

# The interventions landscape for probation services: delivery, challenges, and opportunities

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HM Inspectorate of Probation is committed to reviewing, developing, and promoting the evidence base for high-quality probation and youth justice services. Our *Research & Analysis Bulletins* are aimed at all those with an interest in the quality of these services, presenting key findings to assist with informed debate and help drive improvement where it is required. The findings are used within the Inspectorate to develop our inspection programmes, guidance, and position statements.

This bulletin was prepared by Kevin Ball (Senior Research Officer), Oliver Kenton (Research Officer), and Dr Robin Moore (Head of Research) from HM Inspectorate of Probation. We are grateful to HM Inspectors of Probation Jo Curphey and Billy Finnegan for leading the interviews with senior probation leaders and policymakers. We would like to thank all those who participated in any way in our inspections and to all those who were interviewed or responded to our survey.

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## Contents

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Executive summary .....	4
1. Introduction .....	6
2. Findings .....	14
2.1 Probation interventions make a positive difference .....	14
2.2 What is working and not working? .....	18
2.3 Challenges and opportunities for the future .....	27
3. Conclusion .....	37
References .....	40
Annex A: Methodology .....	44

## Executive summary

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### Context

The timely provision of a broad range of high-quality interventions is a key component of successful probation delivery, with probation interventions complementing and augmenting the services offered by other agencies to all members of society. Probation leaders need to build effective local partnerships to ensure access to these community services, while frontline probation professionals need to have the skills and capacity to develop trusting relationships with people on probation, building understanding of an individual, including their needs, strengths and motivations, and hence which interventions are most appropriate.

Following the demise of *Transforming Rehabilitation*, June 2021 saw the establishment of the public sector Probation Service, delivered through a regional structure. The Probation Service now provides, directly or through commissioning, interventions in differing formats, including accredited programmes, structured interventions, commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS), and practitioner toolkits. Parts of the landscape are being recommissioned in 2024/2025. Thus, this is a timely moment to consider the merits and weaknesses of the current system, with a consideration of what is working and what is not working, key enablers and barriers, and good practices.

### Approach

The findings in this bulletin are based upon several sources including: (i) data collected from our probation inspections completed between October 2021 and May 2023, covering 32 Probation Delivery Units across 11 of the 12 probation regions; (ii) interviews with senior probation leaders in central departments and regional offices; (iii) interviews with representatives from third sector organisations (TSOs); (iv) interviews with current and former members of the Correctional Services Advice and Accreditation Panel (CSAAP); and (v) a survey of probation professionals.

### Key findings and implications

- Research evidence supports the use of various interventions for people on probation, and our analysis of matched inspection and outcomes data clearly demonstrates the potential for high-quality implementation and delivery to reduce reoffending and support desistance.
- However, around half of the cases in our recent inspections did not receive sufficient, or sufficient quality, interventions or services, with some notably lower levels of sufficiency for specific needs. Gaps in provision were highlighted by the research participants in relation to specific needs, particularly accessing suitable housing, and in relation to specific subgroups, especially services for ethnic minorities.
- The following issues were highlighted in relation to specific types of intervention:
  - accredited programmes were viewed positively but there were concerns about waiting lists and the ability to access the programmes in a timely manner

- practitioners had lacked the time to build their understanding of structured interventions and toolkits, and there had been insufficient training regarding their use and delivery
  - the CRS Refer and Monitor system was criticised by both probation staff and TSO workers for requiring data entry duplication, being overly bureaucratic, and failing to provide either side with sufficient information to monitor progress safely and effectively.
- Building upon the findings in this bulletin – including positive examples of innovation in local joint commissioning – the following considerations are set out for improving the interventions provided to people on probation:
  - empowering local probation leaders to engage with local services and communities and match the interventions offer to the needs of the local probation caseload
  - learning from recent commissioning experiences, breaking down barriers to smaller local organisations applying for and securing funding, and paying attention to developments in other sectors, e.g. alliance commissioning and contracting
  - improving links with Creating Future Opportunities, making full use of the multi-agency activity hubs
  - focusing on maximising transparency to increase understanding, assist with informed debate, manage expectations, build trust and confidence, and support the further development of current and new interventions
  - committing to evaluation and learning, enabling interventions and delivery to be improved over time, maximising positive outcomes for individuals and wider society
  - reviewing the priority areas for CSAAP consideration, including core practice skills (signalling that, at its core, probation is a relational, collaborative, and person-centred service), and avoiding any unnecessary intervention hierarchies
  - building the knowledge and skills of staff, developing their confidence in navigating the interventions available for people on probation and in providing the necessary support to complement specific interventions, helping to maximise engagement and impact.
- In developing the interventions landscape, an overriding principle should be to support delivery which is aligned to evidence and which is personalised, holistic, engaging, responsive, and inclusive. A balance needs to be struck between not over-complicating the landscape while ensuring that sufficient options and flexibility are in place at the local level to meet the full range of individual needs, maximising access to universal services wherever possible to support longer-term community integration and social inclusion.
- As with other areas of the contemporary Probation Service, many recent problems in delivering interventions stem from staff shortages and the resultant workload pressures. Unmanageable workloads have led probation professionals to retreat into risk management at the expense of generative rehabilitative work. This is self-defeating as the best way to reduce risk of harm is to tackle offending-related needs and build upon strengths through evidence-informed and evidence-based interventions.

# 1. Introduction

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In this bulletin we explore the probation interventions landscape developed following the formation of the unified Probation Service for England and Wales in June 2021.<sup>1</sup> The Probation Service is now a public sector service providing all supervision and rehabilitation services for people on probation through direct provision, commissioned external services, or referrals to partner agencies.

We do not attempt to evaluate any specific intervention or programme, but to provide an overview of how well the post-unification interventions landscape operates for those on the frontline. Crucially, interventions are designed to meet a key objective of criminal justice: 'to reform and rehabilitate offenders – changing an offender's behaviour to prevent future crime, for example by requiring them to have treatment for drug addiction or alcohol abuse' (Sentencing Council, 2022). The high level aims/objectives of the study were as follows:

- to increase understanding of the current probation interventions landscape
- to identify what is working and what is not working in the current landscape
- to identify key enablers and barriers to the delivery of a sufficiently comprehensive range of high-quality interventions
- to identify good practices to help with the further development of the interventions landscape.

## What is a probation intervention?

Defining 'interventions' is problematic in terms of defining the boundary between supervision and intervention. Probation supervision itself can be seen as an intervention, that is, 'a relationship aimed at promoting a better adaptation of the individual to a given situation' (Ricou et al., 2019). All probation service delivery should be personalised, relational, engaging and rehabilitative, and this was a perspective emphasised by senior policymakers whom we interviewed.

However, for the purposes of this project, interventions are those specified programmes and services which address offending-related needs and build strengths for people on probation which are bought-in or delivered in-house. As such, we exclude unpaid work and electronic monitoring, which though they indeed have rehabilitative potential, are primarily provided for reparation and control in line with other sentencing and criminal justice aims.

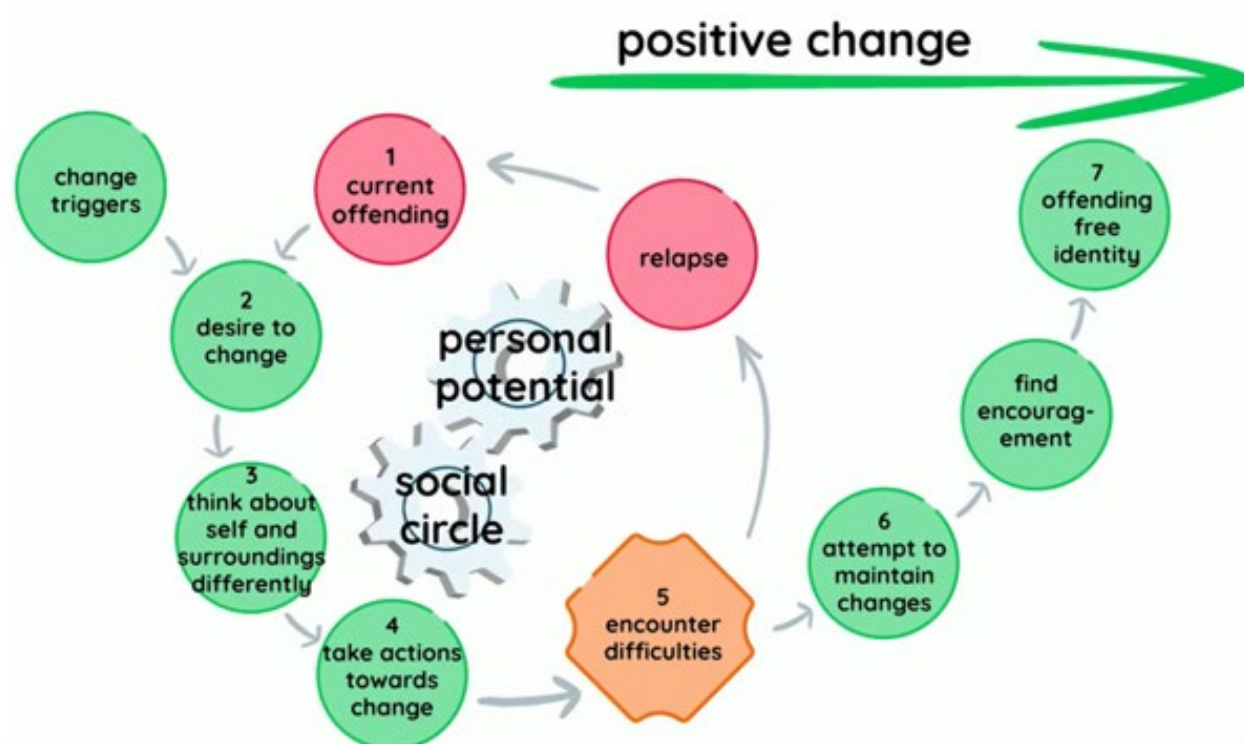
Interventions for people on probation vary widely in terms of their aims, eligibility, and content. Some interventions take the form of programmes addressing psychological or behavioural issues, aiming to change the thinking, attitudes and behaviours which may have led some people to offend (Ministry of Justice, 2022). Other interventions may involve referrals from probation to general community services which help to address offending-related needs such as substance misuse, employment, training and education (ETE), or accommodation.

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<sup>1</sup> During the preceding years of *Transforming Rehabilitation*, we examined the supply chains of interventions and services, finding that the supply had not been established at the scale anticipated and that voluntary and TSOs were playing not playing the central role envisaged (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2018).

Evidence-informed interventions can be seen as those which are guided by the best available research findings (incorporating a broad range of research methods) alongside practice knowledge and lived experiences, and which are underpinned by clear theories of change, assisting with further evaluation. Attention should be paid to established models and principles; for example, the [Risk, Needs, Responsivity \(RNR\)](#) model of rehabilitation (Bonta, 2023). The RNR model holds that an intervention should match the assessed likelihood of reoffending, target identified offending-related needs, and be tailored towards the individual's capacity, diversity, abilities, and strengths. Some interventions also pay close attention to the collaborative and relational practice principles emerging from [desistance theory](#) (Maruna and Mann, 2019); see, for example, the model in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: A model for desistance**

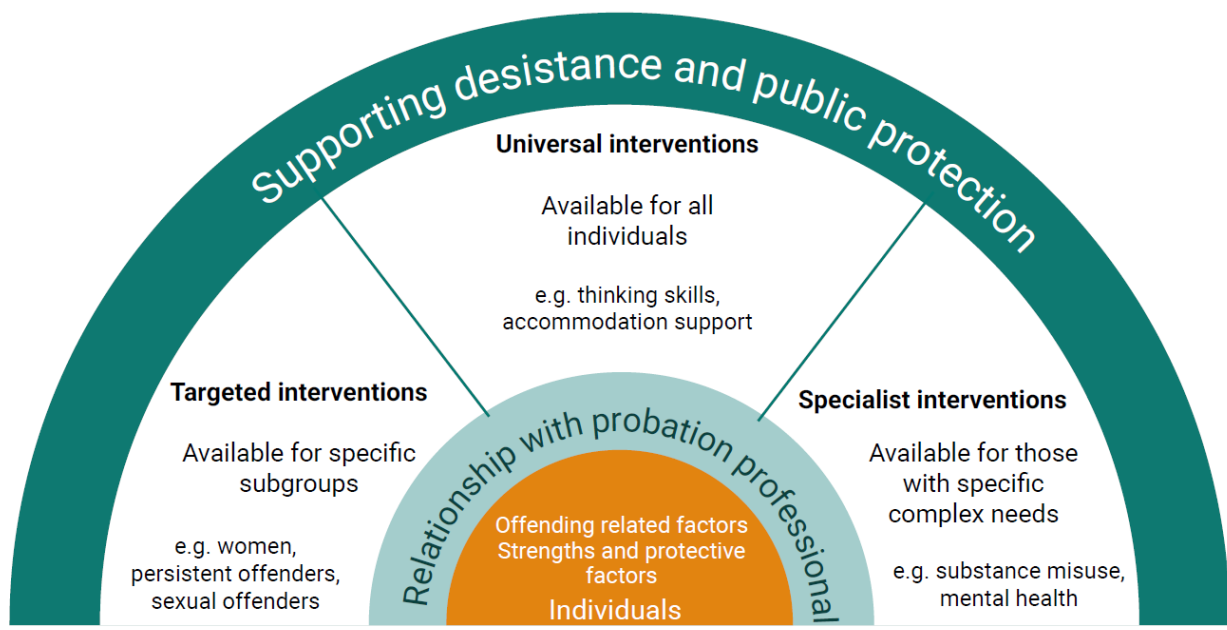


*Morris and Haider, 2023; adapted from Bottoms and Shapland, 2011*

### The mix of rehabilitative interventions

The Target Operating Model for the unified Probation Service (HM Prison and Probation Service, 2021) sets out the intention that 'all supervised individuals, irrespective of where they live, receive well-targeted, well-designed and well-delivered interventions in order to maximise their chances of leading crime free lives'. To meet this aim, there needs to be a strong mix of internal and external interventions, and of universal, targeted and specialist interventions (as illustrated in Figure 2) to meet the full range of individual needs. Sufficient flexibility and options are required to cater for those with often chaotic and unstable circumstances, and more vulnerable groups such as women, those with a disability, or those with mental health and/or addiction problems – specialist interventions providing highly personalised approaches for those with the most complex needs. The services should be easy to access and person-centred, with all efforts having been made to identify and remove barriers to access.

