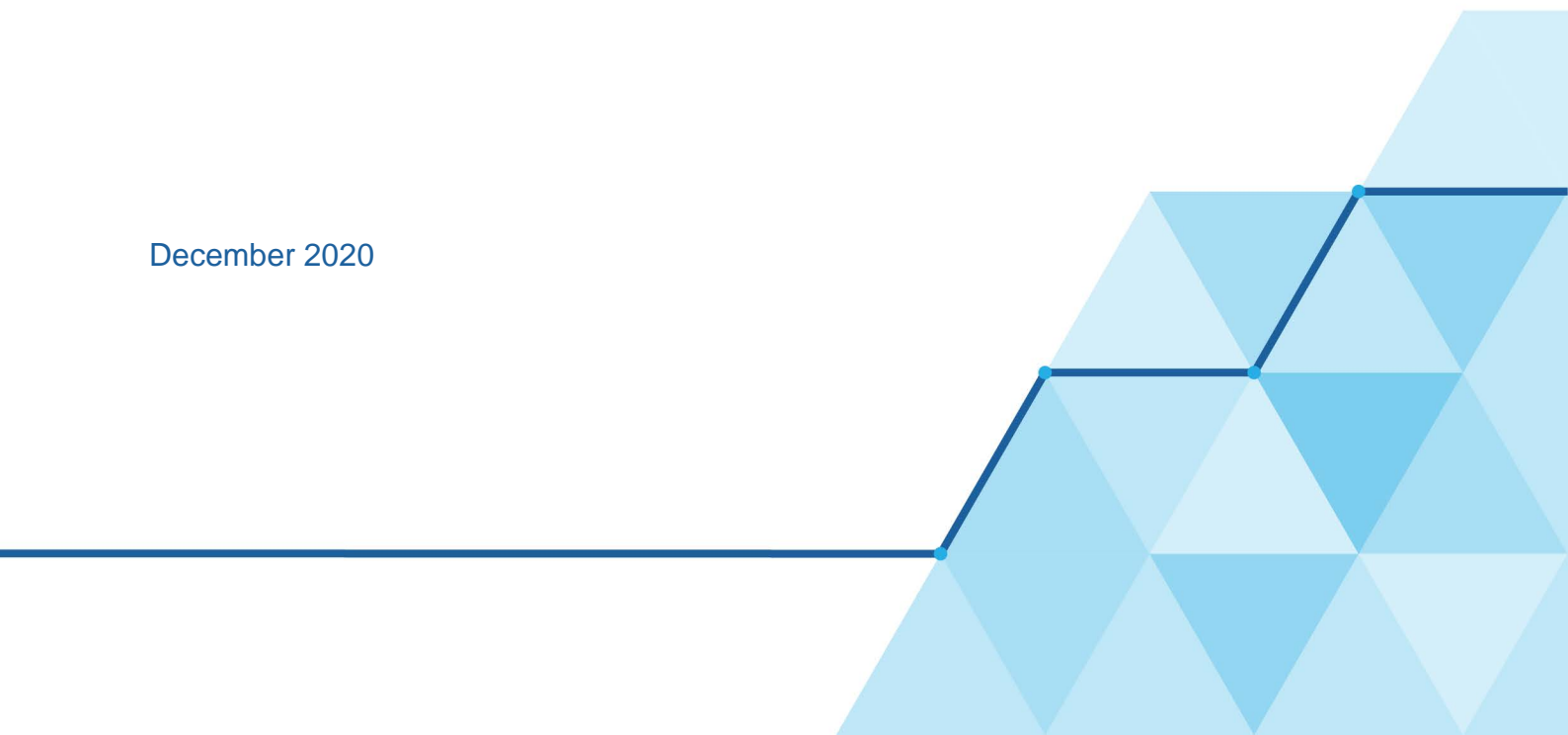




Ministry  
of Justice

# Areas of Research Interest

December 2020



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# Foreword

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is a major government department, working to protect and advance the principles of justice and deliver a world-class justice system that works for everyone. Our responsibilities are significant, wide-ranging and have implications for some of the most vulnerable people in society. They range from building and maintaining the prisons, youth and courts estate, to developing interventions that reduce reoffending and protect the public, to ensuring children's needs are put first in legal decisions about their care.

It is imperative that robust research and analysis underpins this remit. We need to understand who, why and how people come into contact with our system and what we can do to improve their experiences and outcomes. As a department, we are committed to enhancing the way data and evidence is used, to shape policy and operational decisions and drive improvements to justice outcomes.

We are proud to be working with a diverse community of analysts at MoJ, including economists, operational and social researchers, statisticians and data scientists. Our combined methodological expertise, policy and operational knowledge and drive to continually enhance the analysis we provide makes for better decision-making. We want to strengthen this with a more comprehensive, dedicated and coordinated approach to engagement with our external partners. Only by drawing on the wealth of their knowledge and expertise, can we make sure the department is maximising the role of evidential insights.

