



HM Prison &
Probation Service

A Process Evaluation of the Structured Risk Guidance for Extremist Offenders

Stephen Webster, Jane Kerr and Charlotte Tompkins
Prepared for Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service

Ministry of Justice Analytical Series
2017

Preventing victims by changing lives



Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service is committed to evidence-based practice informed by high-quality social research and statistical analysis. We aim to contribute to the informed debate on effective practice with the people in our care in prisons, probation and youth custody.

Disclaimer

The views expressed are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by the Ministry of Justice (nor do they represent Government policy).

First published 2017



© **Crown copyright 2017**

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3 or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at National.Research@noms.gsi.gov.uk

This publication is available for download at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/research-and-analysis/moj>

ISBN 978 1-84099-740-8

Acknowledgements

We thank our colleagues in HMPPS who gave up their time to assist with sample recruitment and all those people that took part in the research. We would also like to thank Christopher Dean, Al Reid and Rachel Horan in HMPPS for the support they have given the research team.

The authors

Stephen Webster (CPsychol, AFBPS) was a Research Psychologist at NatCen Social Research at the time of the current research. He has published extensively in the field of sexual violence using quantitative and qualitative methods and regularly conducts work for the Ministry of Justice, HMPPS and the Sentencing Council. More recently he has conducted a number of studies about serious online offending. This includes two European Commission studies looking at the process of online grooming and an evaluation of the Stop it Now! Europe.

Jane Kerr is a Senior Researcher in NatCen's Crime and Justice team. Jane specialises in sensitive qualitative research with victims and perpetrators of crime. Recent projects she has taken a leading role in include: a qualitative process evaluation of the Neighbourhood Justice Panels (MoJ), an evaluation of Stop it Now!, a qualitative study with people affected by investment fraud (FCA), a research exploring the sentencing of fraud offences (Sentencing Council),

Charlotte Tompkins is a senior qualitative researcher with extensive experience of conducting research with socially excluded and vulnerable individuals, in particular people within the criminal justice system and in secure environments.

Contents

1. Executive Summary	1
1.1 Background	5
1.2 Evaluation design	8
1.3 Process evaluation methods	9
1.4 Report coverage	13
2. Process Evaluation Framework for the SRG Pilot	14
2.1 Theory of change models	14
2.2 SRG pilot theory of change	15
3. SRG Pilot Foundations	17
3.1 Pre-existing knowledge	17
3.2 Capacity	18
3.3 Training	21
3.4 Organisational support	24
3.5 Environment	25
4. SRG Pilot Delivery Processes	26
4.1 SRG eligibility	26
4.2 The assessment	27
4.3 Model of collaborative working	30
4.4 Assessment items and supporting documents	32
4.5 Assessing risk of serious harm and reporting	34
4.6 Co-assessor model	35
4.7 Partnership working	36
4.8 Interface with existing risk management practices	38
5. SRG Perceived Outcomes	39
5.1 Organisations	39
5.2 Staff	40
5.3 Offenders	43
6. Recommendations	46
6.1 Implementation	46

List of tables

Table 2.1	The SRG 21 factors (areas of risk and need)	7
Table 2.2	Sample of staff interviewed across the case study sites	10

List of figures

Figure 3.1	SRG pilots theory of change	15
Figure 6.1	Perceived outcomes of the SRG assessment for staff	40

1. Executive Summary

In 2009 Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS formerly the National Offender Management Service (NOMS)) developed and piloted the Structured Risk Guidance (SRG) for Extremist Offenders. The SRG process is divided into three stages:

- planning and gathering information;
- assessing potential areas of criminogenic need according to 21 factors which may be linked to extremist offending; and
- considering the risk of serious harm in the context of an individual's beliefs, intent, motivation and capability.

This report presents a process evaluation of SRG early implementation and perceived outcomes. Following this evaluation the SRG was revised in 2012 and has become the Extremism Risk Guidance 22+ (ERG22+).

Aims and approach

The aim of the process evaluation was to examine the use, systems and implementation of the pilot SRG for extremist offenders in prison and community settings. The objectives were:

Understand the context in which the SRG was developed and implemented.

Examine the implementation and delivery of the pilot SRG in England.

Summarise any actions taken in regard to identified implementation of risk factors.

Examine the extent of SRG interface with existing risk management arrangements.

Inform a decision on further roll-out of the SRG, including recommendations regarding staff training, implementation and delivery processes and considerations for any future impact evaluation.

The process evaluation used depth interviews and comprised of three distinct stages. First were scoping interviews with four strategic stakeholders from HMPPS and academia as well as observation of the SRG assessment training. Second were case studies in four prison and probation sites to examine implementation effort and implementation practice. In each case study site, strategic staff, lead assessors and co-assessors were interviewed. In total 15 strategic and operational staff were interviewed between March and July 2010. Three men that had been assessed using the SRG were also interviewed. It should be noted that due to the small numbers of interviews, the views presented in the study may not be representative of all extremist offenders who have participated in ERG assessment. Third was a strategic

workshop held in August 2010 where findings were presented and discussed by key strategic and operational staff involved in the SRG pilot.

The interview data was transcribed verbatim and analysed by NatCen researchers using the Framework case and theme-based approach to qualitative analysis (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013). The report presents the research findings set within a 'theory of change' model. This process involved the research identifying the foundations on which the SRG was piloted so as to understand how the assessment was delivered and its outcomes in their appropriate context. The theory of change is proposed by the researchers following analyses, and not by HMPPS or the developers of SRG.

Key findings

Themes

Five Themes supporting the SRG emerged from the interviews.

- **Pre-existing knowledge:** the relatively new influx of extremist offenders into HMPPS meant there was a limited body of expert knowledge and information about the risk assessment of extremists. Consequently, some staff would rely on generic violent risk assessment experience and literature to support some judgements. A potential hazard of this approach was that an offender could be classified and treated as a 'low risk', when in reality they presented with considerably more problems.
- **Capacity:** the staff interviewed supported the pilot and were aware delivery did not attract additional resources. However the amount of time staff had to prepare, conduct and write up the assessment was a central theme running through the interviews. In particular, the guidance of 1.5 days to complete an SRG was felt to significantly underestimate the resources required.
- **Training:** staff received one day of national training or a series of shorter briefings. Staff interviewed were broadly positive about their training. Recommendations for improvements encompassed:
 - acknowledging the diversity of assessor experience;
 - addressing the complexity of the SRG;
 - providing a learning environment to support break-out sessions;
 - more information about philosophical/spiritual influences on behaviour;
 - information about domestic extremism;
 - adding time to practice using the SRG; and
 - Greater clarity about the lead and co-assessor roles in the assessment team.

- **Organisational support:** this went beyond more time to conduct the SRG and included a request for enhanced support from: HMPPS HQ staff; peers and other partners; the local employer; and professional bodies such as the British Psychological Society.
- **Environment:** differences in prison and probation settings had a bearing on the extent some offenders were willing to engage with the SRG and the time available to build an effective rapport and a collaborative assessment relationship.

Delivery

- **Referral:** the SRG was being used with Al-Qaeda (AQ) inspired extremists, those from the Extreme Far Right and in one other area to understand gang and gun crime. In addition, those 'perceived' to have extremist views were also in scope for the assessment. There was some concern about the extent to which the SRG was valid with all these groups.
- **The assessment:** although conducting the assessment early in the sentence would be helpful for Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), some flexibility to ensure the offender was 'ready to engage' was seen as important. A collaborative assessor/offender assessment relationship was the desired goal although not always achieved in full. Collaboration was optimised when: there was transparency about the aims and objectives of the SRG; clear recruitment materials were used; and there was a strong and respectful assessor/offender relationship.
- All 21 SRG items were helpful although some conceptual overlap was identified. The SRG guidance and scoring matrix were welcomed, but there was limited use of the example questions due to concerns about their responsiveness.
- Assessing risk of serious harm using the Motivation; Capability; Intent; and Beliefs model was seen by all staff interviewed as extremely helpful. The assessment report template was also helpful but there were some concerns about where to allocate evidence. The co-assessor model supported collaboration. However, some assessors limited knowledge of the SRG could be a barrier to effective working as were conflicting views on risk items.
- **Partnership working:** the nature and extent of partnership working was underpinned by: existing MAPPA relationships; organisation ethos and awareness of the SRG; and data sharing within and across organisations. Finally, it was felt that the SRG had the potential to supplement the Offender Assessment System (OASys), pre-sentence report, MAPPA meetings and prisoner re-categorisation assessments.

