HM Inspectorate of Probation

Examining the links between probation supervision and positive outcomes – completion and proven reoffending

HM Inspectorate of Probation

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HM Inspectorate of Probation is committed to reviewing, developing and promoting the evidence base for high-quality probation and youth offending 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.

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Executive summary

Context

When designing our recent inspection programmes, we applied a logic model approach and focused our inspection standards upon those key 'inputs' and 'activities' which are the drivers of positive outcomes. Getting to the heart of current probation delivery through on-site inspection is where we believe we can add most value – based on our independence and the expertise/experience of our inspectors, we can focus on the quality of work with individual people on probation.

A guiding principle for our standards frameworks is to be evidence-informed, reflecting the latest evidence (from research and inspection) on what contributes to effective service delivery and positive outcomes, exemplifying what good probation work looks like. To help validate the inspection standards and the logic model, this bulletin examines the relationships between inspectors' judgements regarding the quality of delivery and later output/outcome measures in the form of sentence completion and proven reoffending.

Approach

The findings are based upon data collected from our inspections of probation providers completed between June 2018 and June 2019, covering all of the then 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) and the seven National Probation Service (NPS) divisions.[1] In each inspection, we assessed individual cases and interviewed probation professionals about these cases. The aggregated inspection dataset has been matched with probation terminations data from the *nDelius* case management system (for the community sentence cases) and with proven reoffending measures from an extract of the Police National Computer (PNC) database (for all cases). The analysis of the linked data is summarised in the following figure.

Activities
Inspector judgements:
- Effective implementation with a focus on engaging the individual
- Delivery effectively supports the individual's desistance

n= 3,308 case assessments

Outputs
Reason for sentence termination

n = 1,643 (community sentence cases only)

Outcomes
Reoffending within 12 months

Number of reoffences within 12 months

n= 2,885 (community and post-release custodial cases)

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[1] These services have now been unified into a single public sector Probation Service.

Key findings and implications

- The analysis revealed independently significant associations between inspectors' judgements regarding the quality of implementation/delivery and both sentence completion and proven reoffending. In those cases where our inspectors judged that the delivery both engaged the person on probation and supported their desistance, the sentence completion rate was 24 percentage points higher and the reoffending rate was 14 percentage points lower compared to those cases where both judgements were negative. Differences were found across the assessed likelihood of reoffending levels (calculated using demographic and offending variables).

- For those who had reoffended, we also found significant reductions in the frequency of reoffending when probation delivery was of a high-quality nature; reductions rather than total cessation can be more realistic for those with the most entrenched offending histories and behaviours.

- The findings provide one source of support for the probation delivery logic model. Bearing in mind the economic and social costs of reoffending and that about 170,000 were supervised in the community by the probation service at the end of 2022, the potential benefits for individual people and society as a whole are clear. Crucially, practitioners need to be empowered to deliver their best practice and given the time and space to build secure and trusting relationships, supported through the availability of a wide range of high-quality interventions, resources and opportunities. There is clear value in identifying and building upon strengths and enhancing protective factors whenever possible; we found notable improvements in sentence completion and the reoffending outcomes when this was achieved.

- While the findings contribute to our understanding of how the quality of probation delivery contributes to beneficial outputs and outcomes, there is clear scope for further research and analysis. There would be value from introducing a severity of reoffending measure, considering whether high-quality probation delivery assists with moves from more serious or harmful offending to relatively less serious forms of offending. Further consideration should also be given to the most appropriate measures for capturing incremental changes, recognising that desistance can be a gradual, non-linear process. Attention should be paid to ensuring that these outcome measures are sufficiently timely, can be sufficiently tailored to each person on probation and the supervision/support provided, and, ideally, are able to support claims of attribution.

1. Introduction

When designing recent inspection programmes, we applied a logic model approach and focused our standards framework upon those key 'inputs' and 'activities' which are the drivers of positive outcomes. As set out in Figure 1, we have recognised that various outputs and outcomes are being measured by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). We see all of this work as complementary; without high-quality inputs (such as professional staff and comprehensive services) and activities (such as case assessment and individual supervision), probation providers are less likely to meet the enduring aims for probation.

Figure 1: Probation delivery logic model

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact (Goals)
HM Inspectorate of Probation	HM Inspectorate of Probation	HMPPS metrics	HMPPS / MoJ	Strategic goals / expectations for probation
enable	**generate**	**result in**	**contribute to**	
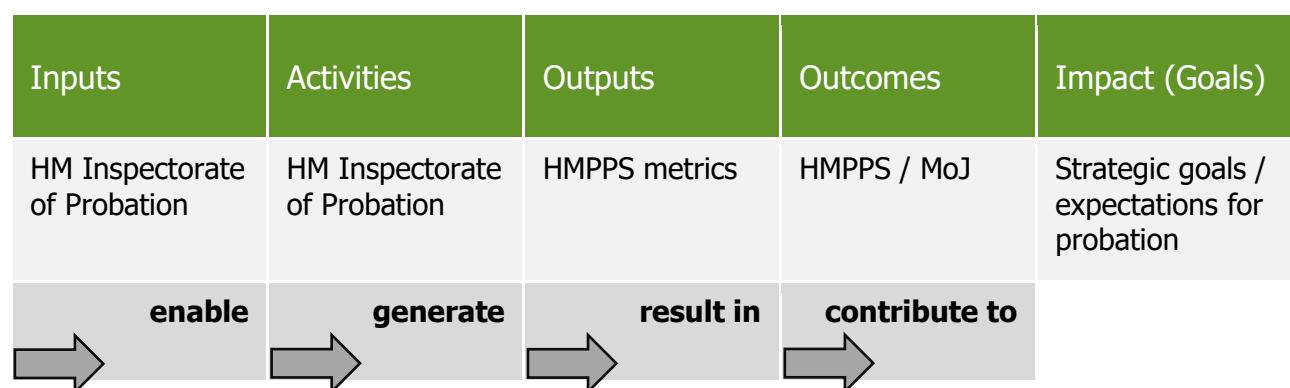
Having a common language is important when developing a logic model. Key definitions are as follows:

- **inputs**: the resources that enable providers to be able to carry out its activities

- **activities**: the day-to-day delivery within the control of the providers

- **outputs**: products or services that result from a provider's activities. These are often expressed quantitatively; for example, how many sessions received, and the amount of contact with a project/intervention

- **outcomes**: the changes, benefits, learning or other effects that result from what a provider delivers. These will contribute to a final goal and may include changes in an individual's knowledge, skills, attitudes, and/or behaviour[2]

- **goals**: the broader social changes that providers are trying to achieve.

A guiding principle for our standards frameworks is to be evidence-informed, reflecting the latest evidence, learning and experience (from research and inspection) on the key organisational inputs and the key ingredients of day-to-day delivery.[3] In our Research & Analysis Bulletin 2020/01, we examined the relationship between these first two stages of the logic model, as captured within our inspection data, finding links between the quality of

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[2] It is beneficial to try to maintain a clear distinction between outputs and outcomes. Outputs are the products of the organisations, narrowly defined. They tend to be easier to measure than outcomes, as they are closer to the immediate work of the organisations.
[3] In developing the standards, we worked constructively with providers and others to build a common view of high-quality probation services and what should be expected.

delivery in individual cases and our organisational-level standards on staffing (standard 1.2) and services (standard 1.3). We found that that the quality of probation supervision declined when practitioners perceived that:

- their workloads were unmanageable (noticeable at 50+ cases)

- their skills, ability and knowledge were insufficient

- in-house training was poor

- relationships with other agencies were ineffective.

To further validate the logic model, the focus in this bulletin is upon the relationships between inspectors' judgements regarding the quality of delivery and later output/outcome measures in the form of sentence completion and proven reoffending. This sits alongside the analysis set out in Research & Analysis Bulletin 2023/03 where we examined the relationships between inspectors' judgements regarding the quality of delivery and their judgements regarding early outcomes. A key question raised by this accompanying bulletin is whether the positive early outcomes observed by our inspectors endure over a longer time period.

Sentence completion – an output measure – is recorded within the *nDelius* probation case management system through the use of termination codes. Notably, termination can be for a positive or negative reason. Negative terminations occur when the person on probation reoffends or does not comply with supervision and is sanctioned by a return to prison or return to the court for resentencing. Positive terminations are those where the court sentence or the prison licence runs its full course, or, in some instances, is closed early by the probation practitioner as a recognition that the individual has made good progress.

The proven reoffending data provides outcome measures. The information is obtained originally from the PNC database, with the MoJ receiving an extract from this database on a weekly basis for the purposes of producing official statistics and for further research and analysis. It is recognised that there are limitations to these measures. 'Proven' reoffending can be seen as a proxy for true reoffending, which is influenced by other factors such as local police activities and priorities. Furthermore, as Wong (2019) recognises, reoffending data does not fully capture the 'zig-zag' nature of desistance which can be characterised by false starts and relapses. Moreover, probation is only one amongst many influences on the often-complex lives of those who offend; the term 'assisted desistance' (King, 2013) has thus been used to describe the role that agencies can play, recognising that individuals can be supported to desist from crime, but there are too many factors at play for any single agency to 'cause' desistance.

Nevertheless, reoffending measures are the most commonly used outcome measures when evaluating the effectiveness of probation delivery, and they are strategically and symbolically important; the public and policymakers expect that probation delivery should contribute to reduced reoffending and a safer society in general.

2. Findings

The findings presented in this bulletin are based upon case assessment data from inspections conducted across England and Wales between June 2018 and July 2019. This inspection data was matched to terminations data from the *nDelius* probation case management system and to proven reoffending data from the PNC extract. The focus of the analysis was to examine whether high-quality delivery was associated with more positive outputs/outcomes in terms of successful sentence completion and reduced reoffending, and also to identify which aspects of delivery were most important.