The Areas of Research Interest (ARI) publication reflects this ambition. It will be used as the basis for ongoing conversations, collaboration and challenge with experts in academia, research organisations and funding bodies. Our aim is to increase the available evidence against our priorities, enhance our combined strategic research capabilities, and reinforce the impact of evidence at all stages of policy and operational development and evaluation.

Our ambitious and pioneering data-linking programme, [Data First](#), is one way we are demonstrating our commitments; representing the most substantial investment across Whitehall by Administrative Data Research UK (ADR UK). Data First is unlocking the potential of the wealth of our data by linking administrative datasets from across the justice system and beyond and enabling researchers to access the data in an ethical and responsible way. By facilitating justice system research, we are creating opportunities for new insights on our users and their needs, pathways and outcomes across a range of public services. We are excited to share our lessons from this project as we pave the way across government to collaborate with experts and make progress against our research priorities.

The unprecedented challenges caused by the Covid-19 pandemic have only underlined the need for robust, timely and relevant research and data. Our aims as a department align with the wider government ambition, outlined in the [UK Research and Development Roadmap](#), to make significant investments in science and research to deliver benefits for society across the UK. The [National Data Strategy](#) further makes the case for developing a coherent approach for the UK to build a world-leading data economy, ensuring people can access data when they need it and trust how it is used.

We are pleased to see the publication of this ARI. As we move forwards, we are excited about what we can accomplish through positive engagement, collaboration and constructive challenge from our wider research community. We look forward to working with you.

**Alexy Buck and Rachel Dubourg**  
MoJ Chief Social Researchers

# Introduction

## Structure and content

This Areas of Research Interest (ARI) summarises MoJ's evidence needs over the next three to five years, aligned with the department's strategic objectives for the system<sup>1</sup>. These objectives provide the structure for the substantive sections of this ARI (pages 7 to 22). They are:

1. Ensure access to justice in a way that best meets people's needs
2. Support a flourishing legal services sector
3. Provide a transparent and efficient court system
4. Ensure that prisons are decent, safe and productive places to live and work
5. Protect the public from harm
6. Reduce rates of reoffending and improve life chances

For each objective we have provided a high-level narrative that frames our research priorities, as well as a set of more detailed research questions.

Whilst we already have considerable evidence underpinning these themes, it is not the purpose or intention of this ARI to outline what we already know. The need to continually develop the evidence base is an ongoing one.

Our areas of research interest are wide-ranging, evolving and cut across multiple domains. We have therefore dedicated a section of this ARI ([on page 23](#)) to the themes that transcend the substantive areas. These themes include equality and diversity, and disproportionality in outcome owing to a range of underlying factors and circumstances. The themes provide lenses through which the ARI questions can be viewed, enabling us to take cross-sectional approaches when addressing important issues.

Furthermore, as multi-disciplinary methodologies are required to improve the evidence base, we have included a section on methodological learning to encourage interest from a varied range of external experts ([on page 24](#)).

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<sup>1</sup> The Spending Review 2020 set out the priority outcomes the MoJ is responsible for: protect the public from serious offenders and improve the safety and security of our prisons; reduce reoffending; and deliver swift access to justice. Further details on the MoJ Strategy and plan to deliver outcomes will be published in the MoJ Outcome Delivery Plan in 2021.

## ARI development

The themes and questions in this ARI were developed via a comprehensive assessment of our departmental evidence needs in consultation with our internal partners. MoJ analysts worked alongside policymakers and operational colleagues to map the evidence base across the justice system and identify our critical gaps and priorities. We liaised with our partner agencies and Arms' Length Bodies (ALBs) in developing this document, although the content substantively reflects the evidence needs of the core MoJ.

Some areas of interest remain similar to our first ARI [publication in 2018](#), reflecting long-standing and complex evidence needs. Other questions are new or have heightened significance against the current social and political context.

The research questions posed in this ARI reflect our priorities, but it is not intended to be an exhaustive or definitive set of questions that encompass all our evidence interests. The questions are not listed in any order of priority. You can see a visual summary of the ARI content [on page 6](#).

## Using this ARI

MoJ will use this ARI as a basis to engage with academics and research organisations from across the justice research landscape and the disciplinary spectrum. We hope that external researchers and funding organisations will find the document useful in drawing attention to the areas where research can have most impact for future policy and operational decision-making.

We have included a section on communication and collaboration at the end of this document, providing ways to get in touch and enable the conversations required to develop partnerships and collaboration.