**Figure 2: The mix of interventions**

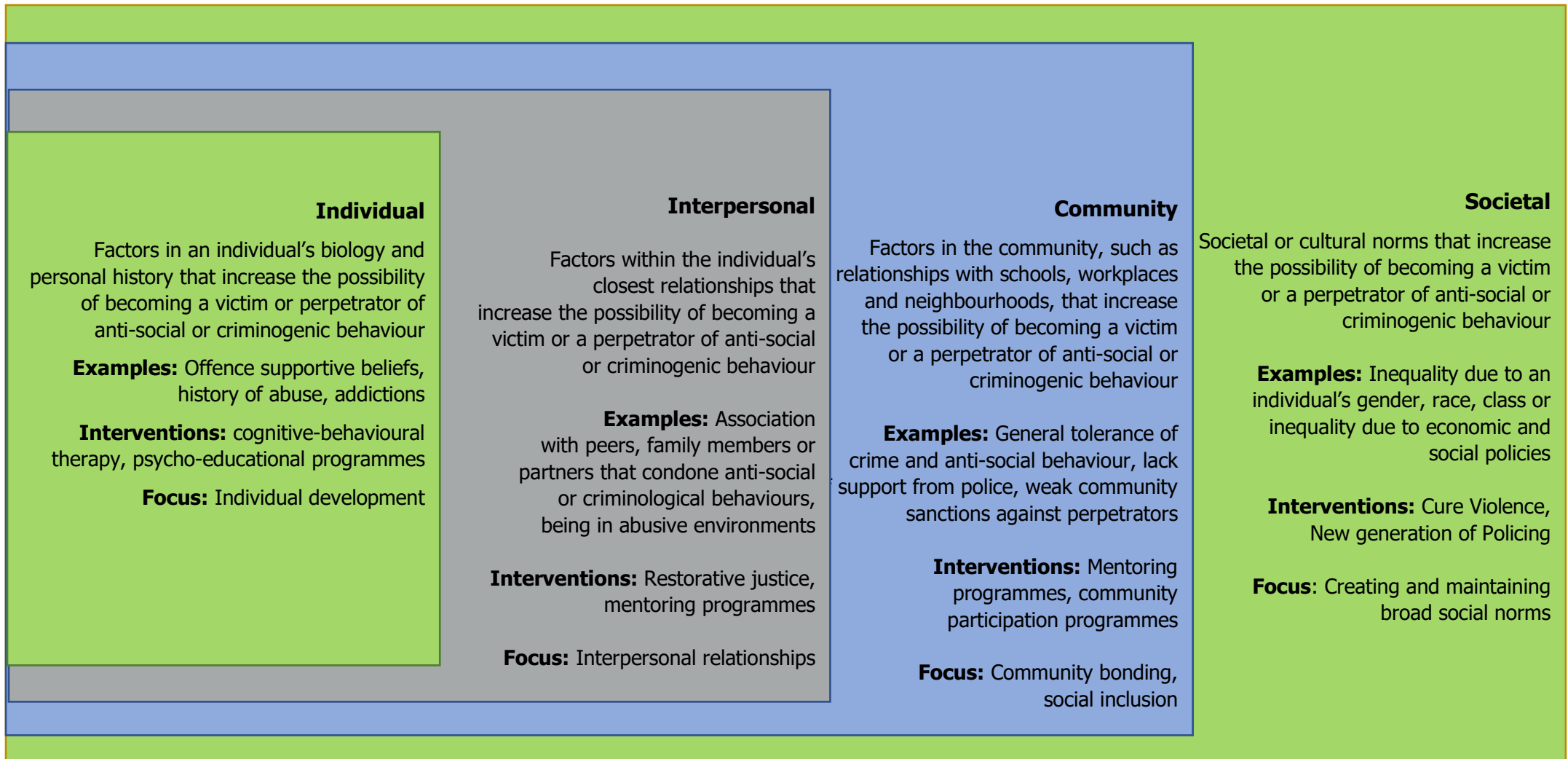


The research literature indicates that many needs and offending-related factors overlap and that desistance is more likely if interventions are integrated and combine holistically. A whole-person and whole-systems approach recognises the need for a range of different activities at the various levels of the social-ecological model – the individual, interpersonal, community, and societal levels – especially when rooted in a strengths-based, trauma-informed way that works with individual need (Kemshall and McCartan, 2022: see Figure 3). While these four levels exist independently of each other, it is important to recognise that they also combine in terms of impacts upon an individual. The impact is personal, which is why there is a need for different desistance pathways and harm reduction strategies. It can also be helpful to consider the four types of recovery capital – social, physical, human, and cultural capital – and whether the available interventions and services are delivering recovery capital in an equitable and responsive way.

There is further evidence highlighting the potential benefits from joint working at a local level, involving, for instance, the voluntary sector, health services, and local authorities. TSOs are an invaluable part of the rehabilitation landscape as they often meet the specific needs of diverse groups within local probation caseloads. TSOs often add especial value through deploying people with lived experience of the criminal justice system; such experience brings additional authenticity and empathy to work with those in conflict with the law. Situated outside of the state, the market, or the family arena, TSOs include charities, community groups, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trade unions, self-help, and advocacy groups.



**Figure 3: The four socio-ecological levels**



## The current landscape

The current probation interventions landscape includes the following delivery mechanisms which probation professionals can access to complement supervision and assist rehabilitation and resettlement:

- *Accredited programmes* often use cognitive-behavioural techniques and are accredited by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Rehabilitation Board, with advice provided by CSAAP – an independent international panel of experts – in line with criteria drawn from the principles of effective interventions.<sup>2</sup> An accredited programme requirement is available as a sentence requirement of a court order under the *Criminal Justice Act 2003* and falls under the statutory purposes of sentencing of reform and rehabilitation of offenders and the protection of the public. Accredited programmes can also be added as licence conditions. Practitioners identify all eligible and suitable cases at the pre-sentence or pre-release stage and then propose an accredited programme (where there are no barriers to participation).

HMPPS are currently developing the next generation of accredited programmes which are scheduled for national rollout in 2025. 'Building Choices' has been provisionally agreed as the name for the new programme which has been developed and approved for testing in three prisons and two probation regions. The ambition is that this programme will provide a streamlined, more coherent, and person-centred approach.

- *Structured interventions* are a suite of interventions to which probation practitioners can refer those posing a low likelihood of reoffending or who are otherwise unsuitable for an accredited programme. They are available for those who are sentenced to a community/suspended sentence order with a rehabilitation activity requirement (RAR)<sup>3</sup> and those subject to post-custody supervision. They can be delivered in a group setting or on a one-to-one basis, have a set format, and are a minimum of four sessions in length. They are approved for delivery via the HMPPS Effective Interventions Panel (EIP) and are assessed against seven core principles that were established by CSAAP.<sup>4</sup> The EIP is made up of experts from across HMPPS and its partners. EIP sessions involve a democratic scoring process, which results in recommendations and conclusions that are fed back to developers (Morris and Baverstock, 2021).
- The *approved suite of probation practitioner toolkits* are resource packages which take the form of booklets, with accompanying videos and written exercises. They are aimed at supporting change and are delivered one-to-one by probation practitioners, as a standalone activity and to complement other interventions. The toolkits address both needs and strengths. All the toolkits, and any future refinements or additions, are approved by the EIP. Toolkits can be delivered under the RAR or otherwise within scheduled appointments.

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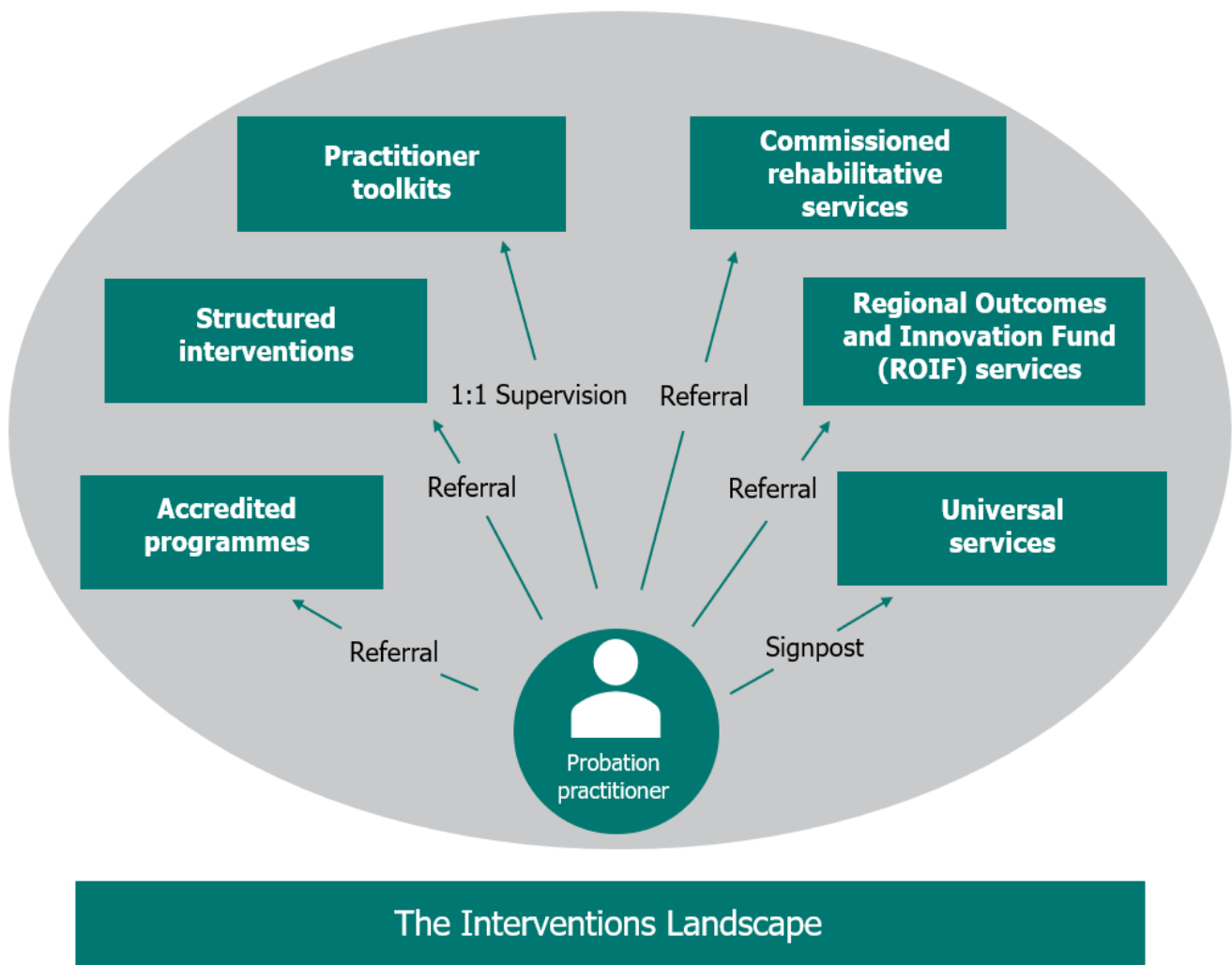
<sup>2</sup> For more information on CSAAP and programmes, see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/offending-behaviour-programmes-and-interventions>. And for a review of the origins and early work of CSAAP, see Maguire et al., 2010.

<sup>3</sup> 'The RAR is one of the requirements that can be included within a community order or suspended sentence order. The main purpose is to secure someone's rehabilitation, restoring service users to a purposeful life in which they do not reoffend.' <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-rehabilitation-activity-requirement-in-probation/rar-guidance>

<sup>4</sup> The principles are as follows: (i) alignment with an evidence base; (ii) a credible rationale for how, why and for whom the intervention will work; (iii) a structure that allows replication; (iv) a selection process that targets the intervention appropriately; (v) to equip people with useful skills and ensure that no one will be disadvantaged or harmed; (vi) quality assurance to ensure it is delivered as designed; and (vii) a commitment to research and evaluation.

- *Commissioned rehabilitative services* are available for those sentenced to a community sentence with a RAR, or for post-custody supervision. CRS are aimed at people whose needs cannot be addressed through the other interventions outlined above, and they can also be used to complement and reinforce other interventions where required. These services (e.g. accommodation support, ETE, personal wellbeing) are procured through the Probation Service's Dynamic Framework system, a web portal through which suppliers can register to bid for contracts or make grant applications. The MoJ announced in May 2021 that 26 organisations had been commissioned through competitive tender to provide interventions to people on probation (MoJ, 2021).
- The *Regional Outcomes and Innovation Fund (ROIF)* enables regions to grant fund further activities which can address service gaps and encourage engagement, desistance and rehabilitation, while also building knowledge of which activities work best. The probation Target Operating Model (HM Prison and Probation Service, 2021) set out the intention for the ROIF fund to 'ramp-up over a number of years. This will allow the regions to build the relationships and skills to make effective commissions and ensure that there are new investment opportunities in each of the ramp-up years'.

