approximately one-third of the Service’s Pre-Sentence Reports (PSRs). As a result the ART programme, initially an American juvenile offender programme written by Professor Arnold Goldstein, was developed by Service practitioners for UK adult offenders.

The revised programme, as implemented in Wiltshire at the time of the evaluation, comprised 16 sessions. Each session was divided into two 55 minute sections which covered two of the three following elements: social skills, self-control and moral reasoning training. The rate of delivery was one session per week with the elements rotating throughout the programme.

During the revision of the programme there was some correspondence and consultation with Professor Goldstein and Professor John Gibbs (an expert on moral reasoning training). However, the evaluation team considered that it would have been advantageous for the Service to be able to consult more extensively with these external experts.
**Staffing Issues**

At the time of the evaluation the staff team comprised four Probation Officers (PO), three probation service officers (PSO)/groupworker grades, four experienced sessional staff and three of the latter who were newly appointed. In addition, a post of Treatment Supervisor had been created and whilst there were some difficulties recruiting to this post it had just been filled at the time of the evaluation team’s visits. The evaluation team found that this staff group had been relatively stable with very few changes over time. This was thought to be due to the personal involvement of the staff in the development of the programme, which had created a feeling of ownership of, and specialisation in, the programme.

There were two members of staff allocated to each programme session with reserves also allocated as far as possible in order to ensure cohesiveness. In addition, it was seen as best practice to have a gender balance and mixture of grades and prior experience amongst programme deliverers; however, due to the composition of the staff team this was not always possible. Regular supervision sessions for all staff were provided in Wiltshire and material from live observation of sessions was often used in supervisory work in order to aid in individual practice development. Some practitioners felt that given the limited nature of what can be offered by sessional staff, the onus on them in terms of preparatory and support work was not fully recognised.

In order to contribute to the ongoing development of the programme the Service provided resources to hold a review week twice a year. This time was mainly used to provide any necessary ongoing training but was also used to consider such issues as staff competencies, and problems arising from the programme work, such as difficult incidents occurring in groups. For example, during one review week, staff highlighted the sizeable number of programme attendees who had committed offences involving domestic violence. This time provided a valuable opportunity for the staff group to evaluate their work and to discuss and address any ongoing issues.

Due to the nature of the development of the programme an unusual method of staff training was used in Wiltshire. The staff who had been instrumental in the development of the programme had trained themselves to run it. Subsequently new staff were trained by existing staff. The team had also provided external training to two other probation service areas. However, unusual consideration had been given to the mode of training; for each new member of staff there was a lengthy induction process moving from observational work and limited experience of session input, through adoption of an increasingly active role, to co-leadership. Despite this, some of the staff commented that they considered this format to be inadequate and that it involved too much learning ‘on the job’. Some of the staff interviewed also commented on the need for more training in the area of collaborative working. At the time of the evaluation, the staff were in the process of preparing a staff training manual incorporating these points.

**Programme Delivery**

The programme was delivered at two sites (Swindon and Trowbridge) at a rate of 6-10 deliveries per annum, with 6-8 offenders per group. Delivery was predominantly in the evening as a high proportion of offenders were in employment.

Only an estimated 60 per cent of referrals were viewed by staff as being genuinely appropriate. As mentioned earlier the Service had highlighted through their review week that a large proportion of the remainder had committed domestic violence offences which raise other issues than those touched upon by ART. There was a significant waiting list for ART, and it should therefore have been possible to ensure more suitable referrals. Despite this acknowledgement at the time of the evaluation team’s visit there was no alternative to offer to domestic violence offenders and hence they were still attending the ART programme. However, there were plans to implement a domestic violence programme as soon as feasibly possible.
At the time of the evaluation completion rates for ART varied from 65 per cent to 75 per cent. Programme staff had considered these rates and had concluded that there were two main reasons for them, in addition to those prevailing elsewhere. A proportion of drop-out at the Swindon site was thought to arise from the pattern of shift-work at major local employers. Secondly, with Wiltshire being a large rural county this created major travel problems for some offenders. Wiltshire Probation Service spent a significant amount of money on transport with offenders often being brought to programme sites by a combination of staff effort and the use of taxis.