Perceived outcomes

- The outcomes for **establishments** and **probation areas** were that the SRG was perceived as providing a robust method of assessing the risk of convicted extremists, and those 'at risk'.
- A number of positive **staff** outcomes were identified. These included: providing procedural assessment clarity; legitimising assessor actions regarding risk management; increasing assessors' professional efficacy; and improving partnership working. A negative outcome for staff was that SRG increased personal workload.
- Two overarching perceived outcomes for **offenders** interviewed were improved relationships within the prison and for some offenders, an increased willingness to engage in positive change.

Recommendations

Implementation recommendations included:

- making offender eligibility criteria clearer;
- refining assessor eligibility criteria;
- extending training eligibility; and
- raising the profile of the SRG in prison establishments and probation areas.

Delivery recommendations were to:

- revisit the estimated time and resource required to complete the SRG;
- review overlapping items;
- ensure assessor support is in place;
- improve guidance for all SRG stages;
- enhance partnership working where possible; and
- to provide assessors with clear guidance about how and where to use SRG outcomes.

Since this evaluation was completed the SRG was revised to become the Extremism Risk Guidance 22+ (ERG22+). The ERG22+ has been mainstreamed across HMPPS. Further information about the development, underlying theory, content and structure and evolving learning from the ERG22+ and its ongoing delivery is outlined in detail elsewhere (See Lloyd and Dean, 2015). This initial evaluation of the SRG was crucial in the evolution of the ERG22+ and the publication of this integral element of its development will inform readers of the development of the tool from its initial conception and its course through to its current form as the ERG22+.Introduction

This report presents the findings from a process evaluation of HMPPS Structured Risk Guidance (SRG) pilot for extremist offenders. This chapter sets out the background to the evaluation before describing the research design and methodology.

1.1 Background

The increased threat to the UK from international terrorism led to the Home Office implementing a counter-terrorism strategy, known as CONTEST. Developed in 2003 and updated in March 2009, the aim of CONTEST is to *reduce the risk to the UK and its interests overseas from international terrorism, so that people can go about their lives freely and with confidence*. The CONTEST programme is organised into four main areas of work:

Pursue – to stop terrorist attacks.

Prevent – to stop people from becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremism.

Protect – to strengthen our protection against terrorist attacks.

Prepare – where an attack cannot be stopped, to mitigate its impact.

The roll-out of CONTEST has seen substantial resources dedicated to counter-terrorist investigations and security operations. Consequently, there has been a significant increase in the number of individuals who have received a custodial or community sentence for extremist offences. In response to this increase in convictions, HMPPS is required to make defensible decisions about how those who have committed extremist offences should be managed.

Given the relatively new nature of extremism in the CONTEST context, the evidence base regarding how to assess and manage the risk presented by extremist offenders is limited. However, the rise in convictions for extremist offences internationally has meant that more attention is being given to this subject, including the issues and challenges surrounding this complex task (See Monahan, 2012; Silke, 2014). Empirical work has also begun to emerge. For example, in 2009 a conceptual set of guidelines for use with persons with a history of extremist violence, or with a conviction for such offences, were released for consultation in Canada and have subsequently been revised (Pressman, 2009; Pressman & Flockton, 2012). These guidelines, known as the Violent Extremist Risk Assessment (VERA), adopt a structured professional judgement approach to address the risk assessment of ideologically motivated violent extremists. The VERA is composed of 28 items, 25 of which are across attitudinal, contextual, historical and protective risk factors. Three further items are considered which relate to a fifth category of demographic factors (sex, marriage and age). The approach is designed to guide the assessor to arrive at a risk level through consideration

of the factors. The guidelines were developed based on current literature and knowledge of other risk assessment tools and a perceived inadequacy and relevancy of these alongside the known characteristics of individuals who have been involved in, or convicted of offences related to violent extremism and terrorism.

At the time the SRG draft guidelines were developed there were no other protocols available for the assessment of extremist offenders (the Pressman (2009) work came after SRG development), nor any outcome studies that could inform an actuarial approach because of the small numbers of people involved and the lack of reconviction data. Existing violence risk assessment protocols and predictors have questionable relevance to extremists because the factors used to assess risk do not relate to the background and motivations of this group. Considering this and the very few studies available about the risk assessment of extremist offending at the time, HMPPS decided to develop and design the SRG for male and female extremist offenders. .

The development of the SRG was based on a combination of approaches that included the triangulation of information/data from engaging in casework with over 40 convicted extremist offenders to understand their pathways into offending; an extensive international literature review, other jurisdictions and expert knowledge and the formation of an expert advisory group. Principles underlying other Structured Professional Guidelines used to assess other offender groups were also utilised in the instrument's development. The guidance was developed by applied psychologists who were very experienced in using similar guidelines in applied forensic settings and understood the practical demands and requirements of such guidance. Therefore it was based on primary source accounts from those convicted of extremist offences and designed with practical application and utility as a primary consideration. More detailed information regarding the development and design of the guidance is outlined elsewhere (Lloyd & Dean, 2015). The outcome was the development of structured guidance to assist HMPPS staff in conducting comprehensive and systematic assessments of risk of extremist offending.

The draft guidelines were developed for domestic as well as Al-Qaeda (AQ)¹ inspired male and female offenders and were piloted in 2009 with two aims:

¹ For the purposes of this report the term AQ extremism is used to refer to those extremists inspired by AQ and domestic / non AQ extremism is used to refer to other types of extremism such as animal rights and far right.

- To help staff working in prison and the probation service consider the different areas of an offender’s life which may influence their potential to commit an extremist offence.
- To assist prison and probation staff take the appropriate steps to prevent future offending.

The SRG process is divided into three stages:

- The first stage involves planning and gathering information.
- The second entails working through the information to assess potential areas of criminogenic need according to 21 factors which may be linked to extremist offending.
- Finally, at the third stage the risk of serious harm is considered, taking into account an individual’s beliefs, intent, motivation and capability.

The 21 factors are listed in Table 2.1:

Table 2.1 The SRG 21 factors (areas of risk and need)

1	Lack of emotional resilience
2	Problems with Relationships
3	Need to feel important, valued or special
4	Need for identity, meaning and belonging
5	Feelings of threat and insecurity
6	Sensitivity to perceived injustice
7	Idealism and political naivety
8	Susceptibility to charismatic individual(s)
9	Susceptibility to indoctrination
10	Susceptibility to group influence and control
11	The family and/or community support extremist offending
12	Over-identification with a cause
13	Attitudes that justify offending
14	‘Us and Them Thinking’
15	Need for stimulation and excitement
16	Desire to experience themselves as a hero, soldier or person of honour
17	Intent to bring about harmful regime change
18	Opportunistic involvement
19	Individual knowledge, skills and competencies to commit extremist offences

20	Access to networks, funding and equipment to commit extremist offences
21	Diagnosis of Mental Illness & Personality Disorder
22	Any Other Area Relevant to Risk

HMPPS recommend that the assessment is completed by a multi-disciplinary team. The rationale is that the assessment will then be informed from a variety of different sources and perspectives, all of which have a role to play in understanding the nature and extent of risk. However, the guidance stipulates that an experienced individual should lead the team and take responsibility for co-ordinating interpretation of information, reporting and the overall process.

Concern has been expressed about the appropriateness of using risk assessment protocols developed for criminal violence with those whose motivation is apparently political (Roberts & Horgan, 2003; Dernevik, Beck, Grann, Hogue & McGuire, 2009; Gudjonsson, 2009). However, Roberts and Horgan (2003) assert that effective processes for assessing risk of extremist offending do not appear different to those used for assessing other types of offending as long as a causal relationship between known risk factors and offending is not assumed. Boer (2008) also argues that a drawback of pilot risk instruments is that they are sometimes used too quickly on populations which can be very different from the samples utilised to develop and validate the assessment approach. Therefore, to maintain the highest standards of ethical and defensible practice, there was an acute need for the pilot guidance commissioned by HMPPS to be independently evaluated. The findings and recommendations of this evaluation were also intended to directly inform revisions to the SRG. In light of this evaluation and following further expert consultation, the SRG was revised to become the Extremism Risk Guidelines 22+ (ERG 22+) (See Lloyd & Dean, 2014; Silke, 2014). We consider this process evaluation to be the first of its kind for this type of risk assessment.