**Figure 4: The probation interventions landscape in summary**



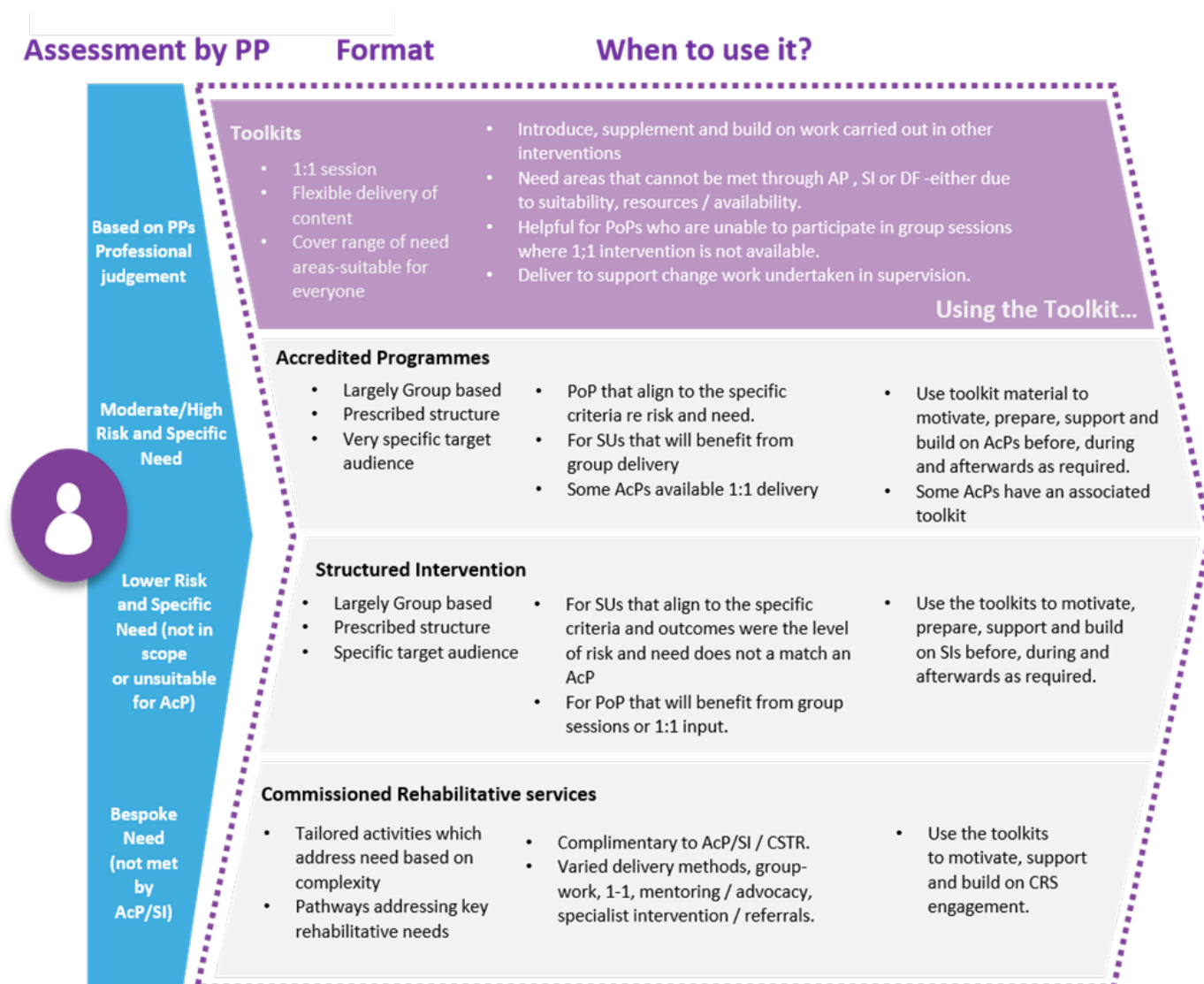
Alongside the interventions set out in Figure 4, *community sentence treatment requirements (CSTRs)* enable courts to sentence adults to a treatment requirement, as part of a community order or a suspended sentence order. CSTRs include drug rehabilitation requirements (DRRs), alcohol treatment requirements (ATRs) and primary/secondary care mental health treatment requirements (MHTRs). These requirements seek to provide recipients with the treatment they need to address the underlying causes of their offending behaviour, in the community, where they can also access alternative support. The individual must consent, and the CSTR provider agency is required to conduct an assessment and agree to arrange for treatment.

The *Creating Future Opportunities (CFO) activity hubs* are also worthy of note, providing a safe space for people on probation to learn skills for employment and how to live a pro-social life. Formerly known as the Co-Financing Organisation, the funding to date has been through the European Union; after this ends in 2024, funding will be provided through the UK Government. CFO activity hubs are physical spaces akin to youth clubs offering arts, sports and leisure facilities in a relaxed and welcoming environment. CFO aims to increase employability, encourage positive social interaction, and develop life skills such as cooking skills, budgeting, and healthy living. There are activity hubs in sixteen community locations, with an additional five satellite locations, and one Armed Forces veteran hub at HMP Holme House. Where hubs exist, probation practitioners can refer those on prison licences or community sentences for participation. CFO provision is not intended to duplicate or replicate mainstream activity and CFO appointments are not enforceable.

While *women's centres* take differing forms, they are also commonly multi-agency hubs. Importantly these centres are not solely criminal justice agencies and can be involved in the lives of the women that attend them beyond the bounds of the criminal justice system, offering: (i) a preventative measure to help women resolve situations that might lead to offending; and (ii) a follow-up service, maintaining contact after women have finished their terms on probation.

There are thus a range of options available to probation practitioners, and, in each individual case, they must decide which interventions and services could be most beneficial for the person on probation. As set out in Figure 5, consideration is given to the RNR principles (HMPPS Interventions Services, 2021).

**Figure 5: Pathways to probation interventions and services**



## 2. Findings

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The findings presented in this bulletin are based upon an analysis of several sources (see Annex A for further detail):

- aggregated case assessment data from probation inspections (1,550 cases), and the accompanying case commentaries from inspectors
- interviews (n=19) with those who provide probation interventions within the Probation Service and from TSOs, senior leaders in HMPPS and MoJ, and leading academics who have participated in CSAAP
- a survey (n=234) of probation professionals on their experiences working in the new probation interventions landscape.

We report findings thematically, examining:

- how delivering interventions makes a difference to those on probation
- what is working well and not so well in the current system
- what those working in probation hope for in the future, and how we might get there.

### 2.1 Probation interventions make a positive difference

Our analysis of matched inspection and outcomes data (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2023a) indicates that when probation professionals make appropriate and timely referrals to planned interventions and services, and when they are delivered well, people on probation are more likely to complete their time on probation,<sup>5</sup> show more progress in relation to offending-related needs, and are less likely to reoffend.

Research studies indicate that desistance from crime is more likely where the delivery of services and interventions is consistent and integrated, with sufficient continuity and consolidation of learning. Interventions should combine holistically to address individual risks and needs and build upon strengths. Sufficient emphasis should be placed on helping the individual overcome practical obstacles to desistance. Sequencing and alignment are also important to ensure that the most immediate needs are addressed first; only after some stability has been established can work be effectively undertaken on additional needs.

In line with the research literature, there are a number of prompts which inspectors considered in each of the cases inspected, including whether:

- the delivered services were those most likely to support desistance, with sufficient attention given to sequencing and the available timescales
- the delivery of services built upon the individual's strengths and enhanced protective factors
- the involvement of other organisations in the delivery of services was sufficiently well coordinated

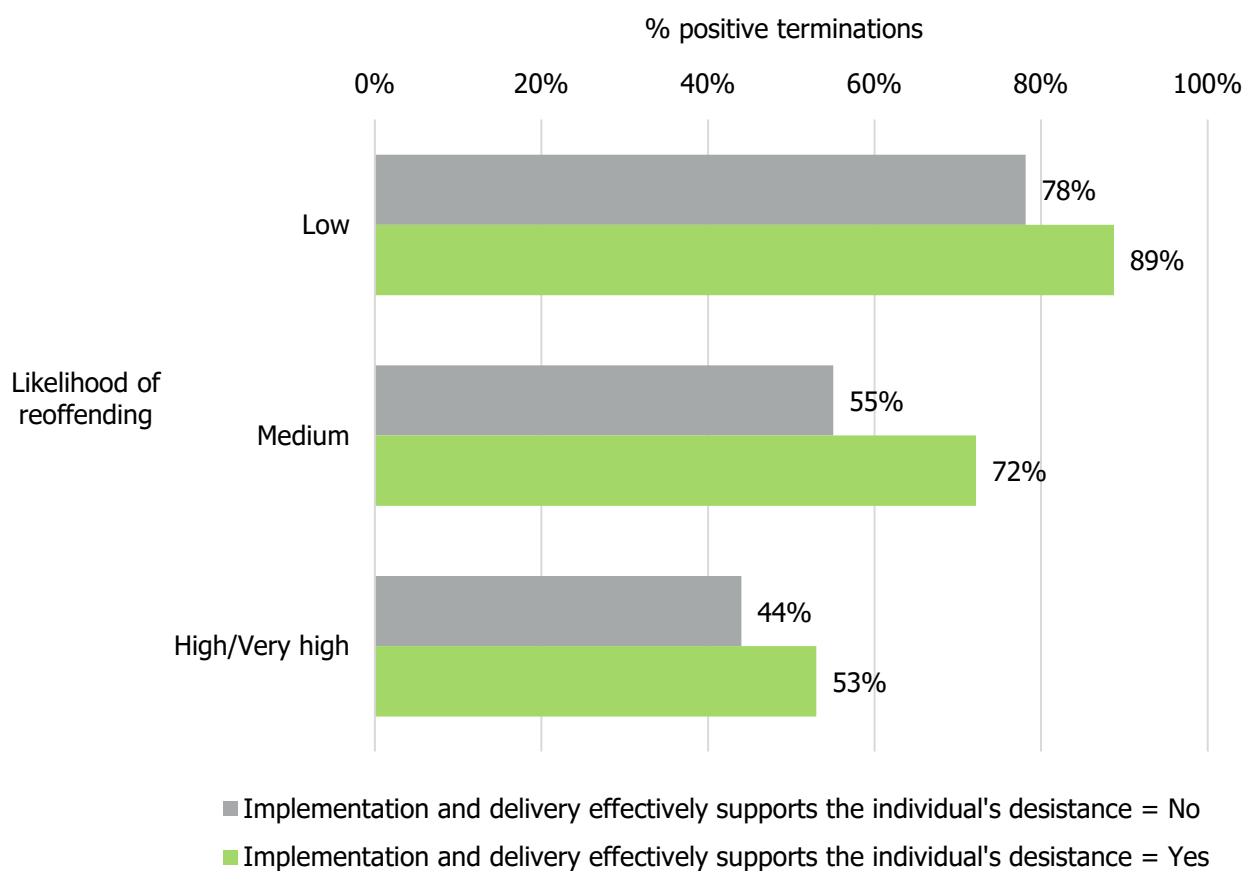
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<sup>5</sup> 'Positive terminations' are where the order or licence runs its full course or where it is ended early by a probation professional to recognise good progress.

- local services were engaged to support and sustain desistance during the sentence and beyond.

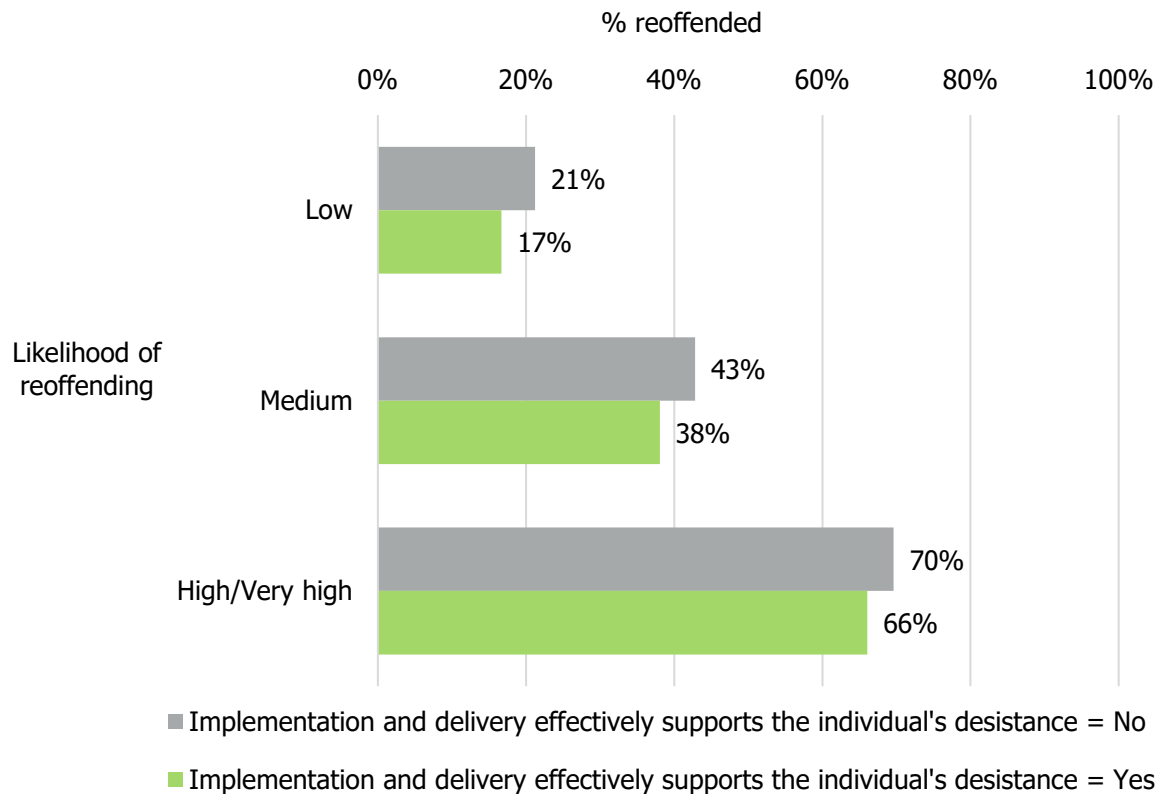
Having considered all the prompts,<sup>6</sup> inspectors then made a yes/no judgement as to whether implementation and delivery effectively supported the individual's desistance. As indicated by Figures 6, 7 and 8, in those cases where inspectors made a positive judgement regarding the quality of this delivery, the later output/outcome measures were significantly more likely to be positive, with clear differences across the assessed likelihood of reoffending levels. Across all matched cases, the sentence completion rate increased from 63 per cent where the delivery was not deemed to be effective to 78 per cent in those cases where it was deemed effective, while the binary reoffending rate fell from 43 per cent to 35 per cent.