# IMPROVING JUSTICE OUTCOMES



through innovative research, data, and analysis

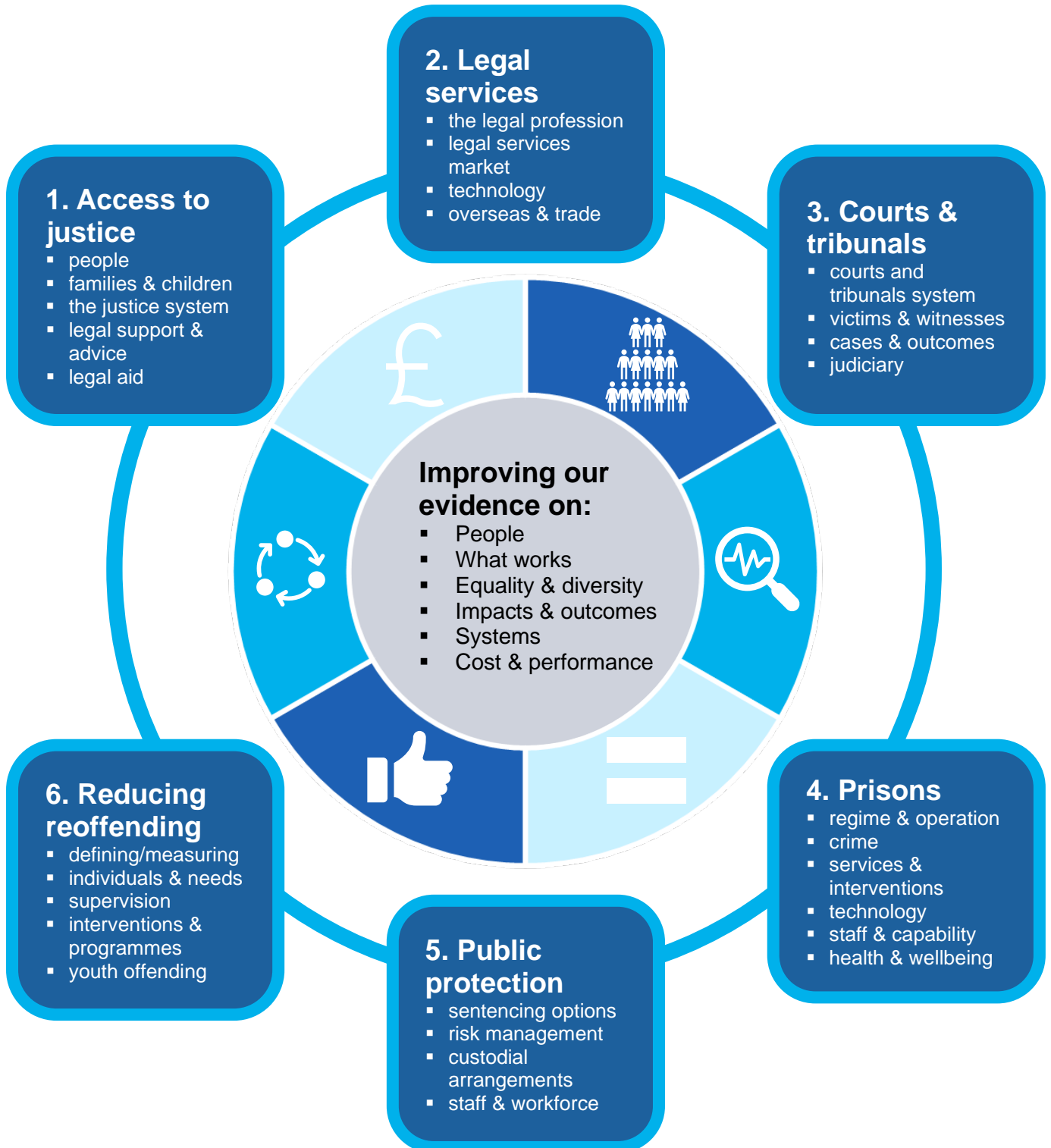


Figure 1 Areas of Research Interest graphic

# 1. Ensure access to justice in a way that best meets people's needs

**We want to improve the way people are supported in their interactions with the justice system, to target timely and efficient resolutions that lead to positive and sustainable outcomes for all parties involved.**

To do this we need to enrich our understanding of people who access the system and, critically, those who do not, so we can ensure people have swift access to a system that meets their needs. This includes greater understanding of their backgrounds, legal capabilities and the impact of new technology. We want to better understand the efficiency and effectiveness of all stages in the justice system, to inform process improvements that will remove bottlenecks and costs that impact outcomes.

We need to understand how different forms of early legal advice and support can work effectively for different groups, ensuring they can connect with the most appropriate services and achieve the best outcomes.

Research questions, reflective of our evidence priorities, include:

## People

- What are people's experiences of dealing with justice problems? How can they be supported to access and navigate the justice system, enforce their rights, and achieve the best outcomes? How does this vary by problem type, level of legal capability, and awareness of support?
- How do geographic, demographic, cultural, and other factors affect people's ability to resolve their legal problems?
- Which groups struggle most to resolve their justice problems, either through inaction or difficulty accessing the justice system and wider support services?
- How can we better understand how problems link, interact, and reinforce, and how people move through different systems as they attempt to resolve them? Including unemployment, debt, housing, or family issues.
- How effective are support structures, for example intermediaries, in facilitating access to justice for vulnerable people, including victims and witnesses?



