



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

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Participation Strategy 2025-2027

HM Inspectorate of Probation, May 2025

Foreword

We published our first *Service User Engagement Strategy* in 2019. Our aim was to become a more inclusive organisation, seeking the views of and responding to those with lived experience of the services we inspect. Since its publication, we have made good progress on each of the objectives set. We have improved our engagement with people on probation, and with children, parents and carers who have experienced youth justice services. We routinely achieve high-quality feedback on these services across our inspection and research activity.

We now aim to go beyond talking to individuals about their experiences of the services that we inspect. We want to broaden the scope of how we work with people on probation, and children, parents and carers, by embedding participation into how we deliver our work.

We will achieve this through:

- establishing advisory groups of both people on probation and children with lived experience of the criminal justice system
- asking these groups to advise us on key elements of our business
- analysing and including the views of our advisory groups as we develop our work
- ensuring our advisory groups can see their contributions come through in the work we deliver.

In addition, we will review our recruitment and retention practices and work to remove barriers to the employment of those with lived experience of the criminal justice system. We believe that people with lived experience of the criminal justice system have a wealth of knowledge and insight. This will add a richness of knowledge and experience that will complement the substantial learned experience within our current staff group.

Finally, we are an organisation that believes in every individual's ability to change. We understand the impact that employment can have on desistance and will continue to focus our participation strategy on providing opportunities for people to benefit from this.

Definitions

We define 'lived experience' as the perspective, knowledge and expertise an individual gains through direct experience of the criminal justice system.

'Learned experience' refers to the contribution provided by our staff. It emphasises their detailed understanding of probation services, gained through training and professional experience.

We recognise the value that both types of experience bring to our organisation.

Scope

The third principle of inspection, which all criminal justice inspectorates have signed up to,¹ is that: 'Inspection should have a clear focus on the experience of those for whom the service is provided, as well as on internal management arrangements.'

We believe that, through constructive contributions, people who have used probation and youth justice services can help us develop approaches that are in line with our organisational values of being influential, independent, professional, inclusive and diverse.

Our challenge across this work is that we do not provide a direct frontline service to people on probation or in the youth justice service.

To address this, we have set ourselves the challenge of moving from treating people with lived experience as passive recipients of probation and youth justice services, and of our own services as an inspectorate, to providing them with more input into the way we carry out our inspections and our wider business.

We want to take a structured, participatory, and collaborative approach to working with people with lived experience of the criminal justice system.

In developing our approach, we have used the Revolving Doors Agency (2016) adaptation of Arnstein's 1969 'ladder of participation'. This sets out different levels of service user involvement, ranging from 'no control', up to 'full control'. Our three objectives will be set at the levels of 'participation' and 'sharing power'.



Source: Adapted from Arnstein's A Ladder of Participation, Hart & Groundswell

¹ Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2019). Joint Inspection Business Plan 2019-21.

We will continue to build on our existing work with people who use probation and youth justice services. This means treating them as equal partners with something valuable to give, breaking down barriers between people with lived experience and professionals, building on people's capabilities, developing peer support networks and, ultimately, improving service outcomes.

In working with people with lived experience, we will take a participatory approach based on the following principles:

Collaborative	We will encourage, listen to, and respond to the views of people with lived experience.
Informative	We will work to ensure our activities deliver the maximum benefit to those who participate.
Respectful	We will respect the individuals we work with, and their lived experience, and treat them as equals.
Inclusive	We will actively encourage people with a broad range of lived experience to participate and will ensure we are able to support the needs of all involved.
Relevant	We will make sure all our activities are relevant and targeted to maximise both our impact and the benefit to those involved.

Why we work alongside people with lived experience

Giving people with lived experience a voice in how we develop and deliver our work is a priority for us. This is because:

- we are interested in their views about what matters and how our work can have the most impact
- we believe that people with lived experience bring unique insights based on their own experiences
- we want to benefit the individuals we work with, by providing opportunities for training and employment, and developing confidence and broadening skillsets
- working with people with lived experience will benefit our staff, helping to build their knowledge and expertise, and greater confidence in their work
- we want to continue to be a representative organisation and are working towards a fully diverse staff group, including individuals with lived experience.

How we're delivering

Strategic objective one:

We will seek, analyse and use the views of people on probation, children, and parents and carers about the services they receive to help inform our inspection judgements.

In our inspections we consider the extent to which both probation and youth justice services respond to individuals' needs and involve them in the way they deliver their work. This is a fundamental part of our inspection approach, and we will continue to make judgements about this across our standards and ratings.

To make these judgements, we engage with people who use the services we inspect. We use several different methods of gathering feedback from them, as part of our inspection activity. This enables us to maximise the quantity and quality of feedback, and to obtain feedback from as diverse a group of individuals as possible. We are committed to providing the broadest opportunities for people to get involved, so that our inspections are equitable, accessible, inclusive, and supportive for all those who wish to engage with us.

We believe that we have made solid and sustainable progress in seeking and analysing the views of people with lived experience across all of our inspection and research activity. We will continue to do so, and to improve the way that we use this analysis to maximise our impact for people with lived experience.

Our progress:

In our probation and youth justice inspections, we provide several opportunities for those with current or recent experience of working with services to engage with us. We offer options for this that recognise and respond to their diverse needs, including telephone contact, meeting in person, a video call, or meeting as a group as well as responding to a text survey. This framework is based on a consultation we carried out with children when we were developing our standards and approach to inspection. We use the information obtained to inform our inspection findings and feedback to the youth justice service. A specific section of the inspection report sets out the findings.

In our thematic inspection programme, we commission the registered charity User Voice² to capture the views of individuals who have directly experienced the justice system. Peer researchers with lived experience design the interview questions, conduct interviews, undertake analysis, and contribute to the final report. User Voice present their findings at our thematic inspection launch events, which are led by the Chief Inspector.