**Figure 6: Positive terminations by effective support of the individual's desistance (and likelihood of reoffending level)**

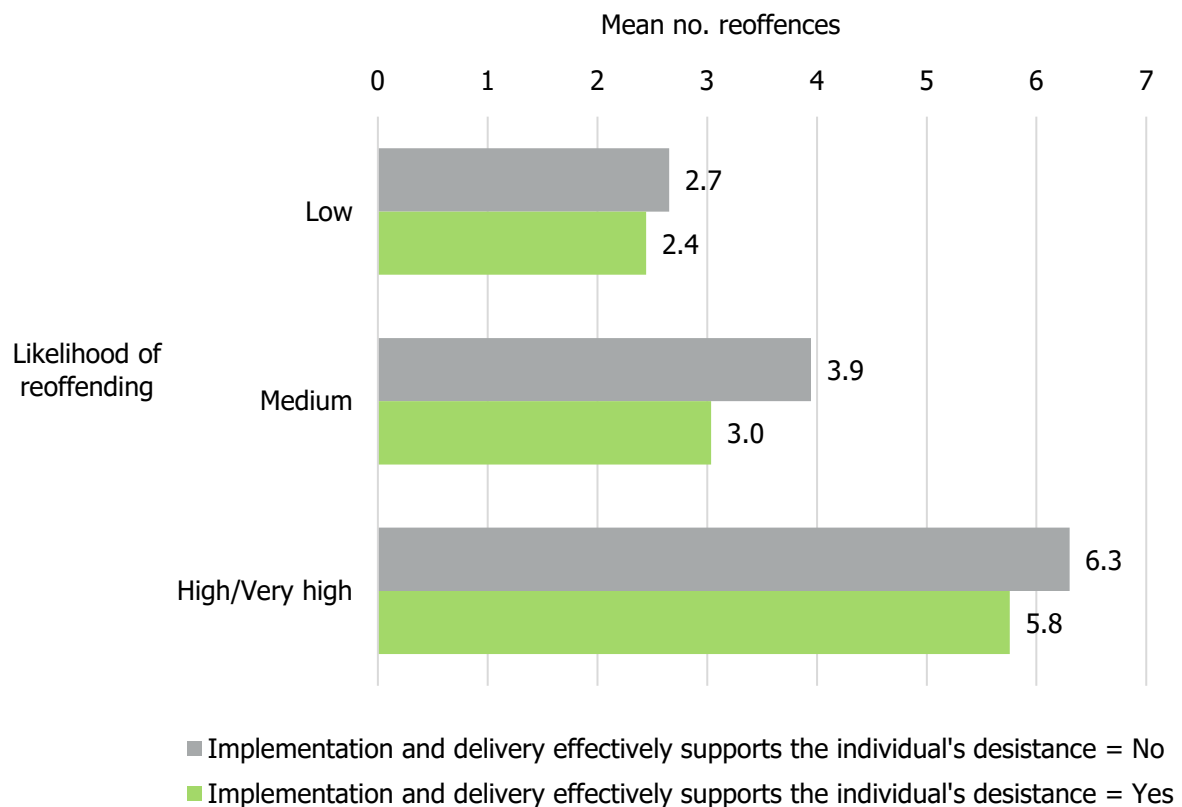


<sup>6</sup> Following an examination of the relevant records and an interview with the relevant probation practitioner.

**Figure 7: Binary reoffending by effective support of the individual's desistance (and likelihood of reoffending level)**



**Figure 8: Frequency of reoffending by effective support of the individual's desistance (and likelihood of reoffending level)**





Wider research supports the use of various interventions for people on probation, especially those based upon cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT).<sup>7</sup> In an analysis of 58 high-quality evaluations in criminal justice settings, Lipsey et al. (2007) found that well-delivered CBT interventions could halve the expected reoffending of participants. CBT can be delivered, preferably by specially trained facilitators, in one-to-one or group settings. The aim of such programmes is to develop reasoning skills and counter the cognitive distortions which contribute to anti-social attitudes and behaviours, that may have their roots in certain community, family, or peer settings. Most probation groupwork programmes are based upon CBT principles, forming the core offer of accredited programmes and structured interventions, and the key concepts from CBT are drawn upon for the approved suite of practitioner toolkits.

Beyond such cognitive-behavioural approaches, there is good evidence that the more practical and supportive interventions which are commonly deployed in probation services are also impactful in reducing reoffending and supporting community reintegration. An MoJ review (2014) concluded that there was promising evidence for probation interventions in the key areas of drug and alcohol recovery, housing support, and employability and work skills enhancement. More recently, Fox et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis which reported that interventions addressing the ETE needs for people on probation achieved a six-percentage point reduction in reoffending for participants compared to those who did not take part in a programme. More generally, the developing body of desistance research highlights that interventions which only address individual needs without mobilising wider social and community networks are unlikely to succeed (Burke et al., 2022, p.12). Access to interventions around housing support, ETE, personal wellbeing, and women's services is provided through CRS.

Several of our research interviewees with current or previous CSAAP experience noted that thinking around probation interventions in the early 2000s, the 'What Works' era, was dominated by the cognitive-behavioural perspective. CSAAP participants noted that while there is still a focus on CBT, a wider diversity of evidence is now accepted, including insights from desistance research regarding the need for addressing social realities in rehabilitation (see [Academic Insights paper 2019/01](#) by Maruna and Mann for an overview of the value of the differing types of research). As one CSAAP participant commented:

*"... maybe we could do a whole lot better if we dropped the focus upon cognition and focused upon the whole person" (CSAAP member).*

However, another CSAAP participant, while agreeing with the need for understanding and addressing the whole context of individuals being supervised, stressed that:

*"... supposed frictions between RNR and desistance ... are the same thing really, couched in different language. And similarly with the biopsychosocial model. The programmes emerging are providing similar tools and processes once translated into everyday practitioner language. Desistance has been around for some time; identity is just one element of desistance. Desistance theory is simply a change of emphasis, it is not in competition with RNR." (CSAAP member)*

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<sup>7</sup> The Royal Society of Psychiatrists provide a useful summary of CBT: [https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/treatments-and-wellbeing/cognitive-behavioural-therapy-\(cbt\)](https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/treatments-and-wellbeing/cognitive-behavioural-therapy-(cbt))

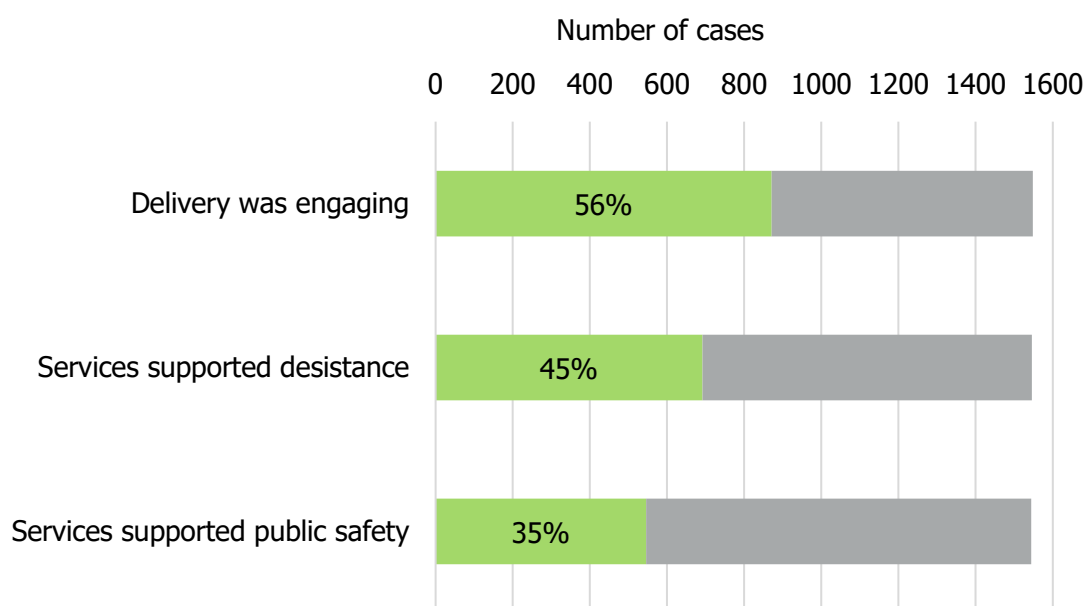
## 2.2 What is working and not working?

One of our interview participants – with a role in the strategic commissioning of probation interventions – commented that there has “never been a wider range of interventions available for people on probation in England and Wales”. An interviewee from a regional team agreed:

*"We currently have the best set of universal core services for people on probation that we have ever had." (Regional Head of Community Interventions)*

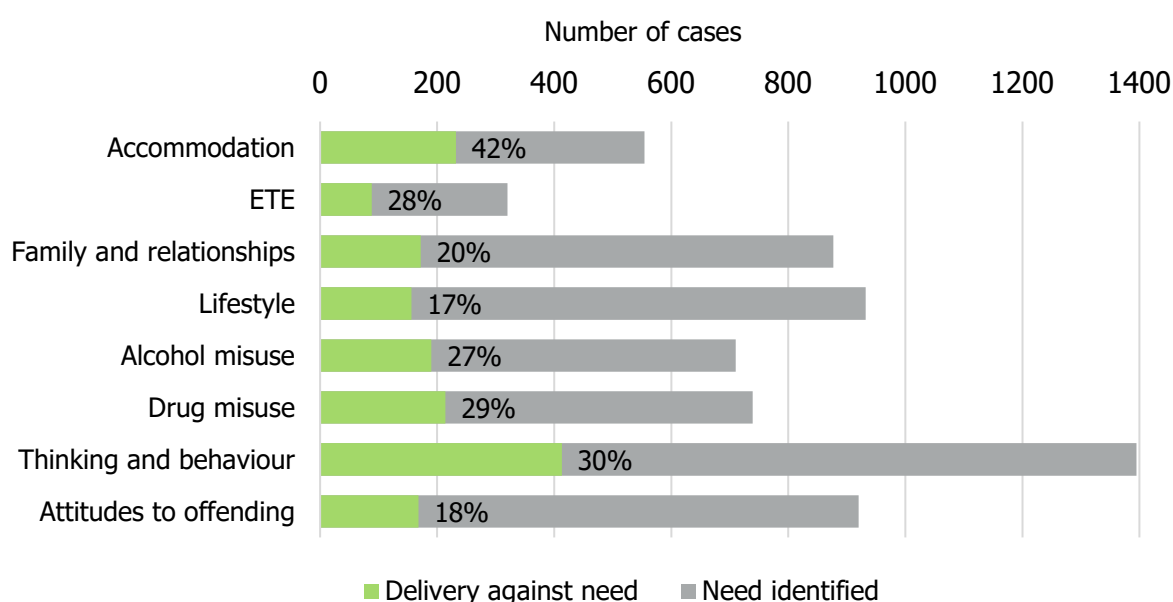
However, different actors, at various levels, in the probation system reported difficulties with the design and operation of interventions, with some significant barriers to probation practitioners accessing the different elements of the interventions landscape to help people on probation. Our inspections of probation in 2022/2023 revealed substantial problems in multiple areas (Russell, 2023). This was true in terms of the delivery of interventions and services, where inspectors found that in many cases there was insufficient quality of work to secure the required level of engagement, desistance, and public safety (as exemplified in Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Implementation and delivery key questions – percentage of cases assessed as positive**



Our inspectors judged that the delivered services were those most likely to reduce reoffending and support desistance (with sufficient attention given to sequencing and the available timescales) in less than half (45 per cent) of the inspected cases. Looking at delivery against specific needs (rather than delivery in the round), the levels of sufficiency ranged from 17 per cent for lifestyle to 42 per cent for accommodation (see Figure 10). Thinking and behaviour was by far the most frequently identified need, and delivery was deemed sufficient in less than a third (30 per cent) of those cases where this need had been identified.