Although this programme received a higher rate of referral for women offenders than any other in the county, the absolute number of female clients remains low and they constituted only one or two members of some groups. As Wiltshire has a very low proportion of ethnic minority group members, the number of black offenders on the programme was also very low. It therefore remains to be seen whether the development of the programme is appropriate for these subgroups of offenders. Further research is needed in this area.

The evaluation team found that Wiltshire made good use of pre-programme information. The communication between referrers and programme co-ordinators was formalised which meant that PSRs, risk assessments and other material were available for programme deliverers. In addition, a pre-group meeting had been incorporated between the offender and programme deliverers which allowed an introduction to the programme and the allocated deliverers. However, it was felt that the liaison between programme deliverers, case manager and offenders could have been strengthened.

Monitoring and evaluation

Offenders’ participation in the Wiltshire ART programme was closely monitored. All attendances and absences were recorded and the latter were communicated speedily to case managers. Programme deliverers had been made responsible for preparing a final report on each participant which provided information such as level of attendance, punctuality, factors established as contributing to offending behaviour, and issues requiring monitoring in terms of future risk.

For the purposes of monitoring programme integrity, it was common practice for the Programme Manager to observe directly two sessions per programme delivered. At the time of the evaluation, videotape recording of sessions was not carried out within Wiltshire as resources were not available; however, senior managers were evaluating the possibility of this method of monitoring. Staff kept written records of session planning and feedback, and these materials were used in supervision sessions which occurred four times per programme. In addition to this, the Service had developed a database which held programme relevant information in an easily accessible manner which could also be drawn upon to aid supervision and/or planning. Integrity issues were said to be high on the team agenda and it was reported that these were regularly discussed.

PRIESTLEY ONE-TO-ONE PROGRAMME

The initial evaluation of the pilot implementation was carried out via a series of interviews with three members of senior management, six line managers, and eight programme deliverers from four Probation Service Areas.

The Priestley One-to-One Programme was developed by Philip Priestley in 1993 for Somerset Probation Service. The programme is a general offending behaviour programme designed for one-to-one work with offenders. The programme which consists of 20 weekly sessions is in three sections: firstly the needs of the offenders are assessed, secondly they are taught social skills, problem-solving, empathy, self-management, goal-setting and attitudes and values about crime and finally, offenders are given time to rehearse and improve on these skills.
Staffing issues

At the time of the evaluation, whilst senior and line managers had similar views about staffing levels and selection criteria for One-to-One programme deliverers there was no official documentation outlining the necessary staff competencies in existence. The evaluation team thought that this was an area that needed consideration, particularly when recruiting staff who were not trained probation officers. The evaluation team noted that there were already signs of tension between trained probation officers and staff recruited specifically to run programmes. Some interviewees felt that new staff might lack the ability to relate to offenders in depth, particularly in respect to anti-discrimination and issues relating to motivation.

It was found, unsurprisingly, that programme staffing levels varied locally. In addition, the number of staff depended upon the management system that had been implemented within the particular Service. The team found that different systems were used in the probation services visited by the evaluation team. For example, in one area the programme deliverers were specialists in programmes delivery whilst in another the deliverers also held caseloads and hence had a dual role within the Service. In addition, in some probation services it was planned to keep programme deliverers as specialists in the delivery of one programme whilst in others they were to be trained to run a range of programmes (for example, Priestley One-to-One as well as ETS\(^1\) and ART). These decisions obviously have resource implications (for example, training costs) which need to be weighed against the advantages and disadvantages of each of the management systems in order to determine the optimum local solution.

Training was viewed as important by the staff interviewed and it was anticipated that demands for further training and development would emerge as staff currently involved in programme delivery mature in post. The training was initially provided by Philip Priestley and was well received by line managers and programme deliverers. However, it was felt that booster sessions would be valuable once staff had some experience of running the programme.

The provision of administrative staff emerged as a significant issue in all Services during the interviews. These programmes are resource intensive with respect to data gathering and without proper administrative support will eat heavily into the time of practitioners.

Programme Delivery

The majority of referrals were reported to be white males. However, in some cases women were targeted for the programme, due to the Service not wishing to place a sole woman on a group programme. In the four Services visited by the evaluation team the completion rates ranged from 60 per cent to 75 per cent.