The probation inspection dataset consisted of 3,308 case assessments. The data matching was successful in 2,885 (87 per cent) of these cases for the reoffending measures. For the terminations data, only community sentence cases could be included. There were 1,788 such cases in the inspection dataset, and the data matching was successful in 1,634 (87 per cent) of these cases. These matching rates compare well to other studies; further detail about the data matching can be found in Annex A.

The headline figures for the matched cases were as follows:

- 71 per cent of terminations were for positive reasons, usually due to the sentence running its full course; negative terminations were fairly evenly divided between failure to comply and conviction of a further offence (see Figure 2)
- 39 per cent of the individuals had reoffended within the one-year follow-up period
- of those who had reoffended, the mean number of reoffences in the one-year follow-up period was 4.5. The number of reoffences was three or below in 60 per cent of these cases, with a mode of just one reoffence (see Figure 3).

As indicated, the binary reoffended/not reoffended measure is supplemented by a frequency measure, reflecting the reality that reductions in the frequency of offending rather than total cessation can be more realistic for those with the most complex needs and the most entrenched offending histories and behaviours. In these cases, positive outcomes can take considerable time to achieve, with desistance being a gradual, non-linear process.

Figure 2: Reasons for sentence termination
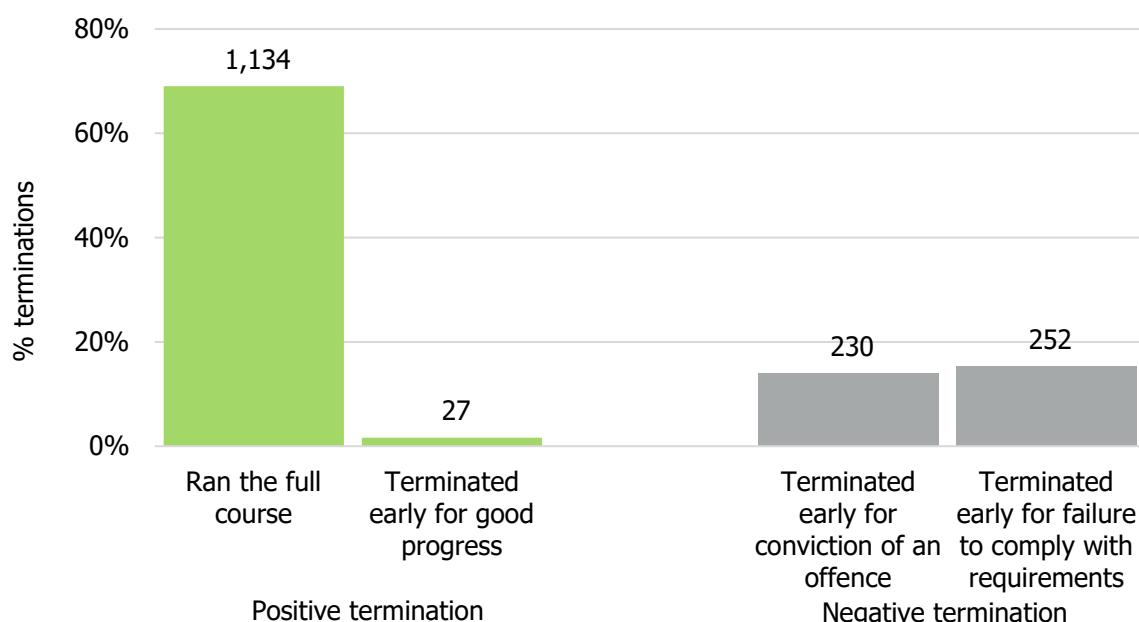
Figure 3: The number of reoffences committed by reoffenders
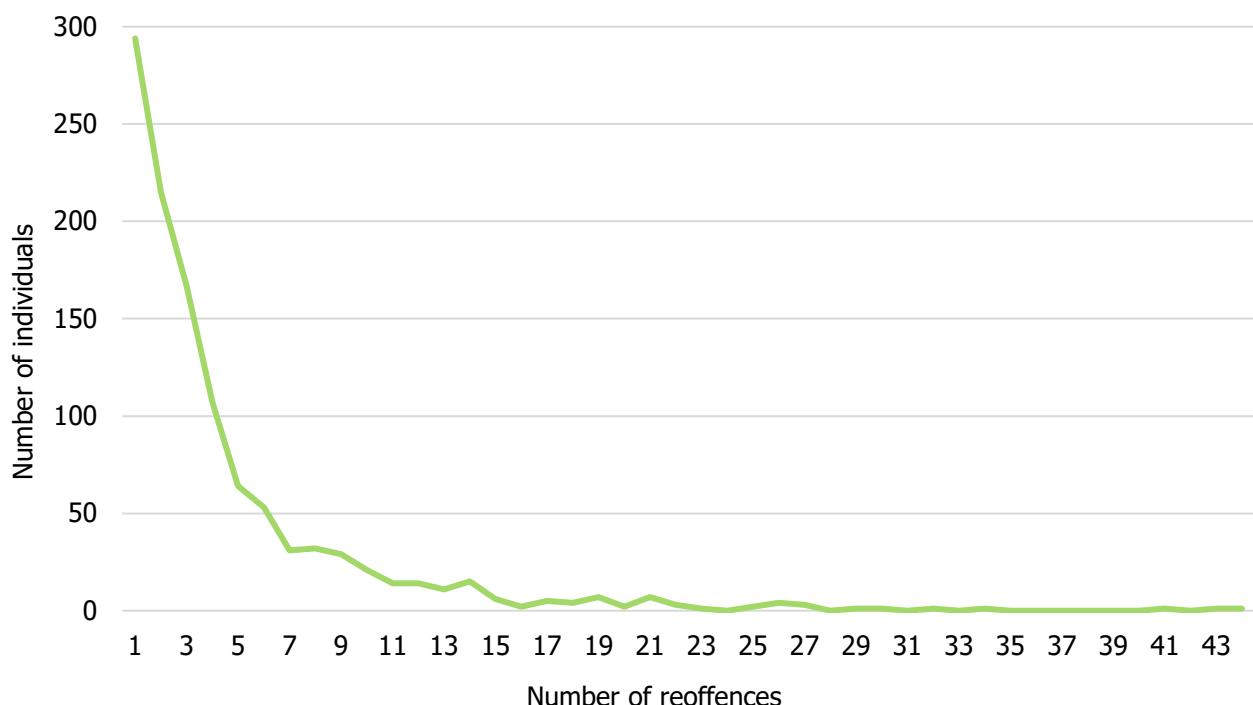
Our inspectors make judgements regarding quality across all stages of the ASPIRE model (see Figure 4 below). There is an inspection standard for each of these stages, with each standard underpinned by three key questions which reflect the importance of (i) engaging the person on probation, (ii) supporting their desistance, and (iii) keeping other people safe.[4] We have previously examined links across the stages (see, for example, our Research & Analysis Bulletin 2020/03.

Figure 4: The ASPIRE model

Assessment
- Risks
- Need
- Responsivity
- Resources (including individual's strengths)

Planning
- Describe how these problems are to be tackled
- Set objects of supervision
- Decide what action is to be taken, when and by whom

Reviewing
- Review progress on objectives
- Identify evidence of progress
- Highlight achievements
- Decide what needs to be done next

Implementation
- Put plan into action
- Keep records
- Monitor progress
- Troubleshoot difficulties

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[4] The current full standards framework can be found here:
https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/about-our-work/our-standards-and-ratings.

The focus in this bulletin is upon inspectors' judgements in relation to the implementation stage, recognising its importance to people on probation and how it should reflect and align to the work undertaken at all the other stages. The underpinning key questions on engagement and desistance[5] were entered into regression models alongside variables covering the person on probation's demographics (age, gender and ethnicity), type of supervision (community sentence or post-custody), previous convictions, and risk levels (both likelihood of reoffending[6] and risk of serious harm). The headline figures for the two key questions (for all inspected cases) were as follows:

- in 75 per cent of cases, it was judged that the sentence/post-custody period had been implemented effectively with a focus on engaging the person on probation

- in 55 per cent of cases, it was judged that the implementation and delivery of services effectively supported the person on probation's desistance.

Inspectors also made judgements in relation to a number of prompts under each key question,[7] and these were added into further regression models. The purpose of all the models was to examine which of the inspectors' judgements on the quality of delivery were associated with sentence completion/reoffending when controlling for the other variables and the relationships between them. Further detail regarding the analysis can be found in Annex A, with the main outputs set out in Annex B. The associations highlighted in the following sections are those which were found to be statistically significant within the regression models. The individual/case information variable consistently found to be significant within the models was the individual's likelihood of reoffending, hence why it is included in many of the figures.

2.1 Engaging the person on probation

As specified by our inspection standard on implementation and delivery, we expect to see high-quality well-focused, personalised and coordinated services which engage the individual person on probation. A focus on engagement is one of the three underpinning key questions, recognising that one of the key tasks for probation practitioners is to find a way to engage with an individual, forming a level of rapport and trust, even when the individual may be extremely reluctant to comply with the process.

The research literature consistently highlights the importance of positive, respectful and trusting relationships between practitioners and those on probation, with the latter most influenced to change by those whose advice they respect and whose support they value. For example, in a 2011 study, Hughes undertook interviews with 12 members of probation staff (six probation officers and six probation services officers) as well as 12 individuals who had

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[5] In terms of the other key question on keeping other people safe, we considered whether we could also look at the reoffending data in terms of indictable-only cases which are those of a more serious nature, such as rape, manslaughter and murder, or trafficking Class A drugs. Such serious offences may attract a prison sentence, and can only be tried in the Crown Court. However, there were only 28 reoffences of this nature in the matched dataset.