1.2 Evaluation design

In December 2009 the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) was commissioned to undertake a process evaluation of the pilot Structured Risk Guidance (SRG) for extremist offenders. The aim of the evaluation was to examine the use, systems and implementation processes of the pilot SRG for extremist offenders in prisons and in the community. The objectives guiding the research were to:

- Understand the context in which the SRG was developed and implemented.
- Examine the implementation and delivery of the pilot SRG in England.

Provide a summary of any actions taken in regard to identified implementation risk factors.

Examine the extent of SRG interface with existing risk management arrangements.

Inform a decision on further roll-out of the SRG, including recommendations regarding staff training, implementation and delivery processes and considerations for any future impact evaluation.

To meet this set of objectives, the process evaluation was based on three distinct stages that included:

Scoping interviews with strategic stakeholders and observation of the SRG assessment training.

Case studies in prison and probation sites of implementation effort and implementation practice.

A strategic workshop held at the end of the evaluation.

This final report presents all findings from the process evaluation, comprehensively bringing together the data from the three stages of research.

Ethical governance

To ensure that the evaluation design was subjected to a high level of ethical scrutiny, an application was submitted and approved by the NatCen Research Ethics Committee. This governance procedure meets the requirements of the Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC) and Government Social Research Unit (GSRU) Research Ethics Frameworks (Economic & Social Research Council, 2015; Government Social Research Unit, 2006) and so has membership that includes senior NatCen staff, external research experts and external professional experts ('lay people').

1.3 Process evaluation methods

Scoping interviews with strategic stakeholders and training observation

Strategic stakeholders were identified through the strategic SRG lead at HMPPS. They were formally approached about the evaluation by email by the research team and were invited to take part in an interview. In total, individual interviews were conducted with four strategic stakeholders from HMPPS, academia and a strategic stakeholder within the probation service. Further to this, a member of the evaluation team observed a national training day in December 2009. The session was led by HMPPS SRG leads and was attended by police,

probation and prison staff who all consented for the evaluator to observe. Observations from the training were recorded on a pro-forma to aid systematic analysis.

Case studies in prison and probation

A qualitative approach was used to explore the implementation of the SRG pilot in prison and community probation settings. This aspect of the research was set within a case study design to ensure that the perspectives of strategic and operational people involved were collected from different pilot sites. This meant a better picture of each site could be drawn opposed to only one ‘type’ of participant being interviewed. At the time of the research the SRG was being piloted in seven sites, including five high security prisons and two probation areas. Four case study pilot sites were chosen to take part in the evaluation. Two prisons and two probation areas were selected to access a range of experiences from a diverse strategic, organisational and geographical context. The four case study sites were visited between March 2010 and July 2010.

Strategic stakeholders and operational staff working with the SRG pilot were invited to take part in the evaluation and share their experiences. Strategic stakeholders were classed as senior level staff and were identified through their involvement in the SRG within their setting. Operational staff were those with frontline responsibility for the delivery and implementation of the SRGs with offenders. Staff were largely identified through conversation with the strategic stakeholders at each site. The NatCen research team wrote to strategic and operational staff about the evaluation and asked them to opt in if they agreed to being involved. In total 15 strategic and operational staff were interviewed across the case study sites. Table 2.2 describes the profile of these staff and their role within the pilot process.

Table 2.2 Sample of staff interviewed across the case study sites²

	Strategic staff / lead	Lead assessor	Co-assessor
Case study A:	2	1	2
Case study B:	0	1	2
Case study C:	1	1	2
Case study D	0	1	2
Total	3	4	8

² Staff participants have been classified based on their own interpretation of their role within the SRG model, and the research team’s understanding of their role based on the interview data.

In addition, three offenders who had been assessed using the pilot SRG approach were also interviewed. The original research design intended that offenders from the four case study sites should be interviewed. However, staff at these sites did not identify any offenders who they considered suitable to be interviewed. Therefore the offenders were recruited and interviewed from a fifth site after discussion with the central team at HMPPS. These offenders were initially approached by their SRG assessor about taking part in the evaluation. Once the offender had given verbal agreement, the research team then spent time prior to the interview with the offender and explained the evaluation's aims, the interview content and process, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Informed consent was provided by offenders using an information leaflet and consent form. The researcher also spent time going through the leaflet and consent form with each participant prior to the interview beginning.

Conduct of the interviews and group discussions

The interviews and group discussions were conducted in private using a topic guide and were recorded using an encrypted digital recording device. All participants were asked to provide written, informed consent prior to being involved in the evaluation.

Verbatim quotations from the staff and offender interviews are provided where appropriate in the report. In order to preserve anonymity, quotations are referenced only by whether they are from a staff member or offender, rather than for example staff role or the area in which they worked.

Strategic workshop

The final phase of the design was a workshop in August 2010. The aim of the event was to present and discuss the key findings with strategic stakeholders and operational staff who had been involved in the pilot. The event was held in central London where delegates included members of the HMPPS SRG central team, strategic stakeholders and operational staff working as part of the pilot from high security prison establishments and community probation areas within England. Where pertinent, points raised from the workshop are included in this report.

Data analysis

The interview data was transcribed verbatim and then analysed by NatCen researchers using the Framework approach (Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton-Nicholls & Ormston, 2013). Blending inductive and deductive approaches, Framework is a case and theme based approach to analysis that involves summarising data into matrices where each row is a participant and each column is a theme relevant to the intervention. This approach meant

that each part of a transcript that was relevant to a particular theme was coded, ordered and accessible. A central chart was also created which gave an overview of each interview in terms of the key sampling characteristics and views/experiences of participants at each site. The final analytical stage involved working through the coded data across cases (participants and sites) interrogating the data fully to identify emergent patterns, and higher order categorisation of experiences and outcomes (Spencer, Ritchie, O'Connor & Morrell, 2013). This allowed the research to take data analysis beyond just a *description* of themes, and to develop *explanatory* accounts of the complexity of SRG assessment in the case study sites. Verbatim interview quotations are also provided in this report to highlight, in the words of the participants, the key issue and findings extrapolated by the researchers from the analysis.

Study generalisability

As this is a qualitative process evaluation the prevalence of particular views and experiences cannot be estimated. On this topic Lewis, Ritchie, Ormston and Morrell (2013) state that:

“Qualitative research cannot be generalised on a statistical basis – it is not the prevalence of particular views or experiences, nor the extent of their location within particular parts of the sample, about which wider inference can be drawn. Nor, of course, is this an objective of qualitative research. Rather, the value of qualitative research is in revealing the breadth and nature of the phenomena under study. It is this ‘map’ of the range of views, experiences, outcomes etc., and of the factors and circumstances that shape and influence them, that can be generalised to the parent population” (pp 350-351).

This report presents the range and diversity of staff’ views and experiences at four purposively selected prison and probation case study sites (from a total of seven pilot sites at the time of the study). It also identifies the personal characteristics and experiences that shape their views. With regard to the relevance of these findings to the broader prison and probation estate that are conducting SRG assessments, Lewis and colleagues (2013) propose that the extent to which a qualitative study can be generalised may be appraised against the following linked criteria:

- *representational* - whether what is found in a research sample can be generalised to, or held to be equally true of, the parent population from which the sample is drawn,
- *inferential* - whether the findings from a particular study can be generalised, or inferred, to other settings or contexts beyond the sampled one (p349)

It should be noted that due to the small numbers of interviews, the views presented in the study may not be representative of all extremist offenders who have participated in SRG assessment. High quality interviews with prison officers, psychologists and probation professionals have been conducted and systematically analysed. As far as was possible for this pilot, staff were selected to represent the range and diversity of professionals conducting the SRG. This means that the study recruited both lead and co-assessors from a range of professional backgrounds, with differing levels of dynamic risk assessment experience. In this case, other prison and probation staff conducting the SRG in the three other pilot sites.