## Families and children

- What are the long-term impacts on children's developmental outcomes because of placements made under public law orders in care proceedings? Including care orders, placement orders, and special guardianship orders?
- How do orders made in private family law proceedings – for example, resolving disputes about child or financial arrangements – affect individual and family outcomes? What works, for whom, to deliver positive and sustainable outcomes?
- How can we minimise the harm to those engaging with the family justice system? What factors affect the effectiveness of Domestic Violence Protection Orders and other measures in the Domestic Abuse Bill?

## The justice system

- How can we better understand drivers of demand in the justice system, so that we support early problem resolution where appropriate, whilst ensuring the formal justice system is accessible to those who need it?
- To what extent do alternative dispute resolutions – particularly mediation – affect outcomes for those involved? What works, for whom, to incentivise and deliver positive and sustainable outcomes?
- How can we better meet the needs of those with legal issues to resolve in either the civil or family justice system and the criminal justice system concurrently, for example, domestic abuse victims, victims of fraud, or defendants facing eviction?

## Legal support and advice

- How do we improve legal awareness and capability in the population, so that people are able to identify they have a legal problem and seek appropriate help?
- When people seek advice, how do we ensure they find useful and accessible information that empowers them – either towards self-help, or to access the most appropriate services for their needs?
- Where are the notable gaps in the provision of legal advice and support, and how can we best intervene to help fill them? How do different advice and support services interact, share information, and refer individuals between organisations?
- How do we best assist early advice and support services to deal with changes in legal need in the population and the demand for services? How do we measure the impact of early advice on short, medium, and longer-term outcomes, and the economic costs and benefits?

## Legal aid

- How do different individuals and groups perceive their experiences of legal aid services? How does this vary by the nature of their legal problem, advice and support acquired, jurisdiction and outcome?
- What are the outcomes of receiving legal aid, and how do they vary by the type of service and time at which they were provided? What are the long-term outcomes for those who access and those who do not, but are eligible for legal aid?
- How do geographical and demographic factors affect legal aid awareness and uptake? How does legal aid uptake vary by eligibility?

## 2. Support a flourishing legal services sector

**We want to create the conditions for the UK's legal services sector to flourish by developing a sustainable, efficient and effective system. This includes securing legal services market access overseas, growing the UK's market share, and enhancing the international competitiveness and attractiveness of the legal sector.**

To do this we need to strengthen and broaden our understanding of individual and consumer legal needs and develop a detailed UK-wide understanding of the legal services sector and the effectiveness of the legal profession in meeting these needs.

We want to recognise what affects legal profession diversity to understand how to drive equality. We want to comprehensively understand the UK legal sector's foreign trade and existing trading relationships, regulatory barriers, and importantly the economic impact of removing barriers to the legal services sector and UK economy. Finally, we wish to understand the full impact of specialist legal technology ('LawTech') that is designed to support the provision of legal services.

Research questions, reflective of our evidence priorities, include:

### The legal profession

- Why do recruitment, career progression and pathways, and retention within the legal profession, vary by protected characteristics, socio-economic and socio-demographic background?
- What are the enablers to encouraging and sustaining greater diversity – in terms of protected characteristics and socio-economic background – in the legal profession, particularly within senior roles?
- How sustainable are different types of role within the legal profession and sector? Particularly criminal defence and specialist legal roles such as mental health lawyers?
- How do the legal professions and services available within the legal sectors of Scotland and Northern Ireland compare with the legal profession in England and Wales?

## The legal services market

- What works to promote and maintain competitiveness within the legal services market and ensure individuals can access quality services at a fair and accessible price, whilst growing the sector overall?
- What is the scale, scope and function of the unregulated legal services market in England and Wales?
- How effective are industry mechanisms and frameworks in ensuring they resolve complaints and meet the wider regulatory needs of the legal services market and profession?

## Technology

- How much specialist technological (LawTech) investment and adoption takes place in the legal sector? How does this differ by the type and size of legal firm or organisation, and for what services and outputs?
- How does LawTech affect the productivity, cost effectiveness, and efficiency of different services and outputs in the legal sector?
- How might technology shape the future requirements of, and services offered by, the legal profession and sector? How can LawTech and innovation support greater access to justice?
- What are the backgrounds of individuals who currently work within LawTech? How might future employment within the legal sector change because of technology and technological investment?
- What are the ethical considerations of LawTech and the enhanced usage of technology within the legal sector? What, if any, regulatory framework or guidelines are required to ensure the fair use and application of LawTech?