When asked about their opinions of the programme material, programme deliverers responded that they considered it to be of a high standard, although they felt that the programme was rather slow to start. In addition, a small number of exercises were seen as too easy and/or ineffective. Senior managers and programme deliverers commented that the programme seemed to be aimed at young males and the material was not always appropriate for women (the latter point is interesting considering the point above about the targeting of women for the programme). Programme deliverers also felt that offenders with literacy problems may struggle with the programme due to the strong reliance on pen and paper exercises.

All line managers interviewed felt they had good communication between themselves and their senior managers. In addition, line managers also felt that they had good communication with programme deliverers. However, the opinions of the programme deliverers tended to be more mixed – some felt that information did not filter down from the Home Office and/or senior managers either quickly or often enough. Programme deliverers were often based in different locations and not all had access to

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\(^1\) ETS: the Enhanced Thinking Skills programme.
electronic communication methods. One Service held forums where line managers discussed the running of the programme; these meetings were valued by programme deliverers.

Given the variation in Services, it is not wise to prescribe one system for all, but a good communication strategy should inform a wider audience about the programme, pass information quickly and on a regular basis, and integrate staff knowledge and awareness of both local and national developments.

**Monitoring and evaluation**

In order to ensure programme integrity, all Services had ensured that either video or audiotape recording facilities were in operation. However, whilst it was common practice for the sessions to be recorded there were few formal procedures for reviewing taped sessions. In addition, feedback to programme deliverers was not well established and was seen as being rather *ad hoc*. Senior managers thought there should be a formal system to measure integrity and provide feedback to programme deliverers and managers and that training was necessary to review recordings effectively (this is now provided by the National Probation Service). Managers and programme deliverers were concerned about the volume of material (both recorded sessions and paper/electronic based information on individuals and sessions) that they were required to collect. Managers were particularly concerned about the storage of this material within the Service in the long term. In addition, programme delivery staff voiced concerns about the amount of time needed to collect and process this information. Monitoring systems were in various stages of development and hence the evaluation team found that there were different levels of data collection within the Services. The evaluation team felt that some of this load could be taken from the programme deliverers by additional administrative staff.

There were some problems with accommodation. Two problems mentioned were lack of dedicated, purpose-built rooms for programme delivery and the fact that central control of accommodation made it difficult to resolve problems quickly. Programme deliverers said that lack of suitable accommodation had led to some sessions being cancelled and rearranged – not conducive to running the One-to-One Programme effectively, particularly at the early stages with an offender.

In general, the staff that the evaluation team spoke to were enthusiastic about the Priestley One-to-One Programme. Programme deliverers enjoyed delivering the programme and the training was commented on favourably. The implementation of systems to record potential issues and bring them to a central forum, involving the programme developers, was under development in one Service but was plainly needed in the remaining three. Information gathering in support of integrity and monitoring was not seen as problematic (although the resource implications were). The major policy issue was with respect to the development of systems to analyse the collected information and to use this information to facilitate effective programme delivery. It was hoped that the implementation of the Interim Accredited Programme System (IAPS) would aid the Services in this task.

**DISCUSSION**

The two programmes described above are remarkably different from each other on a number of dimensions. These range from simple indicators such as programme intensity and duration, to more complex issues such as types and volumes of data available, and to broader contextual aspects such as communication networks, forms of staff support, and procedures for monitoring delivery and implementing change. These differences are not simply seen in a comparison of these programmes, but also in others evaluated by the team (Hollin et al., 2002). Whilst the process evaluations took place in the early stages of the evaluation, some of the issues noted here are, it seems, yet to be resolved.

In general terms, in the evaluation of Pathfinders it should be seen as central that the work carried out focuses on both external and internal aspects of programmes. There are certain standards and criteria which programmes are expected to meet and they must be evaluated on that basis. Each is also a response to local demands, tailored to local circumstances, and with specific objectives, and
these aspects too should be evaluated. This integrative strategy follows the application of a ‘programme logic’ model to evaluation (McGuire 2000). It is encouraging that the programmes noted here, and in Hollin et al. (2002), have been evaluated to some extent, and while this varies and is in some cases fairly limited, in other instances there has been extensive work undertaken. Crucially, there is recognition that evaluation is essential. Probation practitioners have been enjoined by external researchers to conduct their own evaluative work (McIvor 1995) and while this must be supplemented by external validation, the extent of it is impressive in the programmes discussed here.