We will begin our inspections of approved premises in 2025. This is a new inspection programme, and seeking, using, and analysing the views of residents has a central role in our standards and approach. Each time we inspect an approved premises, every resident will be invited to give their views about the quality of delivery they have experienced. We will gather feedback using both face-to-face interviews and a survey. This feedback will be used as a source of evidence to help us judge and rate each approved premises across all inspection standards.

When commissioning and designing research projects, we consider how to give a strong voice to people on probation and children, parents, and carers who have worked with youth justice services. We focus on creating inclusive spaces where all views and perspectives are respected and valued. Two approaches that we have adopted in our commissioned projects are:

- In a project examining the implementation and delivery of community resolutions (Marshall et al., 2023), focus groups were carried out with young people using Ketso Kits. These are portable kits laid out on tables where participants can add their ideas (in written or visual format) on specially made 'leaves' before placing them on a central felt to create clusters of ideas.
- In a project on the supervision of care-experienced children (Staples and Staines, 2024), appropriate ways of engaging with the children were discussed with a care-experienced young person's research group. The researchers gathered views on the questions to ask and the most appropriate format for conducting the research. They then adopted a Mobile Instant Messaging Interviewing (MIMI) approach, using WhatsApp, as a core method (alongside an interview option) because of its accessibility and familiarity to young people. They provided the option for participants to record voice notes if preferred, and to use other features such as emojis, gifs, photos and music.

Strategic objective two:

We will seek, analyse and use the views of adults and children with lived experience to shape our work and how we deliver it.

We want to make our inspection and research activity as impactful as possible by ensuring it is informed by people who have direct experience of the services that we inspect. We believe that through constructive contributions, people who have experienced probation and youth justice services can help us develop approaches that are in line with our organisational values of being influential, independent, professional, inclusive and diverse. We will not just seek feedback but will analyse and use that feedback effectively in the delivery of our work.

Routinely seeking, analysing and using the views of people in this way presents particular challenges, because we do not provide a direct frontline service to those with lived experience. Nonetheless we can move from treating people who have used probation and youth justice services as passive recipients of our inspections to providing them with more input into the way we carry out our business. In doing so, we want to access as diverse and

² [Home - User Voice](https://www.uservice.org/) (<https://www.uservice.org/>)

wide a group of people as possible so that we can source a range of views about probation and youth justice services.

Our progress:

We already seek, analyse, and use the views of people with lived experience when we introduce new inspection programmes.

- For our development work on the 2025 youth inspection programme, we spoke to children with lived experience of the youth justice system. Their views about what a good youth justice service should look like were invaluable to us in developing our quality standards for inspection.
- In developing our approved premises inspection programme in 2024, we consulted with adults living in approved premises to find out what was important to them and how we could carry out our inspections most effectively in a residential environment. This information was invaluable as we shaped our standards and approach.

We have established a lived experience advisory group for adults who have experienced probation services. This will meet quarterly from April 2025 and will be made up of people with lived experience of probation services across England and Wales. We aim to have a diverse membership, with representatives from different backgrounds and from a variety of areas of England and Wales. The group will be chaired by a senior member of our staff, with other staff members providing a supporting role.

To engage with children who have lived experience of the youth justice system, we will work with up to six youth justice services across England and Wales who already have their own established child advisory groups or panels. We will encourage a diverse group of children to join. We think working alongside youth justice services in this way will enable us to best engage with children at the same time as supporting them in their participation. We will meet each group up to three times a year. This will be facilitated by trained inspectorate staff and supported by staff from the youth justice service.

Both the adult and the child groups will provide a structured participatory and collaborative approach between us and people who have used probation or youth justice services to:

1. ensure our ways of working are informed by the end user
2. provide us with honest feedback on proposed or actual ways of working
3. routinely consider issues of wellbeing, and diversity and inclusion, working to embed these issues across everything we do
4. ensure our reporting and ways of working are accessible to the end user
5. celebrate where things are going well and build on these positive approaches

Staff members chairing both the probation and youth justice lived experience advisory groups will take the feedback received into the relevant work strands, where it will be analysed and used to shape our work.

Strategic objective three:

We will enable people with lived experience to thrive as part of our workforce.

We make sure we have people with sufficient learned experience in our organisation, by employing probation or youth justice professionals to our inspector and assistant inspector roles and skilled and knowledgeable individuals to all roles.

We will now focus on securing and learning from people with lived experience, alongside those with learned experience, in our work to recruit and retain a skilled and diverse staff team.

- We will open our recruitment campaigns to those who have experience of the criminal justice system, giving people with lived experience the opportunity to compete for roles at the Inspectorate based on their skills and competencies. This will put those with lived experience on an equal footing with our other staff, and will bring lived, as well as learned, experience to our work.
- We will continue to seek help and advice from others who have achieved this aim, to guide us in how we can further open up our employment opportunities. We will seek their help to ensure our recruitment encourages those with lived experience to apply to work, or to seek a work placement, with us.
- We will take a strategic approach in our discussions with the Ministry of Justice to ensure that, as far as possible, we can overcome the systemic barriers to employing people with lived experience. We will work to ensure any such barriers are identified and addressed, putting us in the strongest possible position to recruit and retain individuals with lived experience.

Next steps

This is a new two-year strategy running from April 2025 to March 2027.

Our work on strategic objectives one and two is underway and we will continue to build on our achievements and undertake regular monitoring, evaluation and review to ensure we best achieve each objective.

Strategic objective three is a new piece of work for us and work will begin during 2025. We will monitor, evaluate and review our progress at appropriate intervals.

We will publish a full review of our strategy in 2026/2027.