In Chapter 3 the operational context of the case study sites is described, whereby a key challenge is the impact of capacity of staff to engage with the assessment. In Chapter 5 the bearing of this operational context on the outcomes for the SRG pilot are explained. These findings were also reviewed and discussed within the strategic workshop at the end of the evaluation, before the report was drafted. Given that every prison and probation area in England and Wales will be faced with spending restraint and finite staff capacity, the research is making an inferential generalisation that similar operational challenges will need to be considered and accounted for if the SRG is delivered in other sites.

1.4 Report coverage

The remaining sections of the report are set out as follows. **Chapter 3** presents the theoretical framework used for the evaluation. Following this theoretical overview, **Chapter 4** describes the foundations that supported SRG pilot activity. **Chapter 5** then goes on to discuss the processes of delivery involved in operationalising the SRG pilot. **Chapter 6** discusses outcomes of the pilot from the perspective of organisations, staff and extremist offenders. Finally, **Chapter 7** presents recommendations and suggestions for future practice.

2. Process Evaluation Framework for the SRG Pilot

This brief chapter provides an overview of the process evaluation framework for the SRG pilot. In particular, the report describes a model illustrating how the range of foundations supporting the pilot areas will have a bearing on the process of assessment, which in turn will have an impact on the outcomes achieved. When describing the foundations, processes and outcomes, careful consideration was paid to the diverse range of strategic and operational circumstances in which the pilot operated, alongside the context and timing at which the pilot was delivered. This process evaluation framework also provides the structure for the rest of this report.

2.1 Theory of change models

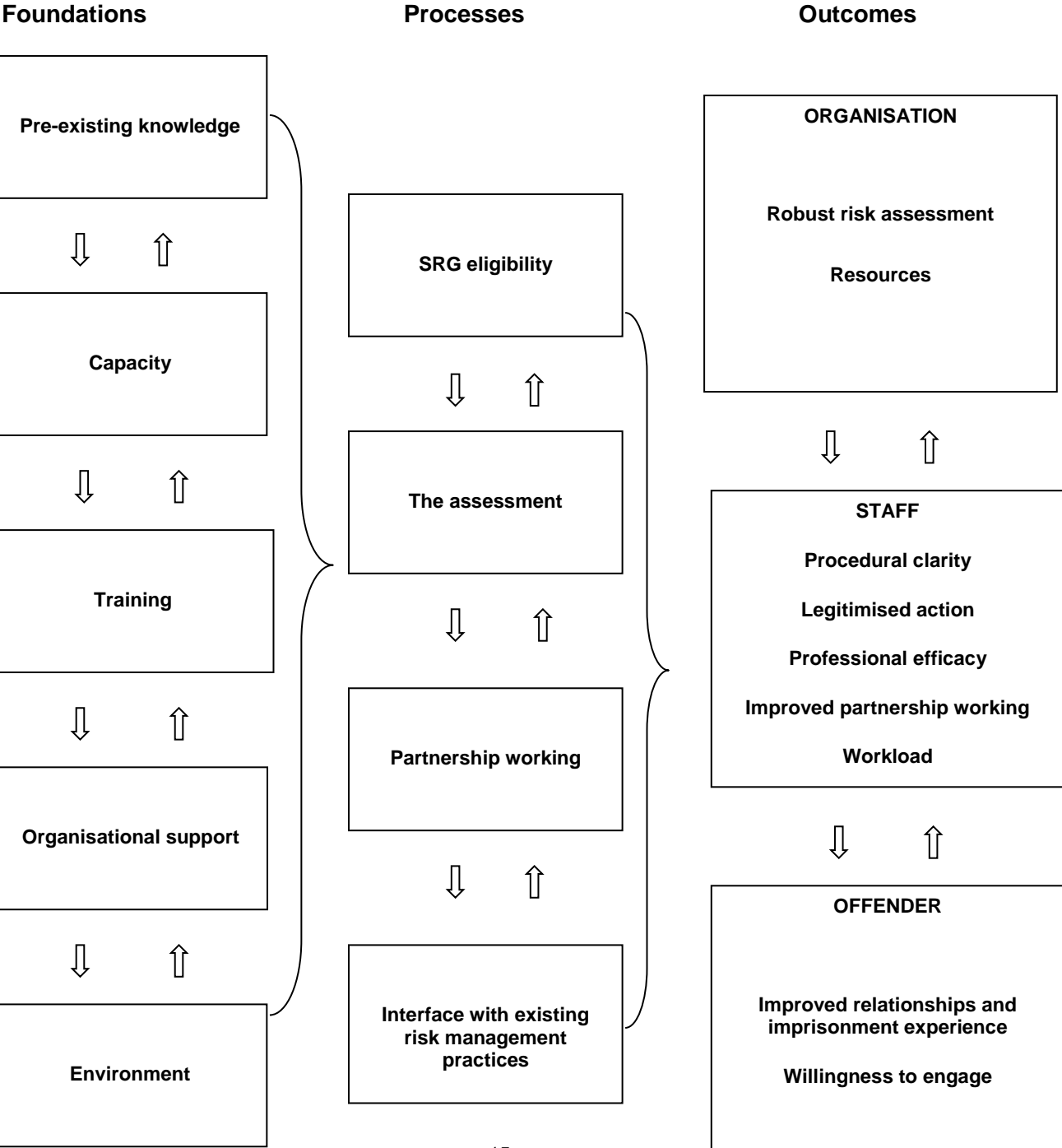
Every programme or policy intervention designed and implemented to encourage any form of social change can be said to have a theory of change related to it. Theories of change identify and describe the building blocks, pathways and methods necessary for a policy to achieve its desired goals (Connell *et al.*, 1995). In providing this explanation of how movement or change occurs, these theories consider the inter-relationship between three different features of the policy:

- **Foundations** refer to the structure or circumstances that will help enable the desired outcomes to take place. In some cases, foundations may be things that are fixed or inflexible, for example, aspects of the criminal justice system. Conversely, these preconditions may also include things that are amenable to change such as the extent of funding available to the pilot areas.
- **Processes** refer to what needs to happen in order to achieve the desired outcomes and how different systems and procedures work with each other. For example, how different organisations work in various ways and the methods used to conduct the SRG assessments within the differing prison and probation settings.
- **Outcomes** refer to the short, intermediate and longer-term outcomes of the SRG pilot. It should be noted that the aim of this evaluation was not to measure or quantify the impact of the SRG pilot and it is not possible to do so based on the methodology used. Instead, the findings focus on the range of self-reported pilot outcomes described by participants.

2.2 SRG pilot theory of change

In the course of the data collection and analysis, it was clear that this broad framework had considerable resonance for the interpretation of emergent findings and the final report. Figure 3.1 shows the theory of change for the SRG pilot. The categories presented in foundations, process and outcomes were derived from interview data analysis by the research team. The key benefit for exploring the different pilot areas in this way is that it can pinpoint how the foundations, processes and outcomes work together in different ways for different organisations in diverse settings. The model therefore displays the diversity of necessary foundations, processes utilised and outcomes achieved.

Figure 3.1 SRG pilots theory of change



The foundations processes and outcomes outlined above were identified as they pinpoint the conditions that have the greatest potential to describe and explain the range and diversity of experiences across the qualitative case studies conducted. This is not to say that other foundations or processes do not exist, and the outcomes presented above explain the full reach and impact of the SRG pilot. Further research will be required to test these findings and add to the map of outcomes using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

3. SRG Pilot Foundations

In the previous chapter the report has described how the SRG pilot can be evaluated by looking at three key features: the underlying pilot foundations; the processes used to deliver the assessment; and the outcomes achieved. This chapter examines the foundations of the SRG pilot as identified from the strategic and operational stakeholder interviews. It therefore describes the key building blocks that made a difference to what pilots were able to offer both staff and offenders, and how they were subsequently engaged with the SRG framework.

Five foundations supporting the SRG emerged from the interviews and are described individually in this chapter. The foundations encompassed:

- pre-existing knowledge and the risk assessment arrangements already in place for extremist offenders;
- capacity of staff to conduct the assessment;
- the nature and extent of pilot SRG training;
- the extent to which staff felt supported by key organisations; and
- the environment within which the SRG was delivered.