[6] Based upon the Offender Group Reconviction Scale (OGRS) score. This actuarial tool predicts proven reoffending within one and two years using demographic and offending variables. For further information on OGRS, see Moore, 2015; Chapter 8.

[7] In our Research & Analysis Bulletin 2020/05, we examined the technical performance of the standards framework, finding that the prompts largely focused upon the most *critical* elements of the key questions; that the standards themselves had strong *coherence*, with the prompts within each key question correlating well with each other; and that the standards were measuring *discrete* aspects of delivery.

recently received community orders. The staff frequently identified relationship skills as most important for establishing engagement and supporting compliance; more specifically, being open, showing empathy, respect, understanding and listening. Those on probation likewise emphasised the centrality of the relationship with their probation officer to their probation experience; they stressed the importance of having a non-judgemental approach, respect, openness, fairness and being listened to.

The literature further emphasises the importance of maintaining responsivity, so that delivery remains tailored to the individual, and positive, trusting relationships continue to build. Wherever possible, practitioners should act as positive and motivating role models for those being supervised, use natural opportunities to demonstrate thinking and behavioural skills, and work with individuals to seek out solutions through problem-solving advice (see Academic Insights paper 2019/05 by Raynor). Real collaboration and co-production has been highlighted as important.

Practitioners also need to maintain a balance between encouragement and 'pushing', with due regard for individual's autonomy. As part of the exercising of legitimate authority, the consequences of non-compliance should be explained to the individual. Instances of non-compliance and relapse should be dealt with in a proportionate, fair and transparent manner – procedural justice indicates that the perceived fairness of processes affects how people view those in authority and subsequently respond.

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

- the requirements of the sentence started promptly or at an appropriate time

- sufficient focus was given to maintaining an effective working relationship with the individual

- sufficient efforts were made to enable the individual to complete the sentence, including flexibility to take appropriate account of their personal circumstances

- risks of non-compliance were identified and addressed in a timely fashion to reduce the need for enforcement actions.

Having considered all the prompts, inspectors then made a yes/no judgement as to whether the supervision was being implemented effectively with a focus on engaging the individual. The analysis of the matched data revealed that community sentences were significantly more likely to complete successfully when the inspector's judgement was positive, and this was true when accounting for the individual's likelihood of reoffending (see Figure 5). The difference in the successful completion rate ranged from nine percentage points for those with a high/very high likelihood of reoffending to eighteen percentage points for those with a low likelihood.

Figure 5: Positive terminations by effective implementation (and likelihood of reoffending level)

% positive terminations
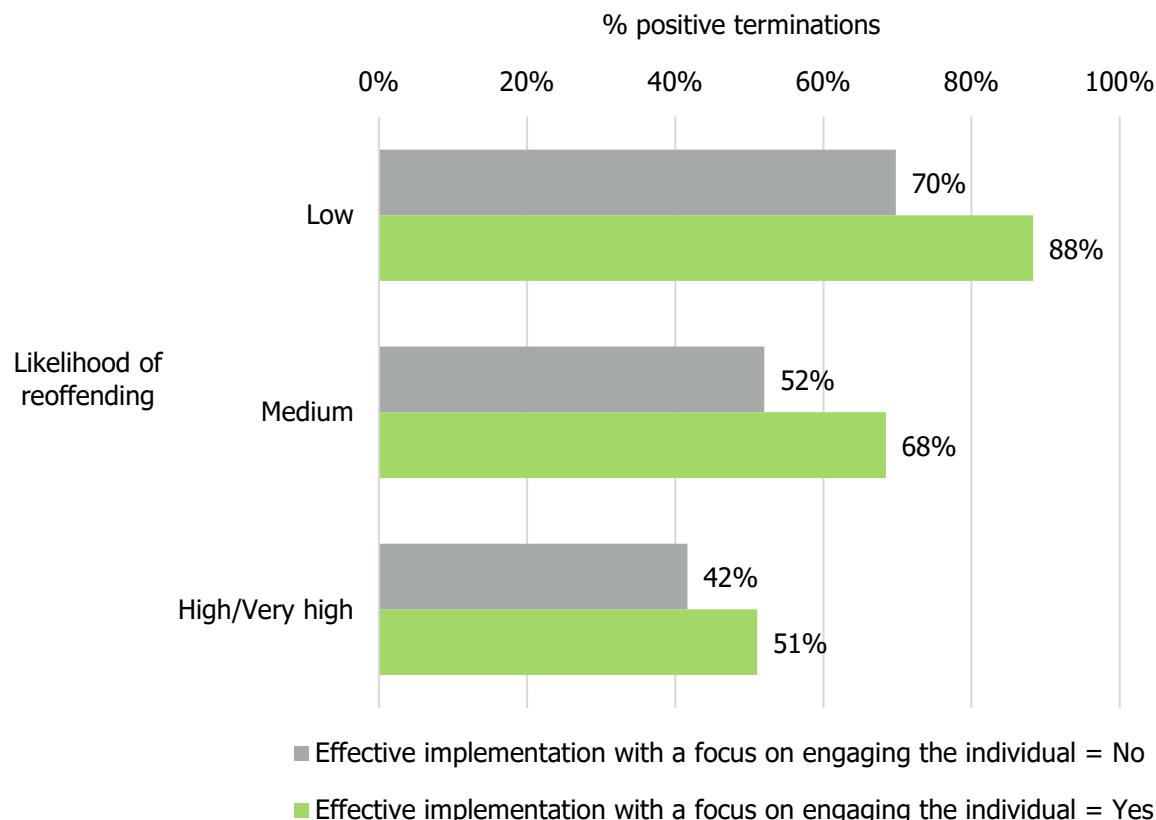
The importance of effective implementation and engagement of the individual is further demonstrated by the proven reoffending data. There was significantly reduced reoffending when our inspectors had judged that the supervision was being implemented effectively with a focus on engaging the individual. As shown by Figures 6 and 7, this was true for both the binary reoffending measure and the frequency of reoffending measure, with differences across the assessed likelihood of reoffending levels. Across all matched cases, the binary reoffending rate fell from 47 per cent where the implementation was not deemed effective to 36 per cent in those cases where it was deemed effective.

These findings support previous research where those on probation have reported that having a positive relationship with their probation officer can lead to reduced levels of recidivism (Chamberlain et al., 2018). Feelings of personal loyalty towards an individual practitioner can make them feel more accountable for their actions, and thus less likely to violate their probation conditions. It can also lead to them being more willing to confide and communicate treatment needs (Robinson, 2005).

Figure 6: Binary reoffending by effective implementation (and likelihood of reoffending level)

% reoffended

Effective implementation with a focus on engaging the individual = No
Effective implementation with a focus on engaging the individual = Yes
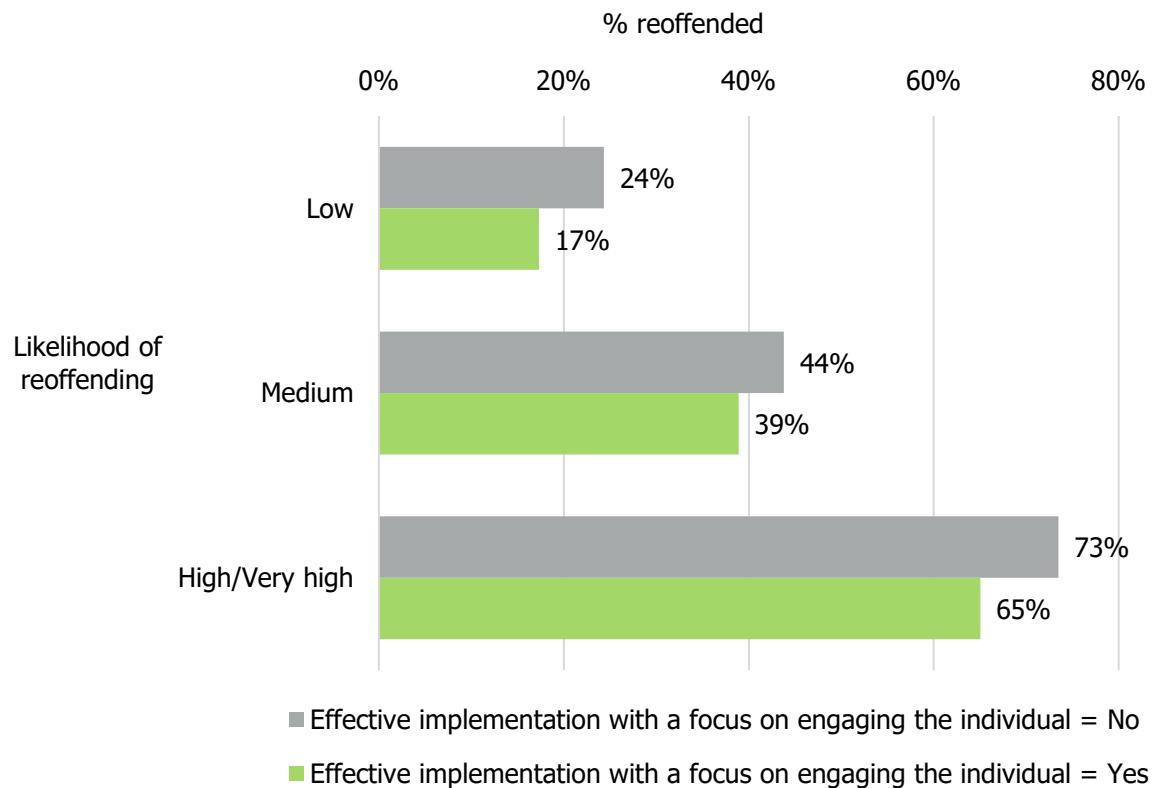
Figure 7: Frequency of reoffending (for reoffenders) by effective implementation (and likelihood of reoffending level)