## Overseas and trade

- What are the legal activities of UK firms and legal professionals that are permanently established in non-EU, overseas and emerging markets?
- What are the barriers – including regulatory barriers – to legal services trade with the UK's overseas markets and what levers can help overcome these?
- How does the UK legal sector meet the needs of foreign markets through cross-border trade in services (including temporary services)?

### 3. Provide a transparent and efficient court system

**We want to modernise the procedures and infrastructure of our courts and tribunals, leading an effective, efficient and coordinated justice system across all the civil, criminal and family justice jurisdictions.**

To do this we need to complement existing evaluation work to better understand the wider and downstream societal implications of court and tribunals reform, the impact on access to justice and outcomes, and the effect of reform on different individuals and groups. We need to learn from new and novel approaches to testing and evaluation, supported by digital technology.

We need to better understand judicial diversity, to enable equitable recruitment. Looking to the future, we need to enhance our evidence on what drives changes in case complexity and efficiency, to inform improvements in case progression, and how technology can further help deliver effective outcomes.

Research questions, reflective of our evidence priorities, include:

#### The courts and tribunals system

- How do individuals in the courts and tribunals system vary by, for example, protected characteristics, socio-economic or socio-demographic background? How do these characteristics compare across jurisdiction and case type?
- How can we better understand flows into the courts and tribunals system, reasons for entry, and the impact of external organisations and their activities? For example:
  - How do police activities – such as Release Under Investigation (RUI) – affect flows into the criminal courts?
  - How are tribunals affected by the policies and services of other government departments, and how can we better understand upstream decision-making processes? For example, regarding welfare policy.
- How can we improve forecasts of case volumes for the courts and tribunals system? How can we better understand future demand and supply, to help plan for the delivery of services?

- How do organisations or other non-individual parties in the courts and tribunals system vary by, for example, size of organisation, nature of work or industry? How do these characteristics compare across case types?
- How can we better understand the opportunities and impact of the use of digital technology on those engaging with the courts and tribunals system?

## Victims and witnesses

- What are the needs and experiences of victims, defence witnesses, and those in distressing civil, family, or tribunal cases? How does this vary by protected characteristics, socio-economic or socio-demographic background and jurisdiction?
- How well understood are entitlements under the Victims' Code, including special measures and access to support services? How effective are these and how could we improve their effectiveness?
- How prevalent is repeat victimisation and who does it affect? What is the overlap between being a victim and committing an offence, and how does this vary by, for example, crime type and demographic characteristics?

## Cases and outcomes

- What are the reasons for case attrition and what works to avoid it, for different case types? What are the impacts of case attrition on victims, particularly for serious violence and sexual abuse cases?
- How does case progression, case timeliness, cost-to-access (where appropriate), and eventual outcome vary by jurisdiction and case type? What works, at which stage, and for whom, to improve the efficiency of case progression?
- How can we measure the quality of case outcomes across different jurisdictions, types of cases, and for the individuals and organisations involved? Including whether the court or tribunal was the 'right' method of resolution.
- How can we define and measure procedural justice and (subjective) fairness? How does this vary by jurisdiction, and protected characteristics?

## The judiciary

- What are the career pathways and recruitment journeys into the judiciary? How do protected characteristics and social mobility affect recruitment?
- What does 'ideal' judicial diversity look like? What promotes, enables, and sustains diversity within senior levels of the judiciary? At what point within a career path does enabling activity lead to greater future judicial diversity?
- What impact do eligibility criteria for judicial roles have on recruitment and diversity, and does this enable sustainability of the judiciary? What motivates individuals to apply for, and remain within, judicial roles?

## 4. Ensure that prisons are decent, safe and productive places to live and work

**We want to provide decent, safe and secure accommodation that supports individuals in their rehabilitation. We want to reduce levels of violence and self-harm and develop the evidence on what structures and interventions can help improve outcomes for individuals in prison.**

To do this we need to better understand pathways, what works for whom and when, to ensure that interventions and support are targeted and timely. This includes insight within women's prisons. We want to understand better what works for children in the youth estate, recognising the difference in approach required to meet the needs of some of the most vulnerable children in society. We want to enhance our insights into the longer-term impacts of imprisonment on physical and mental health problems.

We would like to complement work being undertaken to evaluate physical security measures in prisons and their impact on crime and illicit activity. We want to optimise our running of the prison estate, ensuring that frameworks are evidence-driven and improve outcomes, whilst further exploring how the appropriate use of technology can aid delivery.

Research questions, reflective of our evidence priorities, include:

### Prison regime and operation

- How effective are different prison types, categories and functions, such as reception, training and resettlement, in meeting their core objectives?
- What factors contribute to creating and maintaining a rehabilitative culture within prison, and how can this impact on post-release outcomes for individuals?
- What works across our prisons to increase safety and security and reduce levels of violence?
- How can we effectively balance prison and secure establishment approaches to safety and security, with the delivery of other services and initiatives in prisons?
- How can we improve the transition from the secure estate for children and young people to the adult estate?