Whilst the foundations are described separately, these different aspects of the pilots did not work in isolation from each other. Instead, they influenced each other in different ways and it is the precise nature of this interdependence that had a bearing on what was achieved by the pilot.

3.1 Pre-existing knowledge

Dynamic risk assessment is a complex task that requires assessors to draw on multiple sources of sometimes contrasting information in order to make their judgements.

Consequently, it can take some professionals many years of exposure to 'cases' and the literature to build up their competence and confidence in the assessment of particular offences. Given the relatively new influx of extremist offenders into the prison and probation system, staff described a limited body of expert knowledge and information on the risk assessment of extremists. Consequently, extremist offending was felt by operational staff to contradict the knowledge base on violent offending. As such, risk assessment approaches that were being used with extremists, such as the Offender Assessment System (OASys, HM Prison Service, 2005) and the Historical, Clinical, Risk Management-20 (HCR-20, Douglas, *et al.*, 2006), were felt by staff to be either unsuitable in terms of item specificity or limited in the scope of coverage. For example, staff said that OASys (HM Prison Service, 2005) did not

sufficiently cover an extremist offender's values and beliefs, which were regarded as important areas to consider when assessing their risk. As such, some staff felt that a potential danger of this pre-existing approach was that an offender would be classified and treated as a 'low risk' offender, when in reality they presented with considerably more problems.

To counter this challenge, there was evidence of one pilot area that had a relatively high number of extremist cases, working with partners such as the police and Islamic mentoring organisations to explore the nature of extremist risk. Despite these best intentions, the downside of this approach is that local initiatives can work independently of a nationalised standardised framework. In turn, this presents HMPPS with ethical and quality assurance issues that may then increase the potential for offenders to initiate litigation. The lack of existing guidance for extremist offenders and the socio-legal challenges this may present meant that the SRG pilot was warmly received by staff interviewed. However, the resources required for professionals to conduct the SRG were also a key foundation of the pilot and so are discussed in the section below.

3.2 Capacity

When any policy is initiated, the capacity of staff to engage with the pilot is a common foundation supporting delivery process and outcomes. Although the staff interviewed supported the pilot and were aware delivery did not attract additional resources, the amount of time staff had to prepare, conduct and write up the assessment was a central theme running through the interviews. As such, four features had a bearing on the extent to which staff felt they had enough time to prepare for and deliver the SRG:

Experience of conducting assessments

The need to have experienced staff carrying out SRG assessments was acknowledged at a strategic level to assure quality, reliability and validity of practice. However each area was responsible for identifying their own assessors and therefore staff interviewed ranged from Chartered Forensic Psychologists with significant experience of conducting dynamic risk assessments, to Prison Officers with a limited experience in formally appraising risk. The SRG presents assessors with a range of complex topics to consider. As such, those staff with limited experience in this area were felt to be less certain about the specific nature of some items, and equally unsure about how the information gathered should be interpreted. It is clear therefore that the extent of individual experience had a bearing on the overall time taken to conduct the assessment.

The experience of the person conducting the assessment was also highlighted by the offenders interviewed as part of the evaluation, whereby the assessor's professionalism and capability were described. Key features of the assessor's professionalism appeared to be linked to their experience, both generally but also in conducting complex assessments. Offenders felt that these qualities were demonstrated through the assessor's style during their meetings, such as their non-judgmental attitude and mature and knowledgeable approach. Again, it does not seem to be ambitious to hypothesise that the more experienced staff created an effective assessment dynamic that translated into a smoother and faster delivery process. To support this view, offenders contrasted their SRG experience with contact they had with other professionals with less substantive experience. Here a clear distinction was made, whereby the SRG assessor focussed on the context of the offender's life, their offence and offending behaviour, rather than spending lots of time exploring the offender's religious views and influences in isolation.

“Some people are judgemental without the knowledge...She (the assessor) got the knowledge and then she made the judgement.” (Offender)

Threat of legal challenge

It was apparent from the staff interviews that conducting assessments that were ethical and robust were at the core of SRG assessor practice. The SRG was seen by assessors to help support this ethical goal and is discussed further in the next chapter. Participants felt that a litigation risk was presented by extremist offenders which in turn could have a bearing on the time taken to assess individuals. For example, staff felt this group differed from other offender groups as they were often 'highly educated', had 'excellent lawyers' and had been exposed to lengthy trials so that they gave assessors 'pre-rehearsed' responses. In addition, staff had found this offender group to be proactive in exercising their legal and human rights and as such, had found it particularly difficult to approach certain subjects with them, for example, their relationships.

“Things that are particularly difficult to ask are things around relationships...[in] this case being married and having [a] partner who is committed to the same extremist ideology is a massive risk factor, but we rarely have access to information about the partner and we rarely get to meet them because they are very skilled at using their legal rights, human rights to keep us away from partners.” (Staff)

As such, some staff made slower progress to ensure a quality assessment outcome. In addition, it was recognised that the fact that the SRG was a new process could potentially

impact on some sites being reluctant to get involved with the process. For example, one site was concerned about the implications of the current eligibility criteria for the SRG. That is, staff in this site questioned how defensible it was to use the framework on people not convicted of extremism and so were concerned about the potential impact on operational capacity that such legal challenges could bring.

Assessor role

Where staff had a dedicated role for managing extremist offenders, for example, for those working on a Counter Terrorism Unit (CTU), the time spent on the SRG was not an issue. However, staff acknowledged that the pilot was being done 'on good grace' for development and this position was not felt to be sustainable across the sites should the SRG be rolled out further. However, capacity was reported to be a bigger challenge for assessors who did not have a dedicated role or belong to a dedicated extremism unit. As such, some stages of the SRG process, such as conducting a thorough file review or all assessors attending the 'scoring' meeting did not always occur. This was due to non-dedicated staff being unable to fit in all that was required to carry out a robust assessment alongside their existing workload.

Resource estimates

The SRG had been piloted with the assumption that it would take staff approximately a day and a half to complete. There was some feeling at a strategic level that this was adequate because the SRG was perceived to be a quick assessment to conduct when compared to previous risk assessment arrangements for extremist offenders. For example one site reported using three probation officers to look at an offender's OASys (HM Prison Service, 2005) to ensure the outcome was as robust as possible. However, a contrasting view amongst other strategic participants was that this was an underestimation of the resource required, especially when this timeframe was compared to other risk assessments. For example, Promoting Risk Intervention by Situational Management (PRISM, Glasgow Caledonian University, 2008) or the HCR-20 (Douglas *et al.*, 2006) was reported as taking five to seven days to complete for complicated cases.

This alternative view was reiterated by strategic and operational staff working in both custody and community settings who were clear that the resources required to robustly conduct the three stage process had been underestimated. As such, staff talked about spending from two to five days, to up to a period of six months on one assessment. This in part depended on the need for multiple meetings to gather information and conduct the offender interviews. Having time to carry out the SRG was felt to be especially important for helping to build a relationship between the assessor and offender and where the assessor lacked the

necessary background information. In addition staff felt that estimates of time also needed to recognise the complexity of working with this group of offenders and the multi-disciplinary nature of the task.

Views about the length of the assessment were also reiterated by the offenders interviewed. Offenders noted that it took multiple meetings to work through the range of SRG items over a prolonged period of time. However, offenders were thankful of the time taken by the assessor to listen and understand them, and never felt too time pressured during the meetings. One offender participant had experienced particularly extensive contact with his assessor. For this individual, part of the approach to piloting the SRG was to gather detailed information about his life and background to provide useful context for further developing the risk guidance. In this example the offender met with the assessor up to 25 times over a number of months and said that the meetings lasted up to two hours each.

3.3 Training

Alongside the need to have capacity to conduct the assessment, it was recognised at a strategic level that the different backgrounds of staff recruited to conduct the SRG meant that providing a good level of training on this assessment was particularly important. However, there was in fact a limit for how long the training could actually take. This was due to pressure at Departmental level and acknowledging how long staff could realistically be released to attend training.