Mean no. reoffences

Effective implementation with a focus on engaging the individual = No
Effective implementation with a focus on engaging the individual = Yes
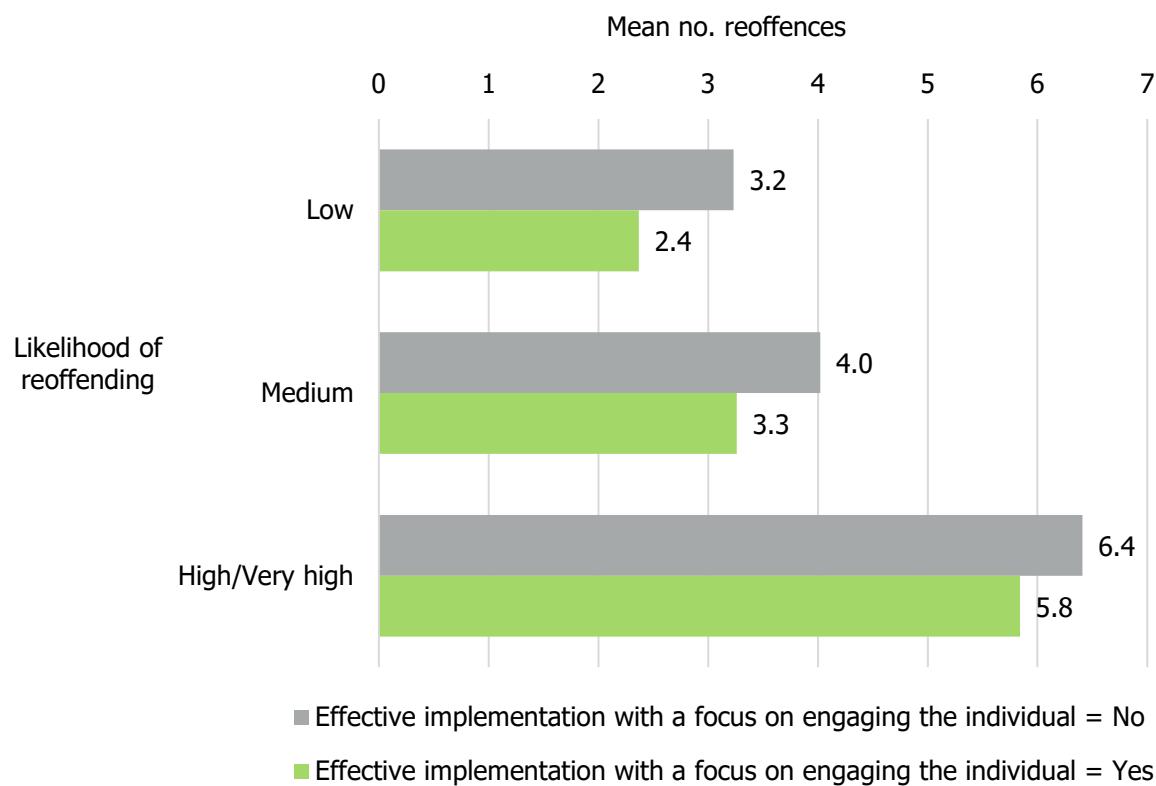
Supporting the individual to complete their sentence

As set out previously, one of the prompts sitting under the engagement key question required inspectors to consider whether sufficient efforts had been made to enable the person on probation to complete the sentence, including flexibility to take appropriate account of their personal circumstances. We expect probation practitioners to use their knowledge/experience and exercise professional judgement about the balance between flexibility and the need to deliver the requirements of the sentence. Factors such as physical and mental health, childcare, and other personal characteristics/background circumstances should all be understood and taken into consideration, and any concerning issues should be addressed in a clear, honest and fair way. As set out in our Research & Analysis Bulletin 2023/05, for flexibility to be successful, both the practitioner and the person under supervision needs to be actively involved, with an ongoing dialogue and constant review of the situation. Notably, flexibility can be taken too far, and work with individuals allowed to drift.

The value of supporting individuals to complete their sentence, allowing appropriate flexibility, is illustrated by Figure 8. The frequency of reoffending (for those who had reoffended) was significantly lower when sufficient efforts had been made to support completion; an average of 4.3 offences compared to 5.7 offences when the efforts were judged to be insufficient.

Figure 8: Frequency of reoffending (for reoffenders) by sentence completion support

Mean no. reoffences

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

4.3

5.7

Sufficient efforts made to enable the individual to complete the sentence, including flexibility to take appropriate account of personal circumstances

■ Yes ■ No
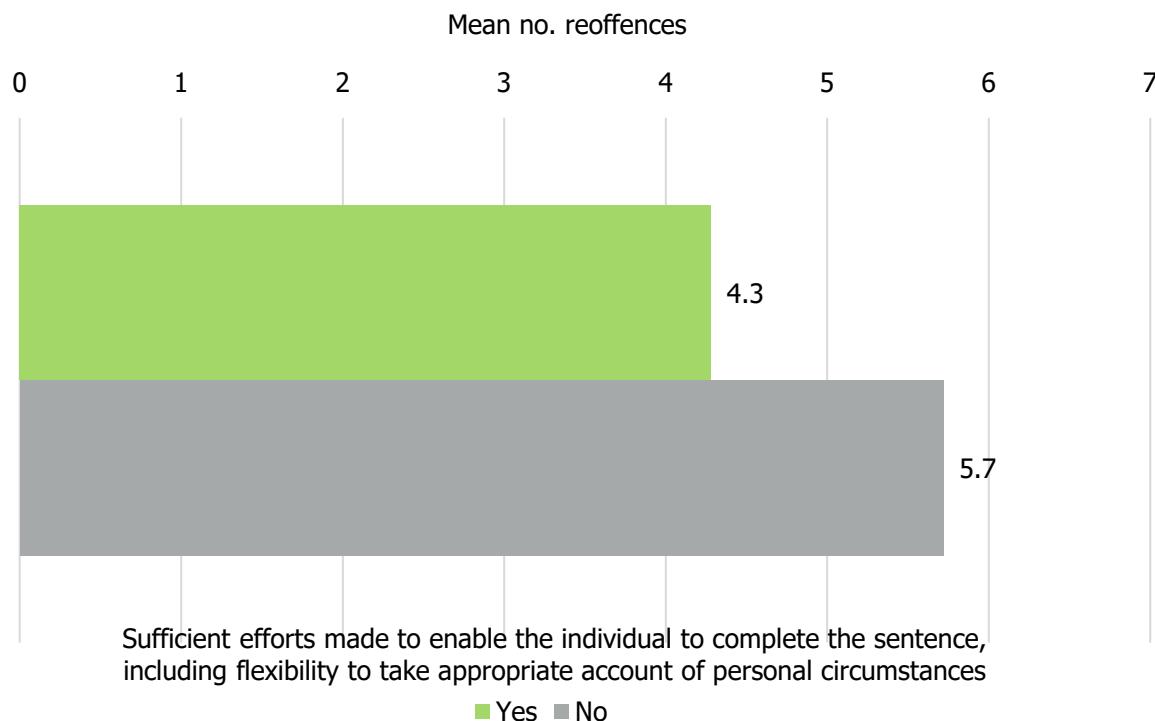
2.2 Effectively supporting the individual's desistance

Research studies indicate that desistance from crime is more likely where the delivery of services 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.

As the desistance research has continued to develop over recent decades (see, for example, Rocque, 2017; Maruna and Mann, 2019; Albertson, 2021; Beck and McGinnis, 2022), further key principles have been highlighted, as set out in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Key principles for supporting desistance

Being realistic about the complexity and difficulty of the process

Developing social as well as human capital

Building and sustaining hope

Key principles for supporting desistance

Individualising support for change

Recognising and developing people's strengths

Recognising and celebrating progress

Respecting and fostering agency (or self-determination)

Working with and through relationships (both personal and professional)

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

- key people in the individual's life were engaged (where appropriate) to support their desistance

- the level and nature of contact was sufficient to support desistance

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

Having considered all the prompts, inspectors then made a yes/no judgement as to whether implementation and delivery effectively supported the individual's desistance. As indicated

by Figures 10 to 12, 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 10: Positive terminations by effective support of the individual's desistance (and likelihood of reoffending level)