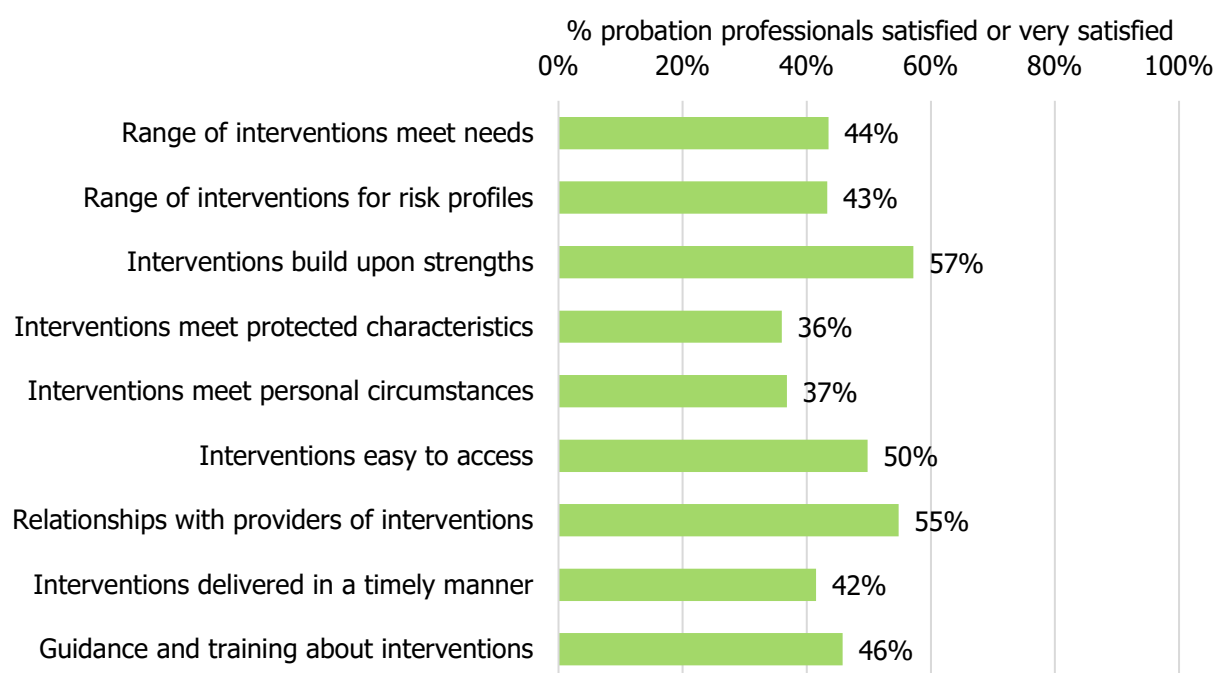
**Figure 10: Sufficiency of delivery against identified needs**



### 2.2.1 Staff experiences of the interventions landscape

At the practitioner level, our survey of probation professionals (n=234) conducted between March and June 2023 found that less than half were satisfied with the current range of interventions available. Only half were satisfied with the ease of access to interventions and just over half with the quality of their relationships with the providers. As illustrated in Figure 11, positive response rates of less than half were evident across a range of questions. It was notable that the lowest levels of satisfaction were with the ability of interventions to meet the diversity of people on probation.

**Figure 11: Probation professional views on the interventions landscape**



We asked probation professionals to describe their experience with the current interventions' framework. As the comments below illustrate, many found that **commissioned rehabilitative services** were not sufficiently responsive to referrals or how well the individual was engaging. The accommodation offer was especially criticised by probation professionals; many stated it was more efficient to make referrals to housing providers directly.

*"CRS interventions not up to standard – people on probation are referred and then not contacted, appointments are arranged and not kept or only arranged a few minutes before and then marked as 'not attended' when phone is not answered. Too much reliance on telephone contact and not enough face-to-face contact. Accommodation CRS particularly poor in my region and there is no one based locally. Services do not achieve goals and instruct us to cancel referrals which feels like they are covering up the fact that they have not made contact." (Probation professional)*

*"CRS accommodation service is non-existent and probably the most important. Even when they are contacted with urgent cases, they still don't allocate them. I had cases that I closed after seven months due to a non-contact with person on probation. I also found that women's services don't explore what people on probation might need and the referral is closed. I always explain to my people on probation why I am referring them. The feedback I have, is that somebody called them, asked them what they need and when they were unsure, they are told to speak to their offender manager and a new referral can be submitted in the future if needed." (Probation professional)*

*"CRS is for the most times useless and just a formality, and as practitioners we end up chasing CRS staff and directing them to do things, or ending up doing it ourselves anyway. This is in particular accommodation CRS. Personal wellbeing provision has been positive although can't cater for complex issues that require more than simple brief interventions." (Probation professional)*

*"CRS – housing – I have never had anyone housed yet, often end up doing referrals/ liaison with council myself." (Probation professional)*

*"CRS: difficult to see added value of someone completing a housing form when resettlement staff identify and are clearly capable of doing this. Housing providers need to do more; for example, building trust with local landlords. Wellbeing, yet to see a quality piece of work, although referrals appear to be actioned!?" (Probation professional)*

A regional leader told us that they had improved their accommodation offer by aligning it with other CRS strands to help prevent people on probation losing tenancies due to antisocial behaviour that could be offset by improving social skills and functioning. As the regional director explained:

*"We have very positive relationships with providers, for example, joint assessment of CAS3 problems revealed that antisocial behaviour was losing service user tenancies. We now align CAS3 with personal wellbeing and recovery work as mental health and substance misuse lay behind most failed tenancies. Collaborative problem-solving is key." (Regional probation director)*

**Structured interventions** were also criticised by practitioners for not always being relevant to the needs of the local caseload and for being overly simplistic, unclear on their aims, and too restrictive in terms of their joining criteria. Many respondents were concerned

that practitioners did not have the required training to deliver structured interventions successfully.

*"The new structured interventions are totally inadequate, very poor quality despite being given an overhaul. They rely on the experience of the facilitators, but some facilitators are very new to the service. People on probation are also complaining to us about the quality of the service offered by CRS in our area."* (Probation professional)

*"Having delivered a structured intervention myself, I would say that the quality of the content is poor. The manuals are not put together well – the exercises are not effective in practice and use of visuals feel meaningless and patronising."* (Probation professional)

*"From my experience, I can say that it is urgent to make significant changes in certain manuals, especially for Stepwise Relationships [structured intervention]. This manual aggregates all ideas from BBR in ten sessions of 1 hour and 30 minutes. Anyone delivering and following that manual understands how "daft" it is. It is not possible to explore all topics."* (Probation professional)

*"Structured interventions – I'm not as confident in these as it will depend on numbers needing to be on them and for the programme team to run them and this will cause delays in the sentence. This will also likely increase pressure on practitioners to try and do the interventions themselves with no training."* (Probation professional)

*"Referrals for structured interventions need to improve. The structured interventions make the assumption that people are prolific offenders. Especially in the Relationships intervention and this is not the case with some of the people who have them as RAR's. The video clips for structured interventions need to be more generic and the voices need to be more neutral. As in some regions the guys on the intervention struggle to understand what is being said."* (Probation professional)

Probation professionals were positive overall about **accredited programmes**. Some practitioners were concerned about waiting lists for accredited programmes – also reported by our inspectors in cases that we have examined across recent inspections – and about continuity of service through the prison gate. There was clearly scope for improved communication between programme delivery teams and practitioners in terms of waiting lists and realistic start dates.

*"Accredited programmes work well and are provided in a timely manner, facilities to deliver the range of interventions could be better (ability to use two rooms at the same time)."* (Probation professional)

*"Accredited [programmes] – these are ok – although massive delays that are not being addressed – staff should have been increased in this area and diverted from case management as necessary."* (Probation professional)

*"Accredited programmes are great aside from the accessibility."* (Probation professional)

*"Accredited programmes seem to have long waiting lists and aren't suitable for people who are in full-time employment which means impacting on a protective factor in their lives"* (Probation professional)

The use of accredited programmes has waned in recent years. MoJ statistics reveal that in 2016, 5.3 per cent of people on probation were registered on an accredited programme. In 2022, this had declined to 4.5 per cent. Our 2019 annual report (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2019b) noted that there were 56 per cent fewer people on probation benefitting from accredited programmes in 2017 compared to 2009. The use of RARs has, in many cases, been preferred to accredited programmes as their criteria are more easily met. The decline in programme usage is also due in part to the policy of preferring speedier oral or short format pre-sentence reports; more comprehensive court reports would be more likely to reveal the need for an accredited programme.

CSAAP participants did not see accredited programmes as beyond critique, feeling that, since their inception, there had been too few stringent outcome evaluations. It was also felt that the historic dominance of CBT had led to an overly individualistic approach. In contrast, in the aligned field of drug and alcohol misuse, the recovery model stresses the importance of social connection and community engagement as stronger predictors of success (Best, 2019).

HMPPS are currently developing the next generation of accredited programmes, which are expected to be fewer in number and broader in design to meet general offending-related needs. While recognising the drive for a streamlined, person-centred approach, some CSAAP participants stated that there is a risk that there may be too few interventions on offer across the interventions landscape to meet the diverse range of needs and specific risks presented by people on probation. One CSAAP participant considered that the rollout of the next generation programmes could be an opportune moment to consider the key areas of focus for CSAAP moving forward, particularly the potential for increased advice in relation to approving/accrediting other aspects of probation work, such as supervision skills and briefer interventions.

Probation professionals were sceptical of the value of the **approved suite of probation practitioner toolkits**. A major barrier for practitioners was having the time to familiarise themselves with toolkit content, and the time to deliver them with the person on probation. Many practitioners wanted training on how to use the toolkits in their work.

*"I don't have time to deliver the toolkits. Our sex offender teams have been helping us out but are being told they can't anymore as they will be replaced with new band 3 staff." (Probation professional)*

*"Toolkits when understaffed is additional work when already 156 per cent on WMT [workload management tool]. Toolkits being used because accredited programmes are not facilitated." (Probation professional)*

*"Toolkits: Training should be given on how to deliver them as they are not always the easiest to understand in what order things flow." (Probation professional)*

*"Toolkits – we have had one input. I still don't feel confident in using them and do not have the time to effectively read through and plan which parts to use in appointments. Some I have looked at is like primary school tasks and I feel these are almost embarrassing to try and use." (Probation professional)*

*"The toolkits are very prescriptive. There is not enough scope to mix and match sessions to meet an individuals need. It also takes away some professional judgement from the practitioner and encourages them to*

*pigeonhole people into a toolkit rather than choosing a range of sessions with the needs of the individual in mind.” (Probation professional)*

An interviewee from HMPPS understood these concerns, but argued that the toolkits were fundamentally misunderstood by many practitioners. The toolkits had been designed as a complement to one-to-one supervision, and needed to be used in a flexible fashion using the parts of the material as appropriate to the individual and their context. The resources were not intended to be used in their entirety in a single session; only relevant parts should be used to promote discussion, reflection, and a stronger relationship. The HMPPS interviewee was keen to address these misunderstandings, but noted that they may stem from the still inexperienced cohort of probation professionals who need the time and space to develop confidence and expertise. Many senior level interviewees, in the centre and in the regions, echoed these concerns about the current staff profile of probation; the new cohort not having had sufficient time for learning and development, nor enough mature mentors to help them gain skills and proficiency in relationship building. One regional interviewee had found that ‘roadshows’ to introduce the toolkits had been useful, but specific training was required in how to use them in practice. Such training was on ‘on the horizon’ according to a senior HMPPS official.

## **2.2.2 Delivering rehabilitation in the new interventions landscape**

Interventions providers told us that they faced several problems providing services to people on probation. At the operational level, the ‘Refer and Monitor’ system was singled out as the main barrier to communicating with probation staff. An operational interviewee explained the issues:

*“Refer and Monitor is onerous and is having a negative impact. It often duplicates existing systems held by the third sector groups in use when they work with other agencies. There is also a duplication in monitoring and management of contracts, with the same CRS provider often providing the same service to several other agencies and having a different reporting, referral, case work and monitoring arrangement with each.” (Regional manager)*

A TSO explained how having a separate system for interventions management could have serious consequences for staff safety.

*“We don’t have access to nDelius,<sup>8</sup>[probation] use R&M (Refer and Monitor) instead. But there is information that doesn’t move between the two systems, like case notes and session feedback. This means that probation officers must move between multiple systems. Because we don’t have access to nDelius, we often only get a summary of the risk assessment, often just some bullet points. This can mean that information is lost that might be important. In one case a service user with a historic sex offence was referred without this risk information being shared with us, and he then followed the facilitator home. While this case was successfully resolved, this information was important in this case and could have been very dangerous.” (Third Sector provider)*

The Refer and Monitor system could also be a disincentive to probation professionals. A regional leader explained the cumbersome process: first the practitioner identifies the initial

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<sup>8</sup> National Delius is the main case management ICT system for the Probation Service.

need(s) and makes the referral, but often the provider will discover more needs, and has to refer the case back to the practitioner who must make a new referral. The process is repeated if more needs are uncovered in the appointments. In contrast, during the *Transforming Rehabilitation* era, providers could access probation case management systems directly to make and amend referrals. A regional director commented:

*"It's just the bloody processes are overcomplicated, the work we do is very good"* (Regional Probation Director)

Another regional leader noted that the CRS referral process had improved since introduction, for example, there were simpler templates to use to make referrals. Increased co-location of CRS staff had also improved practitioner knowledge of interventions and how to make an effective referral.

At the strategic level, the commissioning process was described as unfair for small to medium TSOs. Smaller organisations struggled to complete the complex processes required for registration on the Dynamic Purchasing System web-portal. The procurement rules required adherence to levels of financial stability and insurance provision which smaller organisations can struggle to meet without additional support.

Services for ethnic minority people on probation were supposed to be a day one contract (for the newly unified Probation Service) along with services for women through the CRS. Difficulties in provision through this route led to this element being changed to ROIF grant funding, controlled by regional probation directors. However, the grant funding was postponed during the pause on spending prompted by the HM Treasury Efficiency and Savings Review announced in November 2022. The funding pause meant that there was no funding for specialist services for the needs of ethnic minority people on probation.

Regional probation directors were frustrated that there had been insufficient consultation with local areas about the post-unification provision of interventions. The unification process was undertaken by HQ at too fast a pace for meaningful analysis and discussion of local needs. As such, many of the interventions, in particular the CRS personal wellbeing provision, were not seen as relevant, or were not a priority, to some local caseloads.

*"We would like to tweak the core offer, for example, CRS contracts, but these were written nationally, and at pace, during unification. I own the contracts, but I didn't write them. Try to tweak a contract mid-contract and Computer Says No!"* (Regional Probation Director)

The funding has now restarted and 'Innovation Grants' are funding thirteen new projects around the themes of families and relationships, improving mental health and wellbeing, improving safety, and protected characteristics for those leaving prison. In one region, a 'Dragon's Den' style event was undertaken with operational staff 'pitching' spending suggestions of up to £50,000 of ROIF monies to plug gaps in service provision in their localities. This innovative consultation technique revealed that mental health services were the priority for probation professionals. The regional leadership used this evidence to begin a co-commissioning exercise with the NHS and Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), initially for the Integrated Offender Management (IOM)<sup>9</sup> cohort. However, the threshold to access NHS mental health services is often too high. NHS mental health services are *de*

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<sup>9</sup> IOM was set up to facilitate teamworking by police, probation, and other agencies to deliver a local response to persistent and problematic offending.