Consequently, staff selected for the SRG pilot received one day of national training, or a series of briefing events. This training was conducted by national SRG leads, with one national event also observed by a member of the evaluation team. The national training consisted of background presentations about risk assessment and the SRG items, followed by delegates working through example cases in small groups. From the training observed and strategic and operational staff interviews, it was clear that some staff were generally positive about the national training delivered. They had particularly liked the time spent working on practice case studies and had found the presentation sessions informative. Staff also felt that the multi-disciplinary attendance was useful and presented a valuable opportunity to share views on the SRG.

However, alongside this positive feedback, there was concern at both a strategic and operational level over the extent of topic coverage the national training was able to offer. As such, suggestions for training amendments emerged from both the evaluator's observations and interviews with strategic and operational staff. These encompassed:

Acknowledging assessor experience

As discussed in the section above, assessors had a diverse range of risk assessment experience. Consequently, some assessors felt that a one day course was too brief for less experienced staff to feel competent delivering a complex assessment.

“For people au fait with risk assessment I think they found [the training was] fine. For people [who are] not I think they would have found that really difficult.” (Staff)

The SRG training was felt to be especially brief when compared with other types of training for risk assessments. In turn, this had the potential to undermine the capability of less experienced staff to work with the SRG.

“It almost feels like on some levels we’re asking people to act beyond their competence and their remit without the full training to safeguard that process.” (Staff)

Acknowledging complexity of the SRG

Chapter 2 (and Appendix 8) of this report presents the multiple stages of the SRG assessment and so it is clear that delivering the assessment is not straightforward. Consequently, operational staff in one site felt that an ‘induction’ was a more appropriate term to use for the training. This was due to these staff feeling that the training had provided an overview rather than actually teaching assessors how to approach and implement the assessment. Again, these observations are underpinned by the nature and extent of an individual’s experience and so speak to the need to ensure that appropriate staff are selected for the assessor role, or that the training is tailored to meet different staff needs in terms of their role and experience.

Training environment

The impact of the place in which teaching is delivered on learning outcomes is well established in the educational literature. On the one course observed by the research team, all instruction was conducted in one setting and there were no break-out rooms to conduct the small group exercises. As a result, some staff felt that it was distracting to have multiple groups of people discussing the same case concurrently. As such, conducting the case study group work in break-out rooms was felt to make best use of the limited training time available to assessors.

In terms of training coverage, staff identified four areas where more depth would have been welcomed:

Philosophical/spiritual influences

Given the complex nature of the discussions taking place between the offender and assessor about Islam and the history of Islam, receiving training in philosophical/spiritual influences was identified as an important area to cover by staff. Here, staff felt that a lack of knowledge in this area could leave them feeling unsettled and de-skilled to conduct a robust risk assessment as they were unable to fully understand what the offender was discussing. The research team also experienced this to a degree when they interviewed some offenders for the evaluation. That is, the research interviews would sometimes take a philosophical direction that the researcher was not equipped to probe further or comment upon.

“You’re trying to implement something that you don’t understand as well as having a discussion on a subject that you know nothing about.” (Staff)

To meet this challenge at a local level, some staff interviewed had attended a two day ‘Islamic awareness’ training separately from the SRG training. Furthermore, at one site such training was being held on a regular basis. This training was perceived by staff at these establishments as vital to conducting an effective SRG assessment with AQ inspired extremist offenders. However, such training had not been available across all sites or to all staff. For example, at one site assessors had spent their own time researching the area on the Internet, and in another location, Islamic awareness training was available to probation but not prison staff. Given the extent of AQ extremists that may be assessed using the SRG as a result of CONTEST, it would be helpful to include this two day awareness event as part of the training package. This would ensure that there was consistency of training which is vital for ethical and legal defensibility.

Non AQ extremism

Although the SRG was conceived to cover both domestic and AQ extremism, staff interviewed were sceptical about its relevance at such a broad level. For example, one site had conducted the SRG with a domestic extremist offender and felt the training and written guidance was less relevant for this offence type compared to AQ offenders. That is, the training and guidance was felt to be tailored towards people working in a group and potentially not as useful/relevant to domestic extremists or those extremists who act in isolation. In addition to this, it was felt that the items were targeted towards offenders who took on the role of ‘leaders’ rather than the ‘followers’.

Practicalities of using SRG

Having more time to practise using the SRG within a ‘training room’ context and having more focus on writing the assessment report would have been welcomed by staff as part of the training. Some staff felt that the practical aspect of the training had been rushed, due to the one day focus of the course, and would have liked more time to practise using the SRG once they had learnt about the approach. This would also provide a good opportunity for assessors to get feedback from the trainers on their broad interpretation of SRG items and how it should be delivered, prior to using it with offenders.

Clarity of roles within team

Finally, some staff also discussed a need for greater clarity on the roles of the SRG team, for example the lead assessor and co-assessor tasks. Staff were clear that although working with colleagues helped ensure that individual assessors were not isolated with overall responsibility, for some sites, it was felt that this lack of clarity about roles meant that the co-assessment model had not yet worked to its true potential. From both an assessment quality and economic perspective, this is a key area of practice to address.

3.4 Organisational support

The next foundation supporting delivery and outcomes of the SRG is the nature and extent of organisational support for the assessment process. Here the importance of organisational backing as a foundation went further than providing staff with enough time. As such, strategic and operational staff identified four key areas of assistance for assessors working with the SRG.

Support from HMPPS and the local employer was described as vital to ensure that staff felt confident they were not alone making judgements on high profile offenders, and that they were conducting the most robust assessment. For example, one area had developed a toolkit for assessors to use with the SRG. This was sent via email to assessors and contained exercises on the different SRG areas, such as intent and belief. The intention was that assessors could consult the toolkit for advice and support when working with the SRG and concentrate on the areas identified as important to the offender.

Peer support was recognised as valuable as it enabled skills and learning to be shared amongst assessors. Although this form of encouragement was thought to be happening in one area, it was not widespread across the pilot sites. As such, operational staff discussed ways in which peer support could be easily achieved. Here the potential for secure online

forums were discussed as a quick way of sharing information that does not entail assessors having to travel to meet peers.

Finally, whilst professional bodies were also identified as being able to offer support, it was uncertain which organisations should be included. For example, while some staff felt there would be value in the SRG having support from the British Psychological Society (BPS), people were not clear whether the BPS would be able to deal with the issues properly due to their lack of expertise in the subject area.

3.5 Environment

The four case study sites operated across the contrasting environments of prison and the community. As such, the nature of offenders within these two environments along with the operational restrictions imposed by prison was felt to have a bearing on the process of SRG delivery and associated outcomes. For example, extremist offenders in prison were often serving very long sentences and/or appealing their conviction(s). Consequently, assessors found it challenging to engage these men in the SRG process. In contrast, some assessors working in the community talked about offenders having more 'hope for the future' and so were willing to discuss their past and fully engage with the assessment process.

Alongside the characteristics of offenders, the environment also influenced the time offenders had to engage with the process. Having to stick to restricted meeting times could have a bearing on the amount of time an offender was able to engage in the SRG. For example, one assessor described only being able to see an offender for thirty minutes to conduct an assessment interview due to operational restrictions in the prison. Consequently, the assessor felt that they did not have adequate time to engage the offender in a collaborative process and gather robust information. This would also mean the assessment had to be carried out over a number of visits.

A further risk for all prison assessment frameworks is an offender being transferred between sites and the extent to which their information travels with them. However, staff felt that this risk was amplified for the SRG as security restrictions had meant it was difficult for an assessor to access work they had already carried out with the offender and there was also the possibility that the new site would not be aware of the SRG.

4. SRG Pilot Delivery Processes

Having set out the foundations of the SRG, this chapter presents findings related to the process of delivery. The chapter begins by covering referral to the SRG. It then describes how the assessment was conducted and concludes by describing the nature of partnership working and the SRG interface with existing risk management systems. As with the foundations chapter previously, these four delivery processes are not mutually exclusive but are presented separately here for conceptual clarity.

4.1 SRG eligibility

The focus of the CONTEST strategy is on international terrorism and although the SRG had been primarily used with AQ offenders, the approach had also been used with domestic extremists such as offenders with far-right beliefs. In one area the SRG was also being used to help understand gun and gang crime, although not yet directly with these offenders. Staff at a strategic level felt that it 'made sense' for the SRG to be used with other types of extremist offender groups as they were thought to share similar psychological profiles. In addition, staff reported that using the SRG more widely in the future would also facilitate greater case flow and so help staff develop and retain their skills in using the framework.