% positive terminations

■ Implementation and delivery effectively supports the individual's desistance = No
■ Implementation and delivery effectively supports the individual's desistance = Yes
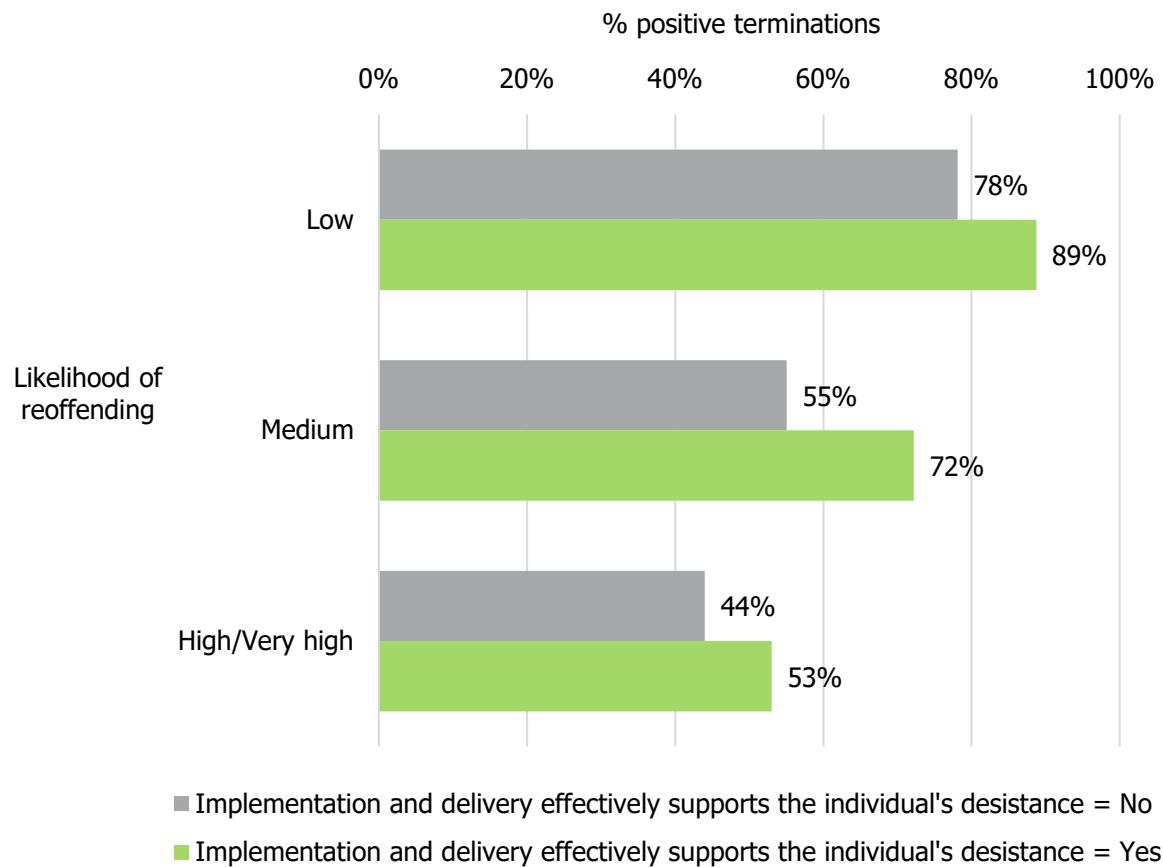
Figure 11: Binary reoffending by effective support of the individual's desistance (and likelihood of reoffending level)

% reoffended

- Implementation and delivery effectively supports the individual's desistance = No
- Implementation and delivery effectively supports the individual's desistance = Yes
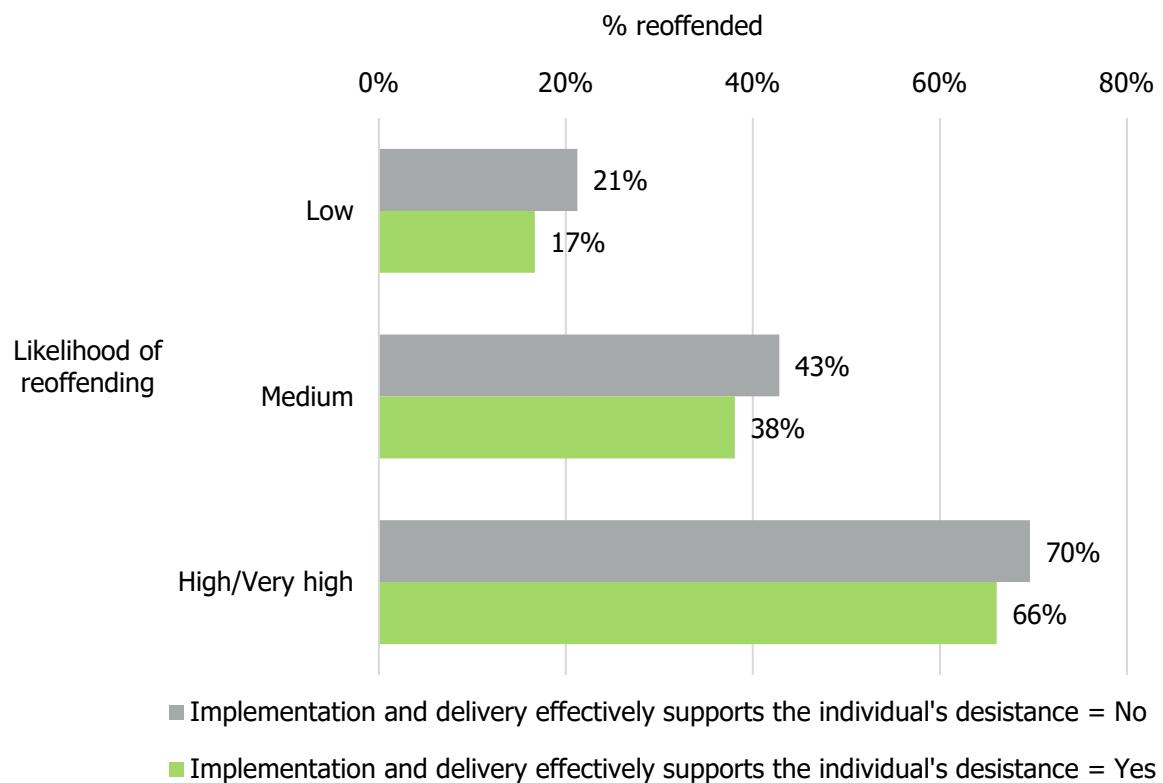
Figure 12: Frequency of reoffending by effective support of the individual's desistance (and likelihood of reoffending level)

Mean no. reoffences

- Implementation and delivery effectively supports the individual's desistance = No
- Implementation and delivery effectively supports the individual's desistance = Yes
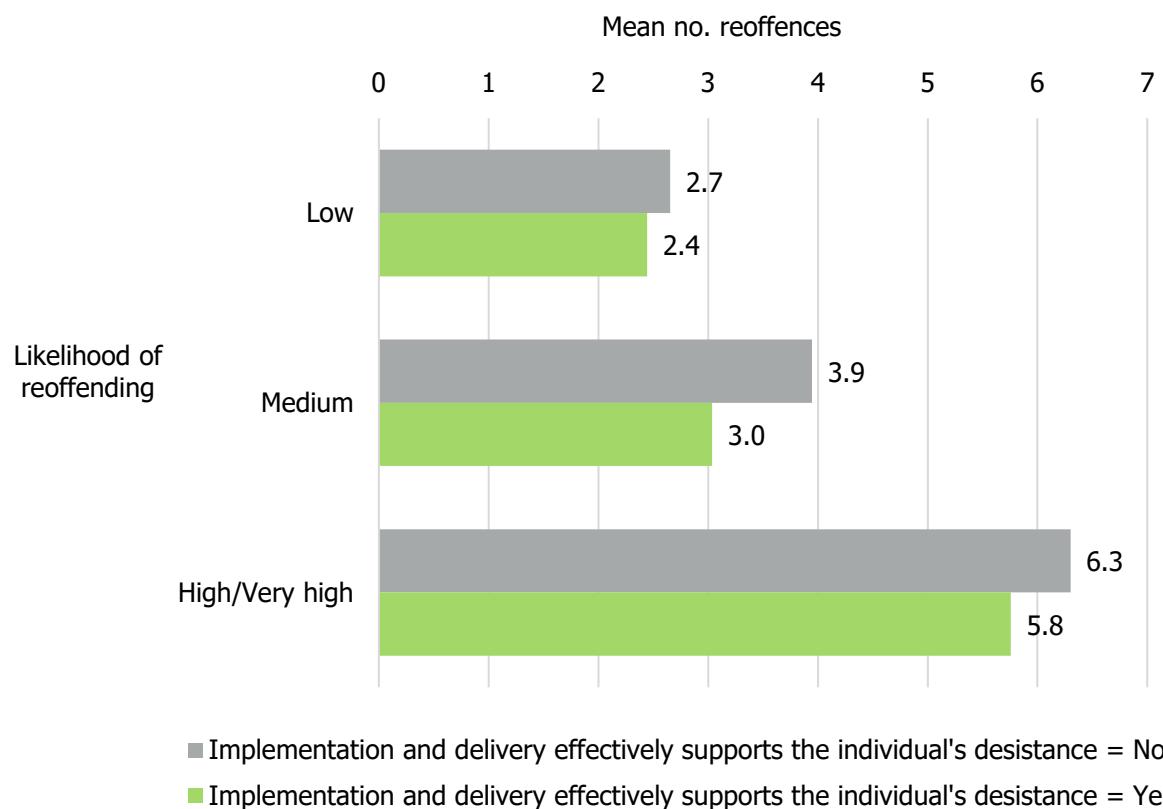
Building upon strengths and enhancing protective factors

As set out above, one of the prompts sitting under the desistance key question required inspectors to consider whether the delivery of services built upon the individual's strengths and enhanced protective factors. This can include interventions to develop internal strengths, such as motivation to change, and those which help to build external protective factors, such as involvement in pro-social activities. Importantly, protective factors have been identified at the individual, family, community and society levels. We previously examined whether probation delivery was being tailored to both needs and strengths in our Research & Analysis Bulletin 2020/03. The importance of utilising protective factors wherever possible was again highlighted, which could include family members who were willing to offer accommodation or take an active part in discussions, or placing a focus on regaining access to children when needs had been appropriately addressed (see also Kitson-Boyce and Betteridge, 2022).

Arguments have been made for a greater shift towards a 'strengths-based' approach (e.g. Maruna and LeBel, 2003) with more focus on 'desistance-related' factors (Farrall, 2002). The value of identifying and building upon strengths and enhancing protective factors is clearly shown by Figures 13 to 15, with significant improvements in sentence completion and reoffending outcomes when this was achieved. For example, the binary reoffending rate in those cases where delivery successfully built upon strengths and enhanced protective factors was about half that where no strengths/protective factors had been identified (30 per cent compared to 63 per cent). A strong focus on strengths and protective factors is thus required across the ASPIRE case supervision process, starting with efforts to identify any potential strengths and protective factors at the assessment stage and then continually reviewing them and the progress that is being made.