Many of the programmes, including those noted here, were developed, or adopted, as a result of local initiatives, which has meant that they have evolved over time. Programmes were described in some settings as ‘organic’ and an ongoing process of modification was expected. Whilst this has ensured that programmes and their staffing were flexible and responsive to local needs, it has also meant that the process of standardising delivery and administration between and across areas has, in some cases been problematic. This has impacted both on the delivery of programmes and on the evaluative research.

In some areas staff were unaware about the context of the programmes; this ranged from case managers not realising the nature of the programmes in which offenders were taking part, administrative staff being uninformed of the importance of collecting and collating programme and offender information and delivery staff dealing with non-programme issues within sessions. This last point clearly reflects the concerns of probation staff and the ‘de-professionalisation’ of their work (see, for example, Newman and Nutley 2003, McLaughlin and Muncie 2000).

Whilst non-standardisation of programme delivery and administration between probation areas may not have been considered problematic in the past, with the advent of the National Probation Directorate (NPD), programme accreditation and its associated evaluation, this is no longer the case. For example, the evaluation team found instances of probation areas not fully completing batteries of psychometric tests, completing batteries which differed from those required by NPD, not scoring completed test batteries and not collecting or collating test data in a systematic or useful manner. Similar problems with completing programme integrity monitoring forms were discovered. The team found a number of reasons for these anomalies, including staff not being aware that they were using the incorrect test battery, not having training to score tests and having insufficient resources to complete paperwork.

Whilst tighter management may resolve some of these issues, the data that is lost to the probation area and to the research and evidence base may have far reaching consequences. One of these might be the inability to identify appropriate referrals to programmes on a reliable and regular basis. This inability to identify offenders who would benefit from programmes is not simply the concern of programme managers, delivery staff or PSR writers, it may also be considered a consequence of a lack of understanding of the specific needs of offenders and the issues addressed within the programmes. This can only be addressed by building the evidence and research base, which in turn may only be done through efficient and consistent data collection at source.

Data collection and interpretation was viewed, in implementation plans, as being key to the delivery of programmes, and in some cases relied heavily on the delivery of the Interim Accredited Programme System (IAPS) by the NPD. This tool was also to aid the management of programmes, offenders, staff and data collection. However, the long delays in rolling out an easily workable version of the software (which allows all programme data to be entered, manipulated and available in a useable format) has meant that data is not consistently available to programme management or delivery staff, or the research teams.

Whilst these issues point to problems in building the evidence base on which to develop current and future policy and practice, it also illustrates the problems in communication noted by probation areas. It is perhaps not surprising that communication issues between central sources and local areas might be problematic in a period of change. The creation of the National Probation
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Service, amalgamation of some probation services into single probation areas, management structure re-organisations and, ‘...extensive changes in the working practices and thinking of all the criminal justice and partner social policy organisations’ (McLaughlin and Muncie 2000, p175) have all presented challenges to probation staff. However, communication breakdowns may be seen as one root of inconsistent programme management, administration and delivery, which again impacts on the nature of research. The reverse, with criminal justice professionals not being informed of research to inform practice, is often the case too, with results of evaluations not being made available. A Chief Officer noted at a recent What Works conference that probation areas simply could not wait years for the results of evaluations to be published to inform their practice (Knott 2001).

Currently, data from the process evaluations of seven Offending Behaviour Pathfinder Programmes is in the public domain (Hollin et al. 2002). Information from this and from associated good practice guides made available by the Home Office may have had an impact on the management of programmes. However, the effectiveness of these practice guides is not yet supported or challenged by quantitative data from the evaluation. Pawson (2002, p157) notes that because of the nature of the policy making cycle, evaluations may not have an impact on policy: ‘evaluation research is tortured by time constraints. The policy cycle revolves quicker than the research cycle, with the result that ‘real time’ evaluations often have little influence on policy making’. He goes on to suggest that systematic reviews of research are now important for the development of policy, which again means that research and evaluation needs to be based on consistent data with high levels of integrity, pointing to the effective management of data collection at source.

REFERENCES