"I think there is enough commonality in this sort of behaviour, psychologically, to make sense; it doesn't make sense to me to have one for Muslim extremists and one for animal rights. I think they do share enough of the fanaticism I suppose." (Staff)

However, as noted in the previous chapter some operational staff questioned the validity of adopting such a broad approach, particularly in regard to three areas. Firstly, generic applicability was challenged whereby the SRG was felt to be AQ focused. Second, if an individual was not engaging with other programmes or intervention then they were felt unlikely to engage with the SRG. Third, some staff also felt that an individual had to possess 'strong extremist beliefs' for the assessment to be really applicable to them.

The SRG is applicable for those deemed of credible concern (of becoming involved in extremist activity/offending) and those convicted of any extremist offence. In addition to the broad referral criteria of convicted extremists, the guidance also states that the assessment can be used on those who have not been convicted of an extremist offence. Although some staff highlighted the utility of this approach in ensuring a comprehensive assessment, this view was not widely shared. As such there were ethical concerns due to the hypothetical nature of the offence. In addition, using an offence-specific framework on an individual with

no explicit conviction or indication of the behaviour is not supported in the broader risk assessment literature. Experienced staff were not familiar with using this approach on other risk assessed offender groups, such as sex offenders. It was felt that perhaps the definition of who to include within the SRG remit should be revisited.

“The pilot said look at a convicted terrorist or extremist, or an affiliate, or someone perceived to have extremist views. Now to me that is really, really dangerous.” (Staff)

4.2 The assessment

The SRG has been developed as a three stage assessment process: planning and gathering information; assessing criminogenic need; and assessing risk of serious harm. In the interviews conducted, staff were asked about their experiences of conducting all three stages with offenders. Offenders were also asked about their assessment experience. Overall, staff felt that the three stage assessment process was very helpful and identified a range of positive outcomes that are described in Chapter 6. Staff were also encouraged to reflect on any aspects of the process that could be improved, resources permitting. Below, the report considers both staff and offender accounts of the assessment and reflects on their experiences at different stages of the process.

Early aspirations

Having a robust approach to assess the risk of extremist offenders was considered to be a key overarching organisational outcome of the SRG. Staff felt that the SRG should provide a benchmark that other partners would understand, and so be able to feed into a management plan or parole board, highlighting relevant areas of risk, and helping to identify appropriate interventions.

“For me, any completion of any tool like that has to have an outcome in the sense of kind of, it has to lead to an objective or sentence plan. Something you’ll do with the offender to kind of like minimise that behaviour in many ways. It has to be practical in that sense, otherwise it just sits there and has no rhyme or reason.” (Staff)

“Giving people more confidence, so when you’ve got parole boards sat with an extremist offender, even if they are just reading a report, even if they are not totally familiar with it, they get a sense that they can base their decisions on something a lot more structured and sound than they have been doing already.” (Staff)

Offenders' initial perception of the assessment was that it would be helpful in two ways. First they perceived a potential personal benefit of being assessed. By co-operating and liaising with the assessor through the assessment process, there was a possibility that a reduction in the risk they posed could be demonstrated. A potential consequence of demonstrating reduced risk for offenders was a feeling that their sentence length could be reduced. Alternatively they also considered that their security status may be reduced, increasing the possibility of being transferred to a lower category prison sooner in their sentence. Second, offenders perceived that engaging with the assessment would also benefit professionals by improving their awareness and understanding about the factors which influence people with extremist views.

However, it was clear that offender support for the assessment was not universal on the wing. For example, some offenders initially experienced pressure from other prisoners to not engage in the assessment. Here the overarching view of peers was that being assessed was in effect collaborating with the Government. These offenders were wary of the potential consequences from their peers of being seen to be 'colluding' with the authorities. In one case, the prison circumvented these concerns by arranging for the offender to meet with the assessor in private. In contrast, another offender felt more able to disregard these concerns and engage in the assessment process, possibly on account of his increased age and the perceived 'gravitas' of his offence in comparison to the other offender interviewed.

Timing

The previous chapter showed how having adequate time to complete the assessment was a key delivery 'foundation'. However, 'when' in a sentence was the optimum time to complete the assessment was seen as equally important. Taking the start of a sentence first, staff described advantages to conducting the SRG early on, as this meant that it could have potentially fed into supervision plans and /or Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) meetings, and provide a baseline. It was then anticipated that the SRG would become an ongoing assessment following an offender's progress through their sentence and after release. However, staff also acknowledged that there needed to be a degree of flexibility in terms of the timing of the SRG, and it may be more appropriate to use the SRG at a later stage in the sentence when an offender may have been more likely to engage having adjusted to the criminal justice system, completed some intervention work and developed a relationship with the assessor.

Offenders were less clear in articulating when they felt the best time was to carry out the assessment once they had been convicted. One offender who had experienced some

pressure from other offenders to not engage in the assessment did suggest that having the assessment early in the sentence may be helpful to prevent offenders potentially being influenced by others.

Consent and collaboration

The risk assessment literature identifies collaborative working between the assessor and the offender as a key feature supporting effective assessment (Shingler & Mann, 2005). This section describes the extent of collaborative working in place across the sites, before going on to discuss the factors that underpinned a collaborative assessment.

Extent of collaborative working

Working collaboratively was described as best practice at a strategic level. The HMPPS position on collaborative assessment is that where possible offenders should contribute to the assessment, although it is recognised this may not always be feasible (either through the choice of offenders not to contribute or because of other factors).

It was anticipated that this method of working with an offender would have helped them to engage in both the assessment and interventions per se.

“[The offender] bought into it fully, he wanted to [do it], saw it was a way of being assessed properly and help us understand him a lot more, so that was really helpful.” (Staff)

However, at an operational level there was a continuum of collaborative working in place. This ranged from full to no collaboration - whereby the offender was unaware the SRG was being used with them. Where the SRG had not been carried out in collaboration this was considered not necessary or possible. For example, it was considered not necessary by staff who felt that offenders would already be aware that probation officers look at risk, so there was no need to make specific reference to the SRG. However in other cases collaborative working had not been possible where individuals were subject to covert surveillance, the offender refused to engage or due to lack of time. Two additional factors identified by staff as having had the potential to impact on the collaborative nature of the assessment are discussed below.

Unintended outcomes

There was some reluctance among prison staff to work collaboratively where it was felt an offender could use this to their advantage and give ‘pre-programmed’ responses. However this view was not shared by all staff, particularly those with experience of collaborative

assessment with other offender groups. Here it was felt transparency was needed, not only about how the SRG approach was being used but also the nature of feedback the offender could expect to receive and the limitations of the approach at the pilot stage.

“At the moment I just think be as collaborative as you can be but just set expectations very clearly in terms of what they can expect to get or not.” (Staff)

Assessor skill

Linked to the fear of unintended outcomes described above, at a strategic level it was felt that the degree of collaborative working in place was in part dependent on the skill and experience of the individual assessor conducting the SRG and their ability to work in this effective, but sometimes demanding way.

As the SRG becomes more established, the importance of providing offenders with a clear route in which to engage with the framework was also acknowledged by staff. However staff noted that at present there was nowhere to record the extent to which the SRG had been carried out collaboratively with an offender.

4.3 Model of collaborative working

Despite the diverse degree of collaboration in place during the pilot, staff and offender accounts highlighted a model of collaborative working that would need to be in place to ensure the SRG was delivered consistently. Three domains underpinned this model and are described in turn below:

Transparency about the aims and outcomes of the SRG

Staff felt that one of the key facilitators to obtaining offender consent was transparency about the purpose of the SRG, and the feedback the offender could expect to receive. This view was reiterated in the offender interviews. Prior to consenting to being assessed, offenders all valued the assessor clearly explaining the assessment, highlighting its voluntary nature and what the assessment entailed. This explanation was central in informing their decision making regarding their involvement in the assessment. All offenders said that they consented to being assessed on the back of the clear and detailed explanation provided.