Figure 13: Positive terminations by building upon strengths/enhancing protective factors

Delivery builds upon the individual's strengths or enhances protective factors
■ Yes ■ No ■ No relevant strengths or protective factors identified

% positive terminations
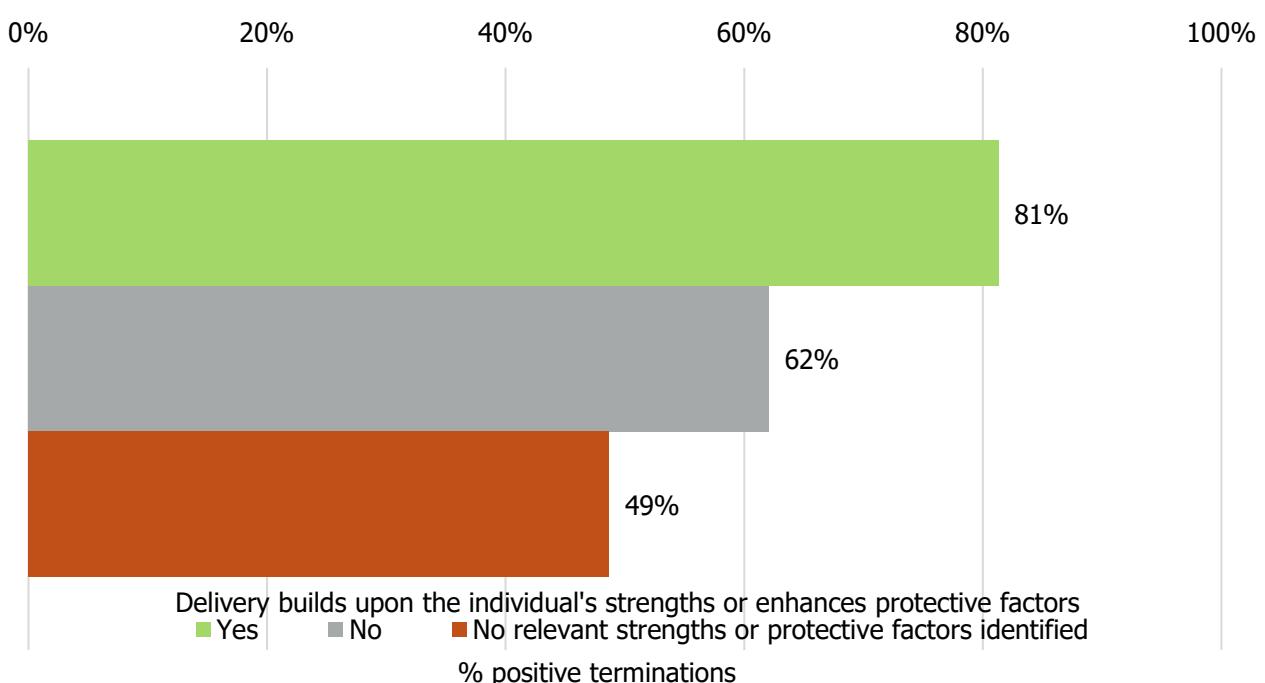
Figure 14: Binary reoffending by building upon strengths/enhancing protective factors

% reoffended

Delivery builds upon the individual's strengths or enhances protective factors

■ Yes ■ No ■ No relevant strengths or protective factors identified
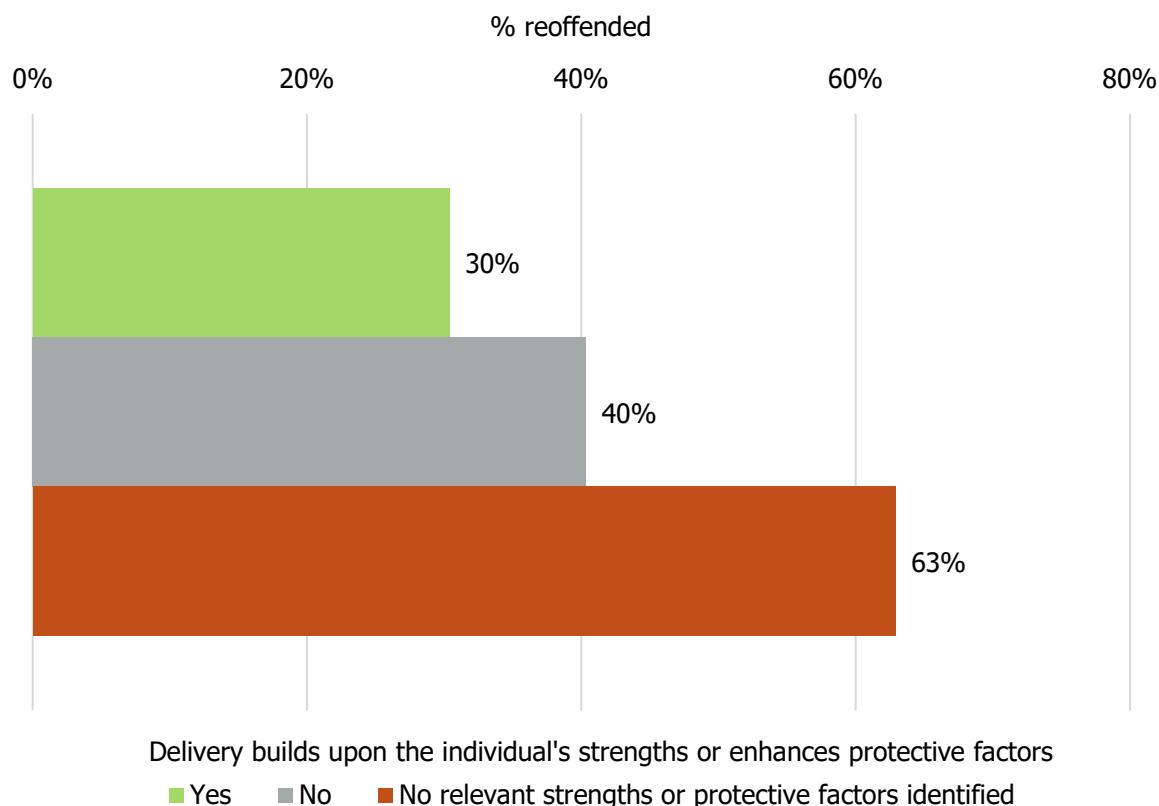
Figure 15: Frequency of reoffending by building upon strengths/enhancing protective factors

Mean no. reoffences

Delivery builds upon the individual's strengths or enhances protective factors

■ Yes ■ No ■ No relevant strengths or protective factors identified
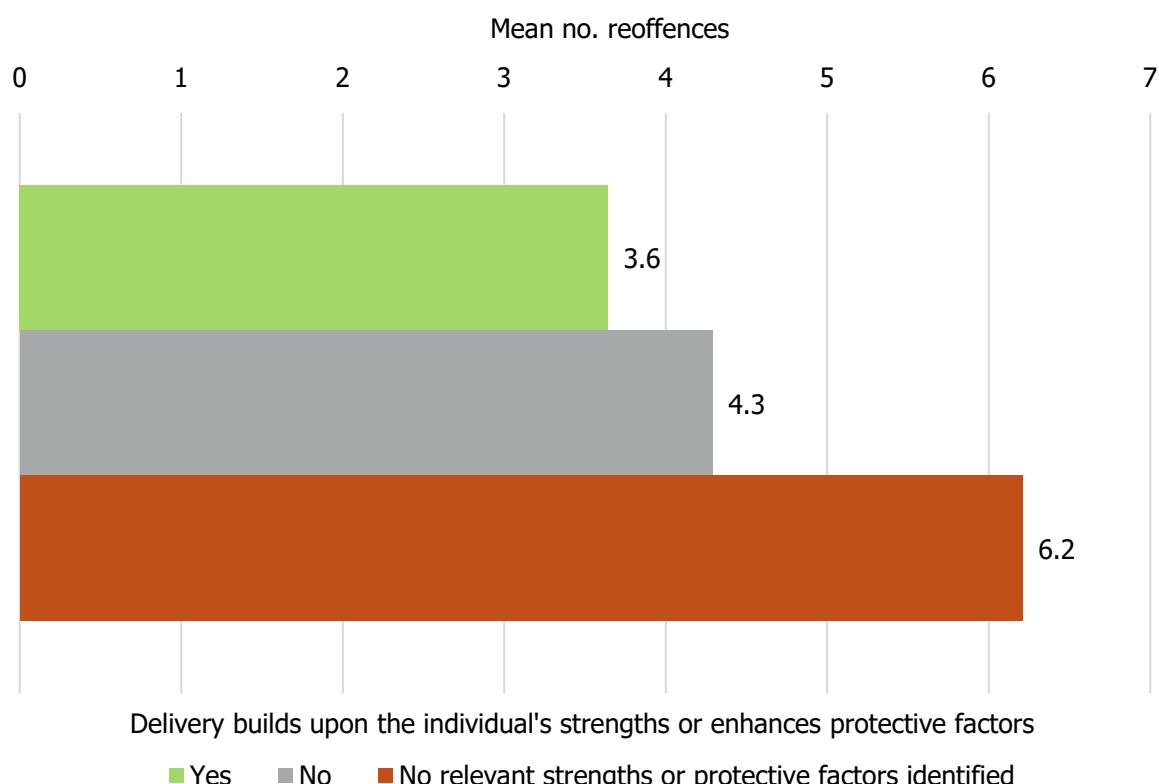
3. Conclusion

Meta-analyses have previously indicated that probation supervision, overall, has a positive effect on reducing reoffending (Smith et al., 2018). More, specifically, there is evidence of the value of training probation staff in core correctional practices (CCPs), which encompasses both relationship skills and structuring skills. A meta-analysis found that the average reoffending rate for those supervised by officers trained in CCPs was 36 per cent, compared to an average reoffending rate of 50 per cent for those supervised by officers lacking CCP training (Chadwick, DeWolf and Serin, 2015).