## Crime

- How does intra-prison crime manifest and what are the associated costs?
- What are the levels and drivers of serious organised crime and the illicit economy in prisons, including drugs, psychoactive substances, and mobile phones?
- How do illicit goods enter the estate and what role do established crime networks play? How effective are measures at preventing and disrupting the supply of drugs and other illicit goods entering the estate and impacts on organised crime more generally?

## Services and interventions

- How can services and therapeutic interventions, such as training, peer and family relationship support, and drug and addiction services, improve post-release outcomes? What impact does prison education have on the type of work secured after release?
- How can we better understand the impact of interventions delivered in prisons and how these are sequenced alongside those in the community?
- What works, for whom, to support effective transition and resettlement from custody into the community? In particular, for children and young people.
- How can we better isolate the impact of multiple interventions within an individual's time in prison? How can we better route individuals onto appropriate programmes in a timely way?

## Technology

- How effective are different types of technology across the estate in ensuring prisons are safe, secure, fair, inclusive and productive?
- How effective is technology at combating the illicit economy and mitigating crime?
- To what extent is technology supporting and enabling individuals to rehabilitate? For example, maintaining relationships via in-cell telephony.
- How and to what extent can digital technology in prisons assist staff and our understanding of the needs of our workforce?

## Staff and capability

- What is the optimal workforce model – in terms of staff volumes, diversity, specialisms and experience levels – to ensure the right level of support?
- How can we enhance staff capability by developing the professional skills and attributes of our workforce via training and learning and development?
- How does staff attrition affect individual behaviours? How can we better understand the risks of, and mitigate, dependency-related progress?
- How does staff diversity – in terms of protected characteristics – impact relationships with individuals in prisons, and their behaviour?



## Health and wellbeing

- What works to reduce levels of self-harm and self-inflicted death in prisons, for different individuals and groups? How can mentoring, peer support and staff relationships help in reducing self-harm?
- What factors contribute to an effective within-prison health service and how can we respond to changing demographics and needs? What works to support a 'whole-prison' approach to physical and mental health?
- What are the impacts – both within prison and post-release – of the physical and mental health services, and support services delivered in prisons?
- How many people in prison need access to mental health services who cannot or do not access them? When is the optimal time to intervene or offer support? What are the longer-term effects of early identification and intervention?

## 5. Protect the public from harm

**We want to build confidence and trust in a system that upholds public protection and creates the conditions for individual rehabilitation. We want to better support the probation service in using evidence-based decision-making.**

To do this we want to further explore the efficacy and effectiveness of non-custodial sentences in optimising the balance of public protection and rehabilitation. We want to develop our evidence base on alternative measures for achieving public protection and understand the operational effectiveness of reforms to the system. We want to build a broader understanding of risk management and what works within the community.

We want to better understand the (cost-) effectiveness of services delivered within the probation system, and the design of the system overall. We want to better understand the impact of staffing and workforce factors in the management of risk and provision of support for individuals.

Research questions, reflective of our evidence priorities, include:

### **Sentencing options, including alternatives to custody**

- What factors affect the likelihood of different groups receiving different sentences, including custodial, community or other court disposal sentences? How do sentencing recommendations vary by the availability of different options?
- What are the enablers and barriers to effective sentences, including community-based, alternative or short custodial sentences? Are certain types or requirements of sentences, or recommended treatment programmes, more effective for different individuals and groups?
- What factors impact sentencers' confidence in using non-custodial sentences?
- How has the use of non-custodial sentencing changed over time?
- What explains public confidence in criminal sentences? How can public confidence be improved?
- What makes an effective pre-sentence report (PSR)? How do PSR's – including language usage – affect sentence length, type, and consistency? What factors influence the use of PSR's – including judicial views and confidence – and why has this changed over time?

- How can anti-social, violent, and criminal behaviour linked to alcohol and drug use be addressed beyond traditional criminal sentencing?
- What contributes to effective electronic tagging and monitoring, including GPS and radio frequency trackers, and sobriety tags, in protecting the public from harm? Are there specific groups of individuals for whom electronic tagging and monitoring is more effective?

## Risk management

- What works to effectively manage risk and ensure public protection for individuals convicted of serious violent and sexual offences?
- How can agencies work together most effectively to protect the public from offending (and reoffending) of a highly serious or dangerous nature? Under what circumstances do multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) reduce public protection risks?
- How can we better understand the dynamic risk factors for sexual reoffending and how they evolve over time? Particularly those identified via the Active Risk Management System (ARMS).
- What are the enablers and barriers to effective Integrated Offender Management (IOM) strategies? How can stakeholders be supported in the delivery of IOM?
- What are the enablers and barriers to the effective operation of approved premises? For which individuals are approved premises most effective, and why?
- What are the drivers of extremism and what works to reduce radicalisation? How effective are de-radicalisation interventions? What factors have a strong influence on the de-radicalisation of individuals?