*facto* reserved for the most critical cases, whereas the regional caseload often consisted of low to medium level needs around anxiety and depression. At present, these needs are not being met through any public service.

For regional leaders, a significant gap in interventions provision was access to stable housing for people on probation. The CRS accommodation provision was seen as an inadequate referral-only service which did not reliably secure housing for people in need. However, Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS3)<sup>10</sup> – the temporary housing service for some people leaving prison or probation hostels – was seen as a great success and regional leaders wanted to see a similar resource for community cases.

Using ROIF grants, one region funded 'Housing Navigators' located in their local authorities. The navigators could not get priority access for people on probation, but the liaison workers did ensure that clients had their housing rights met and their options explained to them in accessible language. The regional leadership believed that these housing workers were making a big difference to individuals in need.

A concern for regional leaders was the inexperience of a large proportion of the current cohort of probation practitioners, including some newly appointed senior probation officers with relatively little time in probation practice. Widespread staff shortages were exacerbating the issues in relation to inexperience, with existing staff having little time to mentor and train new starters. Practitioners and managers were retreating into basic risk management and enforcement work; the positive and rehabilitative mission of probation was being left behind as staff lacked the confidence, experience, and time to build meaningful relationships with those they supervised. As such, many potentially useful interventions across all elements of the landscape were under-utilised.

*"Practitioners are distracted by a lot of nonsense. Even if we could free up the time, the cohort is inexperienced for this work and the experienced cohort needs refresher training. New staff do not emerge from PQiP<sup>11</sup> ready to practice, we never did in fairness. But less so than ever. Toolkits cannot make up for experience. The managers are inexperienced too." (Regional Head of Community Interventions)*

A regional director expressed concern that new practitioners had become wedded to a focus upon public protection because of fears of serious further offences. The recent joiners lacked the time and space to build their understanding of how interventions could play a major role in reducing risk of harm through facilitating positive change in individuals and their social lives.

*"There are two buckets to hold – desistance and public protection – we have to manage them both. The best way to manage risk is rehabilitation" (Regional Probation Director)*

Senior leaders in central HMPPS units understood the issues of understaffing, inexperience, and the need to create more time for staff development. There was an acceptance that the

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<sup>10</sup> CAS3 provides temporary accommodation for up to 84 nights for homeless prison leavers and those moving on from Approved Premises (CAS1) or the Bail Accommodation and Support Service (CAS2), and assistance to help them move into settled accommodation.

<sup>11</sup> The Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) is the route to becoming a qualified probation officer in England and Wales <https://prisonandprobationjobs.gov.uk/roles-at-hmpps/overview-of-the-probation-officer-role/probation-officer-training-pqip/>

unification process had been fast paced, and that this had been difficult for operational staff. There was also a recognition that a focus upon rehabilitation needed to return as a central philosophy in probation. As one HMPPS strategic leader put it:

*"... the rehabilitation strategy is setting the tone for HMPPS in terms of talking about rehabilitation as a sort of central purpose. It's allowing colleagues to start speaking that language again through a period ... where that perhaps wasn't so easy to do. Public protection will be very central for some practitioners; risk management if you were an NPS probation practitioner. So, there is something about the landscape and balancing up ... we know some colleagues just aren't confident delivering change work in the room with somebody whereas others have done it forever and they are experts. We have got to find a way of providing accessible resources in new ways." (HMPPS HQ leader)*

There was concern in the centre of HMPPS that many practitioners lacked relational skills due to their inexperience with working with people in conflict with the law. Developing meaningful relationships with people with probation was viewed as more important to desistance and rehabilitation than the range of interventions on offer. One senior HQ leader – who had long experience of frontline probation work – thought that the relational core of probation could possibly benefit from a narrower interventions offer:

*"We are trying to strip back the offer of interventions. That's a bit counterintuitive for colleagues who think they need more things because rehabilitation is complicated. Actually, we are countering that. We are saying you should have some very basic core practices that when you think about it, like, building rapport, building a therapeutic alliance, you know, building trust and we can have hundreds of products. But actually, its relational it's the value of that relationship that is core." (HMPPS HQ leader)*

Widening the point to the culture of the new Probation Service, this strategic leader argued that:

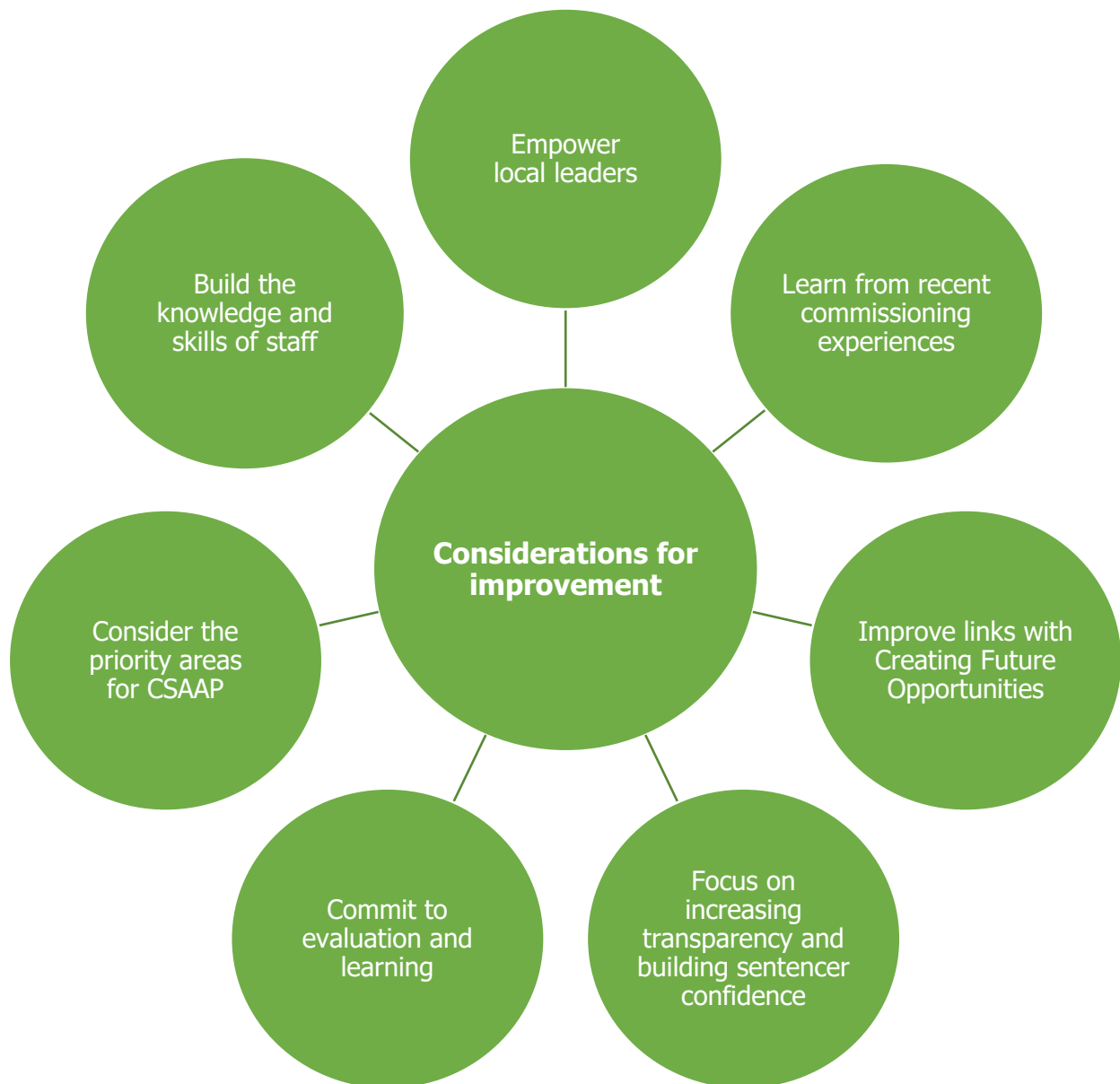
*"... rehabilitation is not just about the products we might deliver to a group or a toolkit. It's about all our interactions, how that probation practitioner grows that relationship with someone. We have an ambition to have a much more rehabilitative purpose of the organisation and being much bolder about that in the future. There is a culture problem, I think, and seriously so in custody. But also in probation because we are bringing together staff that come with all sort of histories. Whatever their organisation was in recent years, and the agenda that was there, that has been a really challenging time for probation, that sort of transition of being split then coming back." (HMPPS HQ leader)*

There is agreement at the middle manager level that developing the supervision skills and confidence of practitioners is the priority for probation. Our research on frontline leadership found that senior probation officers were struggling to encourage their teams to prioritise desistance work alongside risk management (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2024); understaffing and high caseloads had undermined the ability of probation team leaders to coach new practitioners and develop a rehabilitative culture.

## 2.3 Challenges and opportunities for the future

The probation interventions landscape is undergoing a reform and recommissioning process at the time of writing. The current CRS contracts will be renewed in 2024/2025, while accredited programmes are being refreshed and refined for a relaunch in 2025. As such, this is an opportune moment to reflect upon the interventions offer across probation, and consider areas for improvement.

There are no magic bullets which will solve the challenges of contemporary criminal justice. However, our research has identified ideas, innovations, and good practice which could aid policymakers in terms of improving and developing the system of interventions, supporting delivery which is aligned to the evidence and which is personalised, holistic, integrated, flexible, responsive and inclusive.



### 2.3.1 Empower local leaders

Empowering local probation leaders to engage with local services and communities and match the interventions offer to the needs of the local probation caseload is vital. As recently stated by the Justice and Home Affairs Committee (2023), 'when services are provided locally, various agencies can cooperate effectively. The co-location and co-commissioning of services are the gold standard'. Consequently, the Committee concluded that the Probation Service should 'empower regional directors further, ensuring that a greater proportion of rehabilitative services are commissioned locally. They should be granted further autonomy to develop partnerships with local organisations and public agencies. Co-commissioning should be encouraged.'

The probation Target Operating Model (HM Prison and Probation Service, 2021) set out the intention for ROIF funding to 'ramp-up' over time, and there are recent examples of local co-commissioning at the regional level to draw upon. In one of the urban regions, research interviewees described an impressive co-commissioning approach with the PCC. A framework had been agreed with the PCC and HMPPS allowing this probation region to "step a little outside of the standard HMPPS commissioning process and try things a little differently" (Regional Probation Director). For example, for accommodation services, the assigned funds were passported to the PCC office and had led to good provision for all those leaving prison. Collaboration in the housing arena "prevented fighting against other local groups for limited resources and promoted stronger relations with the local authorities" (Regional Probation Director).

The region also co-commissioned for other social needs. The contracts for services were held by the PCC, and probation managed these contracts in conjunction with the PCC. This local co-commissioning enabled probation to reach voluntary providers and local organisations they otherwise might not have discovered.

Another region had used the funding uplift following the Black Review on drug misuse services to collaborate with the local authorities in the region to commission dependency and recovery workers. This co-commissioning avoided competing with these councils for the limited substance misuse workers. Cooperation allowed them to target local needs more efficiently and equitably share funding and resources. Standard competition procurement methodology from all the partners would have been counterproductive, potentially resulting in a scramble for the limited workforce; see also, Clark, Smith and Whitehead, 2024, for examples of co-located and integrated services for women.

Probation services and the prison service have been managed under the umbrella of the HMPPS executive agency since 2017, and the current 'One HMPPS' programme represents a further attempt to improve joint working between custody and community services (Barton, 2022). Area Executive Directors were appointed in October 2023 with the remit to join up the work at the local level, and it is crucial that they support local leaders in accessing a wide network of community resources which can provide genuine rehabilitative and reintegrative support for those moving back into the community (Cracknell, 2023).<sup>12</sup> A further drive for change and the empowering of local leaders is provided through the UK Government's focus upon levelling up and local devolution (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022).

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<sup>12</sup> For a review of the problems with the Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) project which was intended to smooth the transition from prison to community, see Ball and Kirk, 2023.

### 2.3.2 Learn from recent commissioning experiences

In our 2022/2023 annual report, we highlighted the importance of:

- a commissioning framework that gives local service leaders much more flexibility and autonomy to meet the specific, local needs of their caseloads
- a focus on real, practical and measurable outcomes rather than merely signposting people on probation to services that might be able to help them.

The importance of the next rounds of commissioning has been highlighted by the Justice and Home Affairs Committee (2023): 'The Ministry of Justice should seize the upcoming wave of commissioning as an opportunity to apply lessons from the past two years. More funding should be allocated, especially to women's centres and for housing. Contracts should be longer to protect the Probation Service's partners, but subject to termination clauses to protect the taxpayer. More flexibility should be built in, perhaps through regular reviews, to allow partners to innovate.' To support smaller organisations, the Committee (2023) concluded that 'they should be permitted to apply jointly, or in partnership with larger organisations'.

In considering the most appropriate commissioning approaches, close attention should always be given to the National Audit Office's successful commissioning toolkit (2010) and their following eight principles of good commissioning:

- understanding the needs of users and other communities by ensuring that, alongside other consultees, you engage with TSOs, as advocates, to access their specialist knowledge
- consulting potential provider organisations, including those from the third sector and local experts, well in advance of commissioning new services, working with them to set priority outcomes for that service
- putting outcomes for users at the heart of the strategic planning process
- mapping the fullest practical range of providers with a view to understanding the contribution they could make to delivering those outcomes
- considering investing in the capacity of the provider base, particularly those working with hard-to-reach groups
- ensuring contracting processes are transparent and fair, facilitating the involvement of the broadest range of suppliers, including considering sub-contracting and consortia building, where appropriate
- ensuring long-term contracts and risk sharing, wherever appropriate, as ways of achieving efficiency and effectiveness
- seeking feedback from service users, communities and providers in order to review the effectiveness of the commissioning process in meeting local needs.