As recognised by Beck and McGinnis (2022), further evidence is required regarding the key ingredients of probation supervision which contribute to positive outcomes; they state that 'supervision's effectiveness in reducing offending is well established, yet the effectiveness of the type and quality of the prescribed supervision is less known'. The analysis in this bulletin contributes to filling this evidence gap by examining the relationships between inspectors' judgements regarding the quality of differing aspects of delivery and later output/outcome measures in the form of sentence completion and proven reoffending.

As shown by the analysis, positive completion and reduced reoffending were significantly more likely when probation delivery was of a high-quality nature. In those cases where our inspectors judged that the delivery both engaged the person on probation and supported their desistance, the sentence completion rate was 24 percentage points higher and the reoffending rate was 14 percentage points lower compared to those cases where both judgements were negative. Differences were found across the assessed likelihood of reoffending levels (calculated using demographic and offending variables). For those who had reoffended, we also found reduced frequencies of reoffending when probation delivery was of high quality; such reductions rather than total cessation can be more realistic for those with the most entrenched offending histories and behaviours.

Delivery engaged the person on probation and supported their desistance	Delivery did not engage the person on probation and did not support their desistance
78 per cent sentence completion (n=906)	54 per cent sentence completion (n=376)
34 per cent reoffended (n=1,478)	48 per cent reoffended (n=616)
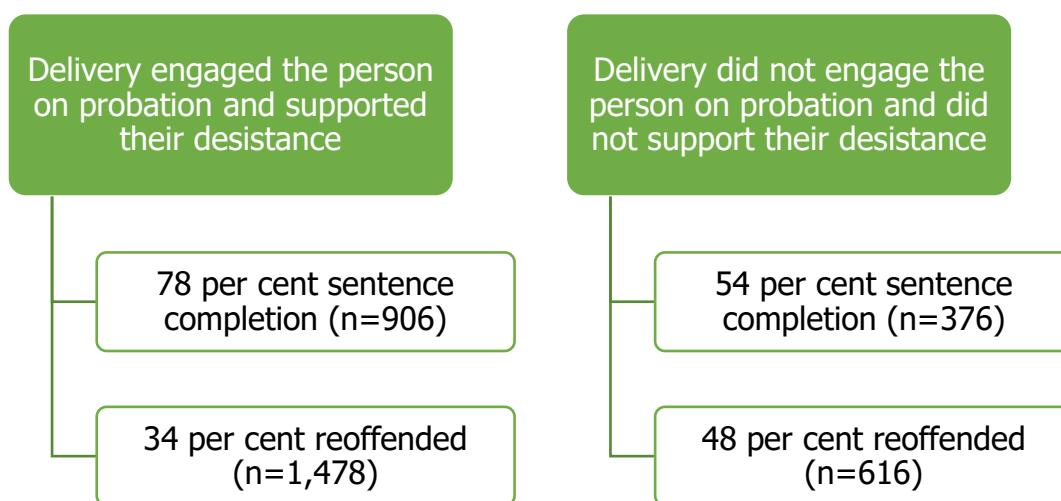
These findings provide one source of validation for the probation delivery logic model, identifying links between high-quality activities and more positive outputs/outcomes. Bearing in mind the economic and social costs of reoffending (Newton et al., 2018) and that about 170,000 were supervised in the community by the probation service at the end of 2022, the potential benefits for individual people and society as a whole are clear. Crucially, practitioners need to be supported and empowered to deliver their best practice and given the time and space to develop secure and trusting relationships, building understanding of

individuals in the context of their lives and discovering what is important to them. Furthermore, practitioners need to be able to access appropriate interventions, resources and opportunities to support people's desistance. As highlighted by the social-ecological framework (see [Academic Insights paper 2022/10](#) by Kemshall and McCartan), responses need to be holistic and person-centred, paying attention to the individual, interpersonal (family and peers), community, and societal levels. A whole systems approach recognises the need for a range of different activities at these various levels, especially when rooted in a strengths-based, trauma-informed way that works with individual need. The value of identifying and building upon strengths and enhancing protective factors is clearly shown in this bulletin, with notable improvements in sentence completion and reoffending outcomes when this was achieved.

While the findings contribute to our understanding of how the quality of probation delivery contributes to beneficial outputs and outcomes for those on probation and for society as a whole, there is clear scope for further research and analysis. Two proven reoffending measures have been examined; a binary reoffended/not reoffended measure and a frequency measure. There would be further value from a severity of reoffending measure, considering whether high-quality probation delivery assists with moves from more serious or harmful offending to relatively less serious forms of offending.

'Proven' reoffending measures do of course have their limitations; they are influenced by other factors such as local police activities and priorities, and they cannot fully capture the complex realities of probation provision and the lives of those being supervised. Further consideration should thus be given to the most appropriate outcome measures for capturing incremental changes and the progress towards desistance from offending, recognising that this process can be gradual and non-linear. Attention needs to be paid to ensuring that these outcome measures are sufficiently timely, can be sufficiently tailored to each person on probation (bearing in mind all the factors linked to desistance) and the supervision/ support provided, and, ideally, are able to support robust claims of attribution.

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Annex A: Methodology

Data

The findings presented in this bulletin are based upon secondary analysis of a matched dataset from three sources of data.

(i) HM Inspectorate of Probation inspections

A full round of probation inspections was completed between June 2018 and June 2019 (first fieldwork weeks), with the reports being published between September 2018 and September 2019 (as set out in Table A1 below). The inspections covered all of the then 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) and the seven National Probation Service (NPS) divisions.

Table A1: Probation inspections, June 2018 – June 2019

Provider	CRC or NPS	Month of report publication
Merseyside	CRC	September 2018
Essex	CRC	October 2018
West Yorkshire	CRC	October 2018
South West South Central	NPS	November 2018
Northumbria	CRC	November 2018
Thames Valley	CRC	November 2018
Midlands	NPS	December 2018
Staffordshire and West Midlands	CRC	December 2018
Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Rutland	CRC	January 2019
Dorset, Devon and Cornwall	CRC	February 2019
Humberside, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire	CRC	February 2019
North West	NPS	February 2019
Durham Tees Valley	CRC	March 2019
South Yorkshire	CRC	March 2019
Cheshire and Greater Manchester	CRC	April 2019
Wales	NPS	April 2019
Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire	CRC	May 2019
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	CRC	May 2019
London	NPS	May 2019
Cumbria and Lancashire	CRC	May 2019
Kent, Surrey and Sussex	CRC	June 2019
North East	NPS	June 2019
Wales	CRC	July 2019

Provider	CRC or NPS	Month of report publication
Warwickshire and West Mercia	CRC	July 2019
London	CRC	August 2019
South East and Eastern	NPS	September 2019
Norfolk and Suffolk	CRC	September 2019
Bristol, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire	CRC	September 2019

The cases inspected were those of individuals who had been under community supervision for approximately six to seven months (either through a community sentence or following release from custody). The overall sample size in each inspection was set to achieve a confidence level of 80 per cent (with a margin of error of five percentage points). Proportionate stratified random sampling was used to achieve sufficiently representative samples – ensuring that the ratios in relation to gender, type of disposal and risk of serious harm level matched those in the eligible population.

Sampled cases were allocated to individual inspectors, who examined the relevant records and interviewed the responsible officers. To support the reliability and validity of their judgements against our standards framework, all cases were reviewed using standard case assessment forms, underpinned by rules and guidance,[8] and further reinforced through training and quality assurance activities.

(ii) nDelius case management system

Sentence completion – an output measure – is recorded within the *nDelius* probation case management system through the use of termination codes. Notably, termination can be for a positive or negative reason. Negative terminations occur when the person on probation reoffends or does not comply with supervision and is sanctioned by a return to prison or return to the court for resentencing. Positive terminations are those where the court sentence or the prison licence runs its full course, or, in some instances, is closed early by the probation practitioner as a recognition that the individual has made good progress.

This data was accessed and matched to the inspection data by MoJ analytical colleagues, covering terminations recorded from November 2017 until the end of December 2021. The matching process followed a two-step sequence:

i.   matching the individual using various combinations of PNCID, surname, first name(s), date of birth, and case reference number (CRN)
ii. matching the sentence record using the sentence/release date. For a successful match, the absolute difference between the corresponding dates could be no more than seven days; if there were two or matches within this period, the record with the smallest absolute difference was selected.

The data was only available for community sentence cases, and the matching was successful in 87.3 per cent of these cases. We found some statistically significant differences between the matched and unmatched cases, with better match rates for cases with lower risk levels (both likelihood of reoffending and risk of serious harm) reflecting the fact that some of the highest risk cases will have been subject to much longer periods of supervision.

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[8] The rules and guidance can be accessed here: https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/about-hmi-probation/about-our-work/documentation-area/probation-inspection/.

(iii) Police National Computer (PNC) extract

Proven reoffending data is held within the PNC database, with the MoJ receiving an extract from this database on a weekly basis for the purposes of producing official statistics and for further research and analysis. This data was accessed and matched to the inspection data by MoJ analytical colleagues, encompassing binary reoffending and frequency of reoffending outcome variables for the period from November 2017 until the end of December 2019. This allowed for a one-year follow-up period, and a six-month waiting period was applied to allow for offences committed towards the end of the follow-up period to be proven by a court, resulting in a conviction, caution, reprimand or final warning. The matching process followed a similar two-step sequence to the one outlined above, with further prioritisation criteria for multiple reoffending records, for example if an individual was flagged as a reoffender in any of the matched records, the highest number of reoffences, and/or the earliest time to reoffend.