## Custody and custodial arrangements

- What is the impact of home detention curfew, in advance of custodial sentence completion, on individual outcomes and risk to public protection? How can home detention curfew be improved?
- How do changes in tariffs, including minimum and maximum sentence lengths or the way life tariffs are calculated, affect sentencing behaviour?
- How do licence period, conditions, and durations affect the potential for recalls, and what are the downstream impacts on individual outcomes and risks to public protection?
- How can short periods in custody be made more effective at reducing reoffending? What are the effects of longer custodial sentences on crime?

## Staff and workforce

- How can we better understand the future demand and needs of our workforce – including learning and development needs – to ensure effective workload management, particularly in relation to serious and high-risk cases?
- What constitutes an optimal caseload mix for probation staff, to appropriately balance risk levels across their workload, whilst delivering the most effective support for individuals, with multiple and complex needs, under their supervision?
- How can we better understand the role of staff engagement, oversight and support – particularly managerial support – for those working with high-risk individuals?
- How can the use of data and technology support our workforce with case management, risk mitigation, and the delivery of effective supervision?

## 6. Reduce rates of reoffending and improve life chances

**We want to address the causes of reoffending using personalised evidence, live data, and digital services to better target and sequence interventions. To do this we need to build the evidence base that can inform the development of more holistic measures than ‘proven reoffending’, factoring in a broader range of outcomes.**

We need to deepen our understanding of the needs of individuals and groups, so we can understand what works and for whom, to deliver timely and targeted interventions, including what works for women, and Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) individuals. We want to better understand how interventions affect those with multiple complex needs, by isolating which specific intervention elements work for different individuals, particularly those with mental health and neurodevelopmental disorders, and alcohol and substance abuse problems.

We need to enhance our understanding of what works in youth justice to prevent and divert offending by children and young people.

Research questions, reflective of our evidence priorities, include:

### Defining and measuring reoffending

- How accurate is the proven reoffending rate and how does it vary by different groups? How and why does reoffending vary by reoffending propensity?
- How can wider attributes, or a broader range of factors, be incorporated into our understanding and definition of reoffending? How could outcome measures, including intermediate outcomes, be utilised?

### Individuals and needs

- What are the risks, needs, protective and promotive factors of different groups? Particularly those with multiple disadvantage, or multiple complex needs?
- How do an individual’s criminogenic needs change throughout time within the criminal justice system? What are the social factors that lead to reoffending? What characterises individuals that desist from further offending?

- How can strength-based approaches nurture positive attitudes to rehabilitation that guard against reoffending? What approaches enable the development of pro-social identity?

## Supervision and environment

- What works to build and sustain positive relationships between staff and individuals under supervision? How does staff diversity impact on relationships with individuals? How can quality relationships influence the outcomes of individuals under supervision?
- What impact do different levels of supervision – such as staff (including attrition), frequency, length, intensity – have on rehabilitation and outcomes?
- How do staff qualifications and experience levels impact the delivery of programmes and their outcomes?
- What are the impacts of supervision within different premises, for example community hubs? Can these assist with access to services post-supervision?
- How can the use of technology support supervision, including remote supervision?
- To what extent does an individual's input into the services they receive whilst under supervision affect their motivation, and how does this influence desistance?

## Interventions and programmes

- What works to reduce reoffending for different groups? For example, those with mental health problems, or those repeatedly convicted of low-level offences?
- How can we ensure better targeting of interventions within pre-sentence reports?
- How effective are rehabilitation activity requirements (RARs) and in what ways can they be improved?
- How does the combination of time in prison and activities undertaken impact upon reoffending upon release?
- How can we better understand the impact of interventions delivered in the community? What timing and sequencing of services, interventions and support works to sustain positive outcomes for individuals? For example, accommodation; employment; relationship, family and peer support?
- What are the enablers and barriers to an effective unpaid work scheme?
- How can we better understand the impact of programmes – particularly non-accredited programmes – on individual outcomes? What approaches ensure individuals complete programmes and embed learning?

## Youth offending and reoffending

- How can we identify children that are at risk of offending at an early stage? How can we prevent the transmission of intergenerational offending to children and young people in families with a history of offending? How can we minimise the criminogenic impact of a child's contact with the youth justice system?
- What works and for whom to prevent and divert children and young people from offending? How effective are community resolutions including Out of Court Disposals?
- How effective are youth justice services at achieving positive, non-justice outcomes that support desistance from offending? How can we better support youth justice services to share information and coordinate their interventions to provide holistic support?
- How do the regimes children receive in custody support desistance from crime on release, as well as their wider educational, personal and social development?
- What factors will create an effective performance framework for youth offending teams (YOTs)?