It is further stated that commissioning approaches should be kept 'as simple as possible and proportionate', and that grant making is an appropriate route where it would provide better value for money, e.g. where it is a more economic process, or a more effective approach to the achievement of outcomes. In the most recent *State of the Sector* report by Clinks (2024) – which provides a snapshot of the voluntary sector's work in criminal justice in 2022-2023 – it is recommended that the government and other statutory agencies should look to make

funding available through multi-year, unrestricted grants wherever possible, with the complexity of the commissioning processes kept proportionate to the amount of funding that is to be awarded, and consideration given to opportunities for the pooling of money and co-commissioning.

Breaking down barriers to smaller local organisations applying for and securing funding is crucial, and attention should be given to recent learning from other sectors. For example, alliance commissioning and contracting has increasingly been adopted in health and social care service provision as a whole system approach which can cater for high levels of complexity, improve the integration of services, adapt to local context, and facilitate better use of resources. It is an approach which seeks to maximise trust and cooperation between providers and commissioners and promote transparency and open communication, with increased equality and collective ownership of opportunities and responsibilities, a sharing of risk, and a clear focus on agreed outcomes. Similar potential benefits have been outlined in relation to 'communicative' partnership arrangements (Morgan and Parker, 2024).

A realist literature synthesis (Redgate et al., 2023) highlighted how alliancing can reduce system fragmentation and 'facilitate innovative and collaborative working practices through developing commitment and trust between alliance partners. This is connected to their ability in building on existing local capacity allowing for services to be tailored to meet local needs and thus influence change at the local level.' The following lessons/tips have been identified (National Development for Inclusion, 2019):

- build, sustain and nurture relationships, including beyond traditional services
- it is not a quick fix – the process takes time, effort, determination, curiosity and humility
- role change is required, including redistributing power relationships
- traditional commissioning processes need to change
- prepare for some difficult decisions – clear governance arrangements are required
- focus on outcomes: be clear about what you want to achieve for whom and manage expectations
- think small at first to learn and demonstrate success
- build in time to reflect and review.

### **2.3.3 Improve links with Creating Future Opportunities**

As set out earlier, CFO activity hubs provide social activities to teach soft skills, with a focus upon reintegrating into society those people who are socially excluded or lack social skills. Activities in the hub are wide-ranging, including sports and hobbies, domestic and budgeting skills, and groupwork to discuss specific challenges. Alongside the running of these hubs, CFO runs a further programme (CFO3) which focuses upon preparing people for employment and helping participants develop the skills needed to gain employment. A through the gate element enables participants to undertake the programme in custody and continue the work when released into the community. CFO3 also facilitates participants who enter custody to continue a programme which commenced in the community. Some CFO3 workers are co-located in probation offices. Such co-location of professionals from different agencies has been identified as a success factor in many criminal justice settings (Berry et

al., 2011). Analysis by the Justice Data Lab (2018) showed some promising results for the intervention, but CFO3 would benefit from more holistic evaluation.

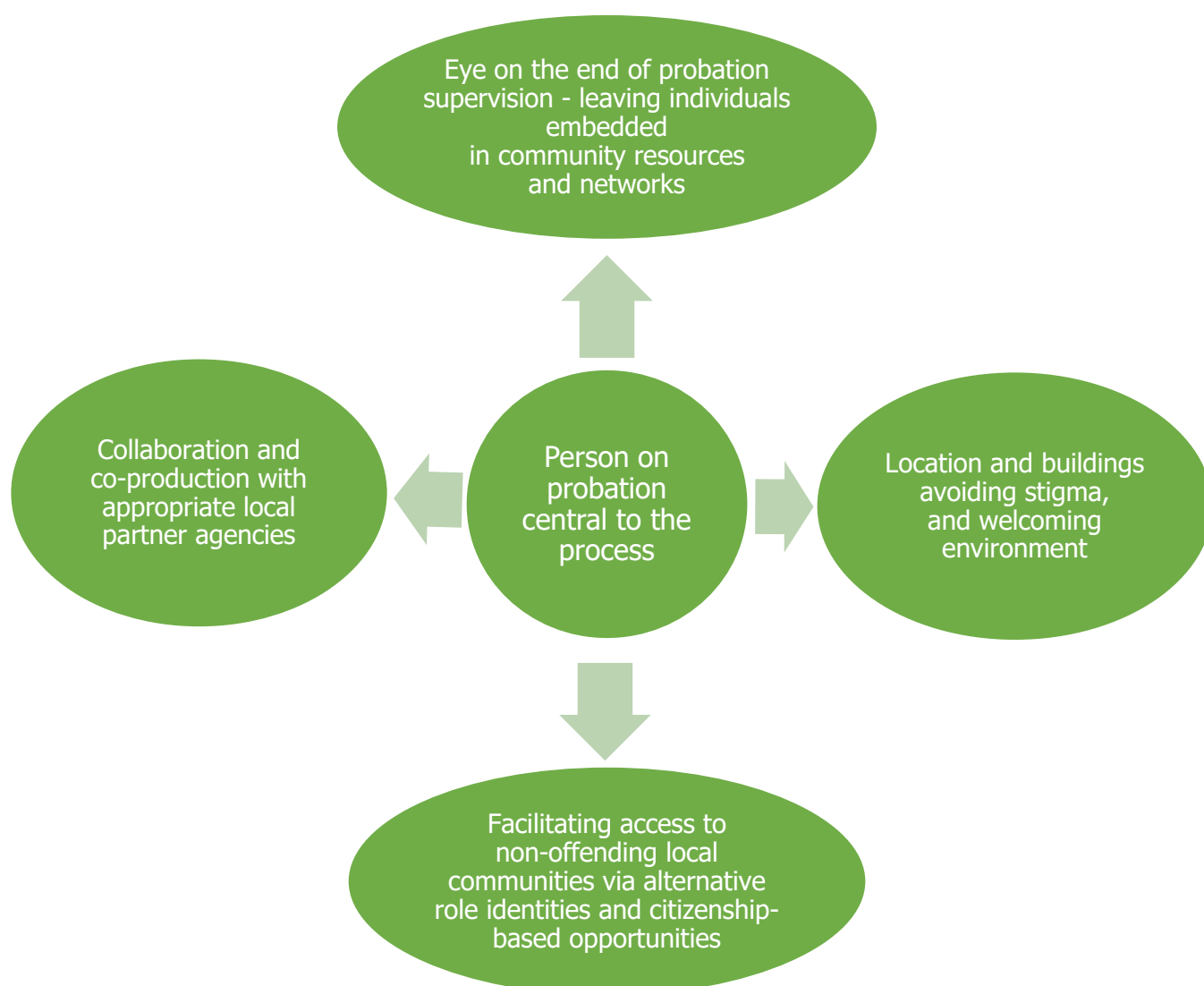
CFO Evolution, the successor programme, intends to build upon the existing services once EU funding ends and direct government funding commences. One issue to tackle is the lack of throughput and footfall in some activity hubs due to fewer referrals from probation than anticipated. CFO programmes are not an option on the Refer and Monitor system, meaning probation staff must contact the CFO team directly (by telephone or email). Where co-location operates, this is a less clunky process. Adding CFO to Refer and Monitor would be a simple way to improve referrals.

CFO activity hubs take the form of a local partnership model, based upon personalised, relational, practical and skill-building practice. Similarly, during the *Transforming Rehabilitation* era, there were various community hubs operated or supported by the erstwhile Community Rehabilitation Companies. Through these hubs, those under supervision were potentially able to access a range of services, facilities and opportunities, with a number of agencies working together to provide joined up services in one location.



Our research into these community hubs (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2020) found that staff benefitted from the co-location and multi-disciplinary nature of the hubs, as they could seek immediate support from a range of other members of staff, while the people on probation benefitted from the relational, strengths-based and individualised approach. As set out in Figure 12, a number of key ingredients were identified in the approach to supporting desistance and community integration.

**Figure 12: Critical success factors for community hubs**



An expansion of CFO activity hubs in more areas and catering for more diverse needs would be welcome, alongside a properly resourced evaluation of the work of the hubs, building the evidence base and supporting their further development.

#### **2.3.4 Focus on increasing transparency and building sentencer confidence**

Focus should be given to maximising transparency in relation to the range of interventions available, how they align to current evidence, how they are being used, and the plans for future developments. The HMPPS business strategy highlights the importance of an 'open learning culture', and maximising transparency can be seen as beneficial in numerous ways: increasing understanding, assisting with informed debate, managing expectations, building trust and confidence, and supporting the further development of current and new interventions. All probation professionals, service providers, interested academics, those with lived experience, and the public should thus be able to access key information on policy and decision-making, e.g. the interventions considered by CSAAP and the EIP and the rationales for their decisions, and on operational delivery, e.g. management information on the extent to which differing interventions are being utilised.



Building the understanding and confidence of sentencers can be seen as particularly important. Sentencers can be sceptical of the value of probation; for example, one survey (du Mont and Redgrave, 2017) found that two thirds of magistrates did not accept that community sentences could reduce or deter crime, and less than half believed probation could effectively rehabilitate convicted people. The upcoming changes to the interventions landscape provides an opportunity to communicate to sentencers, and to others, how interventions and the work of probation more generally can produce positive outcomes for people on probation and wider society, aligning to current evidence, and providing an effective alternative to custody. The next generation of accredited programmes are expected to be fewer in number and broader in design, which could potentially be simpler for sentencers and practitioners to understand. As one of our CSAAP participants stated:

*"It's better for probation to have a few things that they do well, rather than have a swathe of things that perhaps confuse and muddy the waters for probation officers. Rather they should focus on the core things like developing working relationships, understanding the effect of trauma on clients, and maximising the ability to participate in supervision."* (CSAAP participant)

### **2.3.5 Commit to evaluation and learning**

To further support an open, learning culture, a commitment is required to ongoing evaluation – including a focus on how the necessary evaluations can be resourced/funded – enabling interventions and delivery to be improved over time, maximising positive outcomes for individuals and wider society. The evidence base should continually evolve and leaders should seek to build a research/evaluation culture which is hardwired into the Probation Service. There should be a commitment to upskilling staff where required so that they have a sufficient understanding of the role of research and evaluation. Taking this further, it can be argued that supporting, co-producing or instigating research should be seen as a key part of the job, with clear links to professional learning and development. After all, successful research projects involve much more than financial resource – they require: (i) the time of senior staff and engaged gatekeepers who can promote the research and facilitate access to practitioners, people on probation, other key stakeholders, and data; and (ii) a clear commitment from the research participants themselves.

The CSAAP accreditation criteria includes the need for a clear evaluation plan for all programmes, and this requirement can be seen as applicable to interventions more generally.<sup>13</sup> The research questions across the interventions landscape will vary markedly in nature, so a wide range of research skills and methods are required, with a recognition that differing approaches can be highly complementary. There is room for action-based research, in-depth case study work and longer-term experimental designs, while always being aware and fully transparent about the differing strengths and limitations of all approaches. Consideration should always be given to the data collated within core systems across agencies and the most appropriate measures for capturing incremental changes, recognising that desistance can be a gradual, non-linear process.

Evidence-led innovation should be encouraged and accompanied by a commitment to testing and evaluating new approaches, so that the evidence base underpinning the delivery

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<sup>13</sup> Another key CSAAP criterion is the need for monitoring systems to be in place, ensuring that the programme is delivered as intended. Again, this can be applied to all interventions, with evidence indicating that outcomes are improved when quality assurance is taken seriously and there is strong implementation fidelity.

of services continues to develop and broaden.<sup>14</sup> An appetite to embrace and learn from research findings which are both negative and positive is required – not all innovative approaches should be expected to have the intended impact, and simply because something makes intuitive sense does not mean it will work; there can be unintended consequences. To support innovation, it is clear that networks and relationships are key, both at the level of individuals and organisations. There are natural links between innovation and (i) approaches which involve co-creation with service users, and (ii) localised approaches that focus on the development of shared values (Fox and Albertson, 2020).

Attention needs to be given to whether specific services and interventions work better with some individuals than others. While there is good evidence supporting the use of certain types of intervention, the detail is often lacking, particularly when considering differing sub-groups, differing combinations of needs, sequencing issues and differing pathways to desistance (Ministry of Justice, 2020). Particular focus should also be given to improving the availability and quality of costs data. It is notable that most research and evaluation studies within probation lack an economic component. The consequence is that robust evidence on both costs and benefits of differing approaches and interventions is generally lacking. Progress is clearly required here, not least because resource pressures make it even more vital that funds are spent on approaches that provide value for money and the greatest possible economic and social return.

### **2.3.6 Consider the priority areas for CSAAP**

The rollout of the next generation of accredited programmes would seem an opportune time to review the priority areas where CSAAP could now add most value, bearing in mind that the panel is in place to provide evidence-based advice on a range of topics to support the development, delivery, and evaluation of high-quality services. It would be worth continually comparing and contrasting the approaches across jurisdictions, e.g. developments in relation to the Scottish Advisory Panel on Offender Rehabilitation, and considering whether there is a need to maintain the two panels that have now been established – CSAAP and the EIP. There would be value in avoiding a perceived hierarchy of interventions – the focus should always be upon a personalised approach for people on probation, with the right interventions utilised with the right individuals in the right way at the right time.