The data matching was successful in 87.2 per cent of cases, which compares well to other studies.[9] The match rates were high across differing sub-groups, although there were some statistically significant differences between the matched and unmatched cases. As with the matching for sentence completion, there was better matching for cases with lower risk levels; both likelihood of reoffending (low, 89 per cent; high, 84 per cent) and risk of serious harm (low/medium, 89 per cent; high/very high, 78 per cent).

Analysis

In this bulletin, the percentages presented in the tables and charts are linked to the inspectors' judgments in relation to the engagement and desistance key questions and the underpinning prompts from the implementation and delivery inspection standard. Not all prompts were included in the analysis – one prompt was only applicable in post-release cases and two prompts around enforcement/recall were closely linked to the preceding prompt on non-compliance.

Regression modelling was used to further analyse the case assessment data, examining which sub-group differences were significant when accounting for the relationships between the variables. The individual and case information variables selected as control variables were age, gender, ethnicity, number of previous sanctions, type of case (for reoffending outcomes only), likelihood of reoffending, and risk of serious harm.[10] Age, previous sanctions, and likelihood of reoffending were all entered into the regression models as interval data to avoid losing precision; however, the frequencies are reported within categorical groups in the tables in Annex B. All other variables in the regression models were categorical. For the purpose of the analysis, the summary termination reasons were recoded into a new binary variable consisting of positive and negative terminations:

- Positive termination = *Ran their full course* (n=1,134) and *Terminated early for good progress* (n=27)
- Negative termination = *Terminated early for conviction of an offence* (n=230) and *Terminated early for failure to comply with requirements* (n=252)

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[9] A similar match rate of 90 per cent was achieved in the Offender Management Community Cohort study (see Re-offending by offenders on Community Orders (publishing.service.gov.uk)).
[10] Sentence/licence length was not included due to too much missing data.

Terminated early for other reasons (n=41) and *Excluded* (n=10) were excluded from the analysis.

Binary logistic regression was used to analyse how the relevant probation supervision delivery judgements predicted terminations and binary reoffending. For each outcome measure, separate regression models were run. A forced entry method was used, entering individual/case information control variables in block 1, and the inspection judgements in block 2. This method identifies the unique effect of each independent variable on the prediction of the dependent variable after taking into consideration the effect of all other variables in the model.

Generalised linear negative binomial regression was used to analyse how the relevant probation supervision delivery judgements predicted the number of reoffences. Negative binomial regression can be used for over-dispersed count data, that is where the variance of the data is greater than fits a Poisson distribution. The outcome measure was tested against a Poisson distribution, the test was highly significant ($p < .001$), indicating over-dispersion, thus adopting the negative binomial regression model to test the hypotheses. The model incorporates a log link function that allows for the modelling of linear relationships between the predictors and the transformation of the dependent variables, with an extra parameter to model the over-dispersion. A forced entry method was used, entering individual/case information control variables and the inspection judgements in the same step. This method identifies the unique effect of each independent variable on the prediction of the dependent variable after taking into consideration the effect of all other variables in the model.

Separate regression models were run for each output/outcome variable, analysing the influence of the key question variables and then the underpinning prompts (excluding the key questions). All models included the control individual/demographic variables outlined above. The associations highlighted in the bulletin are those which were found to be statistically significant within the regression models; the significance level used was five per cent ($p < 0.05$), meaning that there is a 95 per cent certainty that the difference did not occur randomly or by chance. However, when interpreting the findings, it should be remembered that probation delivery may be one amongst many influences on the often-complex lives of those being supervised, and this study does not seek to isolate the effect of probation delivery from all other potential influences.

Annex B: Analysis outputs

Table B1: Individual/case characteristics

		Terminations		Binary reoffending		Number of reoffences	
		n	% positive	n	% reoffended	n	Mean no. offences
All cases		1,643	70.7%	2,885	38.8%	1,120	4.54
Age group	18-24	280	67.1%	460	39.6%	182	3.79
	25-39	829	66.8%	1,507	41.5%	626	4.86
	40-59	476	78.2%	823	34.4%	283	4.47
	60+	44	88.6%	71	23.9%	17	3.35
Gender	Male	1,312	70.0%	2,450	38.9%	954	4.40
	Female	315	73.0%	417	37.4%	156	5.50
Ethnicity	White	1,369	70.2%	2,327	40.1%	934	4.77
	Black	83	72.3%	193	36.3%	70	3.31
	Asian	72	76.4%	156	30.8%	48	3.35
	Mixed	52	69.2%	98	35.7%	35	3.91
	Other	19	73.7%	35	22.9%	8	2.50
Number of previous sanctions	0	251	91.2%	330	10.9%	36	2.03
	1	160	89.4%	223	15.2%	34	1.85
	2 to 5	375	74.7%	560	25.2%	141	3.16
	6 to 10	264	69.3%	450	35.1%	158	3.08
	11 to 20	279	59.9%	544	47.8%	260	4.16
	More than 20	282	48.2%	719	64.5%	464	6.09
Type of case	Post-release	n/a	n/a	1,197	43.4%	520	5.32
	Community	1,643	70.7%	1,670	35.4%	591	3.87
Likelihood of reoffending	Low	839	84.3%	1,208	18.6%	225	2.58
	Medium	416	64.2%	819	40.4%	331	3.50
	High	280	51.1%	615	63.3%	389	5.20
	Very high	59	33.9%	167	82.6%	138	8.33

		Terminations		Binary reoffending		Number of reoffences	
		n	% positive	n	% reoffended	n	Mean no. offences
Risk of serious harm	Low	441	72.1%	694	33.4%	232	5.03
	Medium	1,099	71.2%	1,787	40.0%	715	4.50
	High/Very high	66	62.1%	352	40.6%	143	3.88

N.B. Shaded cells indicate that sub-group differences were significant (p<0.05; based upon the logistic or negative binomial regression models which included these characteristics and the inspection prompts).

Table B2: Engagement key question and prompts

		Terminations		Binary reoffending		Number of reoffences	
		n	% positive	n	% reoffended	n	Mean no. offences
Key question: Is the sentence/post-custody period implemented effectively with a focus on engaging the person on probation?	No	440	55.9%	727	47.5%	345	5.10
	Yes	1,199	76.1%	2,149	35.9%	771	4.28
Do the requirements of the sentence start promptly, or at an appropriate time?	No	466	62.0%	710	42.3%	300	4.42
	Yes	1,174	74.2%	2,171	37.7%	818	4.58
Is sufficient focus given to maintaining an effective working relationship with the person on probation?	No	395	57.0%	641	45.4%	291	5.25
	Yes	1,240	75.3%	2,231	36.8%	822	4.30
Are sufficient efforts made to enable the individual to complete the sentence, including flexibility to take appropriate account of their personal circumstances?	No	245	53.5%	408	49.0%	200	5.72
	Yes	1,392	73.9%	2,467	37.1%	915	4.28
Are risks of non-compliance identified and addressed in a timely fashion to reduce the need for enforcement actions?	No	462	59.5%	779	44.2%	344	4.79
	Yes	1,170	75.1%	2,075	36.7%	762	4.42

N.B. Shaded cells indicate that sub-group differences were significant (p<0.05; based upon logistic or negative binomial regression analysis).

Table B3: Desistance key question and prompts

		Terminations		Binary reoffending		Number of reoffences	
		n	% positive	n	% reoffended	n	Mean no. offences
Key question: Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the person on probation's desistance?	No	732	62.7%	1,282	43.3%	555	4.88
	Yes	898	78.0%	1,582	35.1%	555	4.20
Are the delivered services those most likely to reduce reoffending and support desistance, with sufficient attention given to sequencing and the available timescales?	No	690	62.3%	1,241	42.1%	522	5.06
	Yes	893	77.2%	1,555	36.5%	568	4.13
Where possible, in cases where there were relevant strengths or protective factors, does the delivery of services build upon the individual's strengths and enhance protective factors?	No	457	62.1%	729	40.3%	294	4.29
	Yes	918	81.4%	1,623	30.4%	493	3.64
	No, there were no relevant strengths or protective factors	253	49.0%	504	62.9%	317	6.21
In cases where other organisations were involved in the delivery of services, was that sufficiently well coordinated?	No	472	63.8%	801	44.6%	357	5.31
	Yes	781	75.5%	1,474	40.1%	591	4.26
	No, there were no other organisations involved	375	70.7%	582	27.3%	159	3.84
In cases where there are key individuals in the person on probation's life, are they engaged where appropriate to support their desistance?	No	535	66.0%	864	38.1%	329	4.51
	Yes	496	80.6%	1,055	34.8%	367	4.01
	No, there were no appropriate individuals	589	66.9%	922	43.5%	401	5.00
Is the level and nature of contact sufficient to reduce reoffending and support desistance?	No	376	77.4%	636	32.4%	206	4.42
	Yes	877	82.8%	1,576	32.0%	504	3.56
	No, mostly due to non-compliance of the individual	379	36.7%	652	61.5%	401	5.87
Are local services engaged to support and sustain desistance during the sentence and beyond?	No	529	62.6%	891	43.0%	383	4.95
	Yes	824	74.0%	1,528	41.2%	629	4.37
	No, not required	274	78.8%	440	22.0%	97	4.07

N.B. Shaded cells indicate that sub-group differences were significant (based upon logistic or negative binomial regression analysis).