# Cross-cutting themes and research methods

## Cross-cutting themes

The overarching themes that structure this ARI are closely linked, with several questions and issues that cut across them. Some extend beyond MoJ and reflect the interests of other government departments. We want to encourage research that is tangential across multiple objectives and outcomes to develop a holistic approach to analysis that supports policy and operational decision-making. This section outlines cross-cutting themes and approaches that can be considered across our research priorities.

- **Equality and diversity:** How do protected characteristics and socio-demographic differences impact upon interactions with the justice system? How can we better understand and account for population-level differences, experiences and inequalities in our policies, particularly for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) individuals?
- **Health and wellbeing:** How can we ensure the right level of support for those with health conditions, particularly mental health and neurodevelopmental disorders, at all stages in the justice system? How do the wider social determinants of health impact upon justice needs and outcomes?
- **Intersectionality:** How do multiple sources of disadvantage combine and reinforce over an individual's time within the justice system? How does intersectionality affect individual experiences and outcomes?
- **Space and place:** How do the social and material constructs of space affect interactions with the justice system? How can place-based understanding and approaches account for factors that influence human behaviour and decisions?
- **Pathways and outcomes:** How do individuals within the justice system move through it, interacting with multiple (often disparate) agencies, services, interventions and policies? How we can develop, target, sequence, and measure the outcomes of, interventions and support?
- **Relationships and trust:** How can we help ensure relationships between individuals in the justice system are mutually effective and built on trust? How can procedural justice, for example, help develop relationships, build trust, and create and sustain outcomes for individuals?
- **Perceptions:** What are the effects of perceptions – held by individuals, society, employers, the media – of the justice system? How do perceptions impact on individual behaviours and outcomes?



## Analytical and research methods

We want to build our internal capability to apply cutting-edge analytical and research methodologies. We are keen to engage with researchers across a range of disciplines, to explore how innovative methods could be applied to justice research.

The methods we would like to consider, to enhance our scientific capability include:

- **Simulation, agent-based modelling and hybrid modelling methods:** optimisation methods; forecasting techniques; resource modelling, and performance frameworks, to inform and optimise the running and delivery of the MoJ estate and operations, to ensure they run effectively, efficiently, and productively.
- **Data science, machine learning, and artificial intelligence:** algorithmic decision-support and decision-making, to inform the real-time personalisation of services and interventions; natural language processing, feature extraction and analysis of complex textual data; artificial intelligence transparency, accountability, fairness, and 'explainability'.
- **Experimentation, implementation, and evaluation:** including exploring, developing and testing new ideas or methods using innovative pre-experimental and evaluation approaches and randomised control trials; how to measure the impact and effectiveness of public service interventions in a human-centric manner; advances in pre- and quasi-experimental methods; theory-based evaluation and value-for-money evaluation.
- **Social research methods, particularly qualitative research and ethnographic methods:** to give a richer understanding of the experience of, and interactions with, the justice system; advances in 'big qual' methodology; quantitative social research methods such as sequence and cluster analysis.
- **Statistical techniques:** to better measure effects within our research and the analysis of our data; learning from new methodologies to analyse and interrogate administrative data, particularly missing information, low frequencies and counts, and approaches to data linkage.
- **Behavioural science methods and insights:** to better understand the needs and motivations of those within the justice system, their interactions with public services, and their responses to interventions.
- **Data mapping and linking:** improving the quality and use of administrative data through developments in cutting-edge data linking methodologies, to provide cross-system insights of justice user journeys and outcomes.

## Communication and collaboration

We are committed to collaborating with our external and academic research partners to address the priorities outlined in this ARI. This publication provides the basis for a wider programme of engagement activities to enable us to discuss our evidence priorities in more detail and to take forward mutually beneficial partnerships with the research community. We intend to work alongside our existing academic networks and with knowledge brokers to facilitate this.

We are keen to support researchers in their bids for funding on research that align with the themes in this publication and encourage you to get in touch to discuss your research proposals.

Through the Data First programme, we are facilitating researcher access to justice data that has been shared with the ONS Secure Research Service (SRS) to help address key evidence gaps. This includes a series of [Research Fellowship funding calls](#), funded by ADR UK. For further information, see the [Data First project page](#) on the ADR UK website, and our [Data First GOV.UK page](#) which hosts a suite of materials to support researchers make the best use of this data. Feel free to get in touch with us if you have any questions at [datafirst@justice.gov.uk](mailto:datafirst@justice.gov.uk).

We are continuing to work alongside the research community on specific projects, including providing contributions via advisory groups, and further, are keen to develop mechanisms for exchanges of ideas and evidence.

Please contact us if you wish to discuss any aspects of this ARI, provide feedback, or explore ways to engage and collaborate. We are also happy to provide advice and guidance on undertaking research and seeking access to data within the justice system.

We can be contacted at the following email address:  
[evidence\\_partnerships@justice.gov.uk](mailto:evidence_partnerships@justice.gov.uk).

Thank you for taking the time to read the MoJ ARI publication. We look forward to hearing from you.

**December 2020**



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