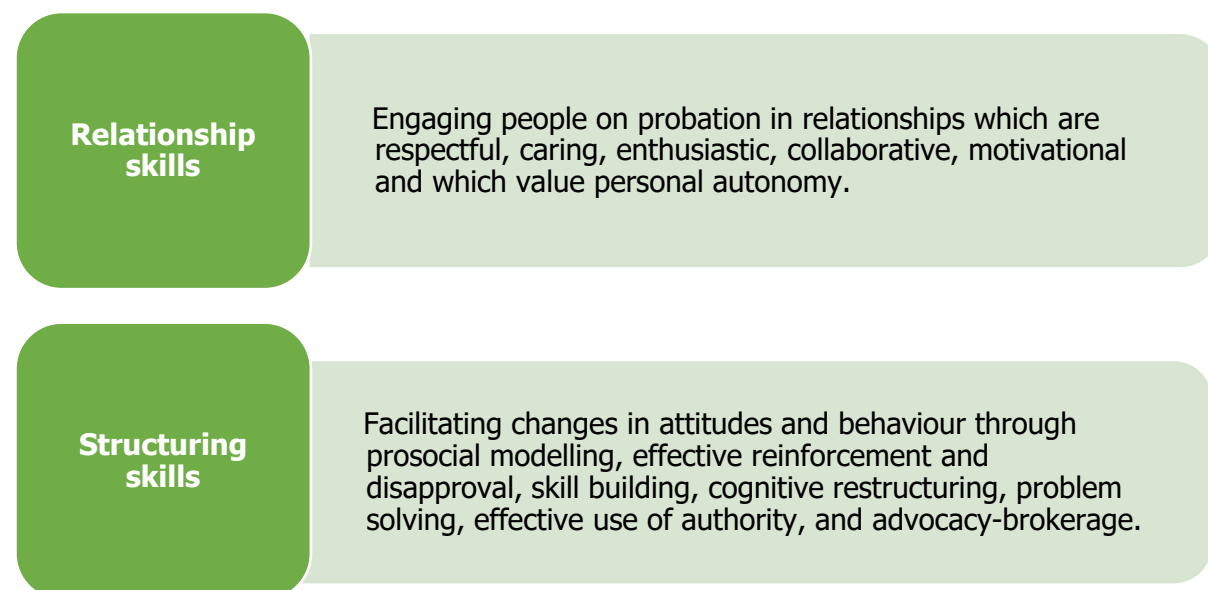
One CSAAP participant reflected that the early dominance of the cognitive perspective in the What Works movement in the 1990s and 2000s had downplayed the role of individual supervision in favour of groupwork. In contrast, the Council of Europe Probation Rules (2010) state as follows: 'Research shows that the most effective interventions are multi-modal, i.e. they use a range of different types of method calling for a corresponding range of professional skills and expertise. Some of these skills are provided by organisations and individuals with whom probation agencies work in partnership. Other skills will be deployed by probation staff themselves'. In relation to probation practitioner skills, some CSAAP participants emphasised that probation supervision itself can be an effective intervention, and that the core correctional skills themselves should thus be accredited. Effective practice involves deploying both relational and structuring skills (see Figure 13),

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<sup>14</sup> Supporting the continual development of those online resources which provide an overview of the strength of the evidence supporting differing types of intervention; see <https://mmuperu.co.uk/reducing-reoffending/> and <https://www.college.police.uk/research/crime-reduction-toolkit>.

alongside a sound knowledge of the evidence base of how people change their behaviour and capacity to maintain a better lifestyle (Raynor, 2019; Durnesco, 2020).

**Figure 13: Effective practice skills for probation practitioners**



The importance of probation supervision cannot be understated. As Reed and Dominey (2023) state, 'it is the intervention experienced by almost everyone subject to statutory supervision, whatever their background and whatever their needs'. The benefit of CSAAP input and advice would be to support alignment to the best available domestic and international evidence, and to synthesise that evidence into a *modus operandi* tailored to the context of England and Wales, further building understanding and confidence in the work of probation. A shift in the focus on CSAAP would also help to signal that, at its core, probation is a relational, collaborative, and person-centred service.

### **2.3.7 Build the knowledge and skills of staff**

A number of our research participants highlighted the critical importance of providing time and space for the new inexperienced cohort of probation professionals to develop their confidence in navigating the interventions available for people on probation and to provide the necessary support to complement specific interventions, helping to maximise engagement and impact. More generally, our research (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2023c) into how practitioners can facilitate positive change in those they supervise identified three key organisational imperatives for the Probation Service to get the best of probation professionals:

- the **time** to work with individuals in a comprehensive way
- the necessary **skills** to deal with a range of behaviours and attitudes
- the **space** to reflect on their practice.

In our [Academic Insights paper 2022/11](#), Tidmarsh argues that 'the next iteration of probation should be reconstructed around the professionalism of its staff, its most valuable asset', and it is welcome that this is also the vision within the Professional Register for the Probation Service (HMPPS, 2023a), which was launched in May 2023. The aim of registration

is to provide assurance that probation professionals are appropriately qualified and are maintaining their professional integrity through the continuous professional development of their skills and knowledge. A renewed emphasis on understanding and deploying relational and desistance-focused practice could reignite interest in and utilisation of the wide range of probation interventions currently available.

The timescales for probation unification meant that significant changes had to be made to the probation delivery model relatively quickly, while significant levels of understaffing have meant that new staff have not had sufficient time for learning and development, nor enough mature mentors to help them develop their skills. Our research on frontline leadership found that understaffing and high caseloads were undermining the ability of probation team leaders to coach new practitioners and develop a rehabilitative culture (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2024). Staff shortages in other areas of the public and voluntary sectors have also negatively impacted in terms of meeting the needs of people on probation.

While it is heartening to see some progress in recruitment, policymakers need to be creative in recruitment, retention, and attracting former probation professionals back to the service. In our report on frontline leadership (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2024), we noted the promising example of legacy nurses in the NHS as a means of retaining experienced staff in senior practitioner roles. Learning from other policy spheres who are succeeding in retaining talent would be a worthwhile endeavour for HMPPS.

### 3. Conclusion

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Well-designed and administered interventions can improve the lives and prospects of many people on probation. Interventions are most effective where all needs, strengths and motivations are captured through assessment and sentence planning, and then addressed through delivery by skilled providers in partnership with the supervising probation practitioner. Analysis of our aggregated inspections data strongly indicates that positive outcomes are much more likely with those people who have benefitted from well-targeted, well-delivered, service delivery.

The participants in our research described a probation interventions landscape that encompassed a broad range of interventions to meet the needs of people on probation. However, they also reported gaps in provision (as can be seen from our inspection data), barriers to access, frustrations with processes, and misunderstandings about what was available. A notable gap in provision was a 'bricks and mortar' pathway which could quickly and reliably transition people on probation into secure and affordable housing, thus preventing homelessness, reducing associated vulnerabilities, and supporting community integration and social inclusion. The housing navigators we describe in one region appeared a good start to closing the accommodation gap.

Access to mental health and substance misuse services was also problematic; these problems often co-occur for people on probation. The Black Review and recent developments in the NHS and the criminal justice system (Black, 2021; Ball, 2022) offer hope for better provision in the future. For example, the Probation Service has recently appointed regional health and justice coordinators who aim to negotiate better access to treatment and recovery services for people being supervised.

In terms of specific types of intervention, a recurrent complaint concerned the clunky CRS Refer and Monitor system, which was criticised by probation professionals and TSOs. A rethink by HMPPS is needed on how best to share information about individuals, avoid data entry duplication, and keep case managers informed on progress and emerging needs from providers. Data sharing has long been a problem for prison and probation services, and it is frustrating for all that such problems persist.

Accredited programmes were viewed positively but there were concerns about waiting lists and the ability to access the programmes in a timely manner. Structured interventions and practitioner toolkits were underutilised, little understood, and underappreciated by the frontline. These issues ultimately emanate from the workload pressures of an understaffed service, with practitioners having lacked the time to build their understanding of these interventions and toolkits, and having received insufficient training regarding their use and delivery.

More positively, we have seen many examples of innovation and good practice. We were impressed by the areas which had engaged in co-commissioning interventions with other partners; the partnerships were often brought together by PCCs. There were many local initiatives to encourage referrals to intervention providers, such as co-location, training events, or office visits by providers.

Regional leaders and TSO participants wanted the balance between competitive commissioning and grant making to be redrawn. Many smaller TSOs were excluded from the

probation interventions landscape as they did not have the back-office support and financial resources to join the commissioning framework. This inequitable situation has denied access to useful local sources of support for many people on probation. This is surely a false economy, with the gains from reduced reoffending and community reintegration at the local level outweighing any short-term savings from limited competition. Developments in other sectors, notably alliance commissioning and contracting, are also worthy of attention.

The promising approaches we describe echo the messages from the research literature on success in delivering rehabilitation. These success factors include (Bosker et al., 2020): (i) co-location of providers; (ii) strong partnerships with other agencies; and (iii) co-production of rehabilitation with people with lived experience of prison and probation. Building upon the findings in this bulletin and the wider literature, we have identified the following key considerations for improving the interventions landscape moving forward:

- empowering local probation leaders
- learning from recent commissioning experiences
- improving links with Creating Future Opportunities
- focusing on maximising transparency and building sentencer confidence
- committing to evaluation and learning
- considering the priority areas for CSAAP
- building the knowledge and skills of staff.

In developing the interventions landscape, an overriding principle should be to support delivery which is aligned to evidence (integrating differing types and forms of evidence) and which is personalised, holistic, engaging, responsive, and inclusive. A balance needs to be struck between:

- (i) not over-complicating the landscape and avoiding any unnecessary hierarchies of interventions, including a recognition of the role of supervision as an effective intervention in its own right; and
- (ii) ensuring that sufficient options and flexibility are in place at the local level to meet the full range of individual needs, maximising access to universal services wherever possible to support longer-term community integration and social inclusion.

As with other areas of the contemporary Probation Service, many recent problems in delivering interventions stem from staff shortages and the resultant workload pressures. Unmanageable workloads have led probation professionals to retreat into risk management at the expense of generative rehabilitative work. This is self-defeating as the best way to reduce risk of harm is to tackle offending-related needs and build upon strengths through evidence-informed and evidence-based interventions. Kemshall (2021) outlines how the approach of protective integration, where desistance is the primary objective, achieves the aims of public protection by facilitating change in the individual. Kemshall (ibid, p.4) explains that through protective integration people on probation are, 'protected from further failure, community retribution and stigma; and the community is protected from further harm'.



The future bedrock of an effective Probation Service will be a fully staffed, well-resourced and well-led cohort of probation professionals. The current inexperienced cohort needs time to build and develop their confidence and skills in effective supervision practices (Raynor, 2019; Durnesco, 2020) and become conversant with the evidence underpinning desistance, recovery, and growth. Their leaders confront the immemorial conflict between allowing time for professional development and getting the job done. Only more staff in post through successful recruitment and retention will break the logjam.

Whether the regionalised civil service structure is the right vehicle for probation has yet to be proved. One HMPPS and the Probation Service, nevertheless, have a complement of committed leaders, skilled veterans, and enthusiastic newcomers, and the provision of a suitably wide range of evidence-informed and evidence-based interventions is a key ingredient for rebuilding an effective relational, collaborative and rehabilitative Probation Service across England and Wales.

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## Annex A: Methodology

### Inspection data

The inspection findings presented in this bulletin are mainly based on data from 32 inspections of probation services completed between October 2021 and May 2023 (fieldwork weeks). The 32 PDUs were spread across 11 of the 12 probation regions (England and Wales).

**Table A1: Inspections of probation services, October 2021 – May 2023**

Probation Delivery Unit	Month of report publication
Gwent	February 2022
Swansea and Neath Port Talbot	January 2022
West Kent	May 2022
West Sussex	May 2022
Essex North	May 2022
Northamptonshire	May 2022
Birmingham North, East and Solihull	August 2022
Staffordshire and Stoke	August 2022
Warwickshire	August 2022
Hammersmith, Fulham, Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	October 2022
Ealing and Hillingdon	October 2022
Lambeth	October 2022
Lewisham and Bromley	November 2022
Newham	November 2022
Barking, Dagenham and Havering	November 2022
Redcar, Cleveland and Middlesbrough	December 2022
South Tyneside and Gateshead	December 2022
Derby City	February 2023
Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland	February 2023
Kirklees	March 2023
Sheffield	March 2023
Hull and East Riding of Yorkshire	March 2023
North and North-East Lancashire	March 2023
Manchester North	May 2023
Tameside	May 2023
Wigan	May 2023
West Cheshire	June 2023
Blackburn and Darwen	June 2023
Knowsley and St Helens	June 2023
Liverpool North	June 2023
Cumbria	July 2023
Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight	July 2023

The cases inspected were those of people on probation who had started community sentences (community orders and suspended sentence orders) with an unpaid work, rehabilitation activity, and/or accredited programme requirement, and those cases starting post-release supervision, including licence and post-sentence supervision cases.

A total of 1,550 cases were inspected. Rather than take a sample of cases, a cohort approach was used across the inspections, examining cases drawn from two separate weeks in the period between 27 and 32 weeks before the fieldwork, including all cases commenced (or released from custody) in each of those weeks. However, potential exclusions were as follows:

- cases where the same person had more than one sentence in the eligible period
- cases where the order or licence had terminated within seven days of commencement
- cases where there was a current serious further offence (SFO) investigation, serious case review, child practice review, or other similar investigation.

All cases in the cohort were allocated to individual inspectors, who examined the relevant records and interviewed the relevant probation practitioners. To support the reliability and validity of their judgements against our standards framework, all cases were examined using standard case assessment forms, underpinned by rules and guidance,<sup>15</sup> and further reinforced through training and quality assurance activities.

## **Interviews**

Nineteen interviews were held between June and October 2023 with representatives from:

- TSOs providing rehabilitative services
- regional probation division senior operational managers
- HMPPS and MoJ senior policy managers
- current and former CSAAP panel members (capturing views as to how accreditation and approval processes had developed over time).

The interviews were led by HM Inspectorate of Probation inspectors or researchers. The sessions were conducted and recorded in MS Teams. Key themes were identified from the sessions from the field notes and automated transcriptions of the sessions. Some quotes have been edited to protect anonymity but retain the original meaning.

## **Survey of probation practitioners**

We undertook a survey of probation professionals using a web resource between March and June 2023. The survey was promoted through social media and emails to regional probation offices. Responses were received from 234 probation professionals. While responses were received from all regions and across grades and functions, the survey findings may not be representative of probation professionals across England and Wales.

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<sup>15</sup> The rules and guidance can be accessed here: <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/about-hmi-probation/about-our-work/documentation-area/>