Clear recruitment literature

The use of consent forms and supporting information when introducing the SRG to offenders had not been in place at the start of the pilot across all sites. While some staff felt that it was vital to have a consent form in place, and that some colleagues may refuse to be involved

without offender consent, concern was also raised. This focussed on the potential for a signed form to disengage offenders, especially if they had no previous contact with the psychology department or interventions. There is no evidence to suggest that signing consent leads to disengagement from interventions and so it is advisable that these fears are addressed to ensure optimum ethical practice in the future.

Offender and assessor relationship

In earlier sections it has emerged that the extent of an individual's professional presentation and overall experience were a foundation supporting delivery. It is therefore unsurprising that offenders also implicitly picked up on these issues when the assessment experience was explored. Offenders talked about 'liking the assessor' and recognising their positive personal and professional qualities. Personally, the assessor was described as pleasant, respectful and genuine from the outset. These qualities were important as they had put the offenders at ease at the initial meeting and formed a platform for the relationship to develop during the subsequent assessment.

"(The assessor) was a very polite person, I can see she is a good person. But anybody trying to take information, pushing pushing, then that wouldn't be happening."
(Offender)

The assessor's careful listening, and thoughtful and responsive questioning were also qualities and characteristics which offenders valued and noted during the assessment process.

"(The assessor) did that, (she) got right inside of me.... because she showed her professionalism. ...she's a good listener and she asked the appropriate questions."
(Offender)

"She was getting underneath the surface but she wasn't directly digging away...you knew she was doing it but you didn't mind because that's why you were there." (Offender)

Offenders commented on how the assessor spoke to them and asked questions, portraying genuine interest and care. This subsequently encouraged offender engagement and led them to enjoy meeting with the assessor. An implicit feeling of faith in the assessor was alluded to by some offenders when compared to their earlier experiences of other professionals on account of this more relaxed experience.

"(The assessor) comes to see me to talk about my offence, my offending and my personality... the other people want to sit there and talk more about religion." (Offender)

Offenders' relationships with the assessor developed over time, underpinned by mutual respect and trust. An example of this was provided by one offender who welcomed the assessor closing the door to the room when they were meeting. The offender interpreted the door no longer being left open as the assessor believing that sufficient trust had been built up between them and welcomed the privacy the closed door provided. On account of these relationships, offenders described looking forward to meeting with the assessor. They felt reassured by regular contact with the assessor and were sometimes anxious if they did not meet them.

The importance of assessors having an appropriate personal approach was also reiterated by staff interviewed, and was felt to be an important consideration when recruiting assessors. For example, a balanced approach and a strong thirst for development were discussed by staff as being two important qualities for potential assessors.

4.4 Assessment items and supporting documents

A key stage of the SRG involves working through the gathered information to assess potential areas of criminogenic need according to 21 factors which may be linked to extremist offending. The factors cover a number of areas including lack of emotional resilience, the need for identity, meaning and belonging, and susceptibility to group control and influence (see Table 2.1). There is also a 22nd factor which is intended to be used for any additional issues not covered but considered relevant for an individual's risk assessment such as accommodation and substance misuse. Assessors were asked to score whether offenders presented 'no evidence', 'some evidence' or 'strong evidence' for each factor. Staff experience of using these assessment items and supporting documents are discussed below.

Assessment items

When assessment items were appraised, a key feature was the extent staff felt they were relevant to extremist offenders. Staff either reported that there was relevance in having all 21 items, if only to then discount them, or suggested some conceptual overlap. Areas reported as conceptually overlapping were:

- 3 and 4 (Need to feel significant/sense of belonging – Motivation)
- 7, 9 and 10 (Receptiveness to extremist views - Motivation)
- 19 and 20 (Knowledge and ability to commit an extremist offence – Capability)
- 13 and 14 (Attitudes and beliefs that justify offending – Beliefs)
- 3, 15 and 16 (Need to feel significant/sense of belonging – Motivation)

Some assessors felt that there was the potential to collapse these items into broader concepts. At a strategic and site level it was felt that the 21 factors could be clustered into broader themes, and this would make the approach 'less daunting' for new assessors. On the other hand, it was recognised that in terms of the number of items, this was in line with other violent risk assessments such as HCR-20 (Douglas *et al.*, 2006) or the Psychopathy Checklist – Revised (PCL-R, Hare, 1991). Finally, staff also expressed a desire for more understanding in what items had the most validity in terms of risk, and when an item could be disregarded. In terms of the assessment items, the three offenders largely concurred that what they were asked was appropriate.

Alongside providing feedback on the relevance of the 21 items, there were contrasting views on whether there were any relevant unmet needs not currently covered in the SRG. Here some strategic staff felt that the current coverage was sufficient and recognised that the 22nd factor could have been used for anything else that could have come up, but had not yet needed to use this. Conversely, some operational staff reported that the SRG needed to include the following additional areas: social resilience and lone activity factors; self-radicalisation and substance misuse; as they were felt important factors to consider in regards to an extremist offenders risk.

Supporting documents

While staff felt that the SRG guidance, scoring matrix and suggested list of interview questions was useful, the questions had not generally been used. This was for three overarching reasons. First, they were not perceived as relevant to the offender being assessed. Second, some assessors felt the questions did not facilitate their style of interview. For example, one view was how the suggested questions were not transparent enough in terms of the information assessors wanted to gather from the offender.

“the suggested questions, [are] not my style of interviewing at all. I’m quite upfront and I think those questions were like worded as if you’re slyly trying to dig information, but probably when I work with people, [I’m] a bit more upfront, a bit more transparent. So I didn’t find them that helpful.” (Staff)

Third, there was a lack of clarity over how the questions linked in with the 21 areas of need and some staff would have welcomed more guidance over how to use the factors, for example, whether it was acceptable to use the same evidence for more than one item. Once again, the degree of staff experience also had a bearing on how the assessment materials were perceived. Staff that were less experienced at carrying out risk assessments felt that

the documents and guidance contained too much information and were generally not easy to use during the interview process.

“[There are] three very long documents that you’ve got to try and bring together very rapidly on a subject that you know don’t anything about.” (Staff)

In line with the staff views, offenders also noted that assuming a standard set of questions for all individuals would not work as not all questions would be relevant or suitable. Further, answering the questions was not necessarily straightforward for offenders and involved a lot of discussion. Subsequently offenders felt that the time taken to answer some questions needed to be considered when planning the meetings and overall assessment process.

4.5 Assessing risk of serious harm and reporting

The third stage of the SRG comprised assessing the risk of serious harm and writing the report. These are discussed in turn below.

Assessing risk of serious harm

When assessing the risk of serious harm, assessors are required to consider four factors: Motivation; Capability; Intent; and Beliefs. The assessors interviewed were unanimous that these four factors were very helpful in understanding the nature of future risk and that it was important to take them all into account when conducting a comprehensive assessment for this group. In addition, offenders suggested that these factors made sense when set in the context of their past behaviour. However, some further areas for consideration were also noted by staff. For example at a strategic level it was recognised that assessors may have felt pressurised to map one of the 21 areas into each of the four domains. In addition, some staff said that the current presentation of these factors alluded to four mutually exclusive features. As this was not felt to be the case by both staff from the Centre and the sites, there was discussion of presenting the four factors as overlapping Venn diagrams to help represent this complexity.

Reporting

Writing a clear and comprehensive report is vital to ensuring the efficacy of risk assessment. HMPPS had taken a number of steps to ensure effective reporting and this included providing a report template for sites to use. Although there is no doubt that the template helped ensure consistency of presentation, there was uncertainty with regard to where particular pieces of evidence should go. To manage this challenge, some staff felt that it would be helpful to anonymise and circulate completed reports so assessors had examples

they could consult where necessary. In addition to the content required, staff commented on the length of the report. While staff acknowledged that a high level of detail was necessary for the report to stand up to legal scrutiny, a shorter or summary version would also be helpful when circulating to other interested partners.

Offenders also commented on the reporting stage of the SRG and valued being able to see the output produced as a result of the meetings. Whilst some offenders found it clear and accessible, one found it a little harder to read and digest due to some of the language and terminology used. Being able to check and challenge parts of the report were the most important dimensions that offenders valued, and there was evidence of amendments being made by the assessor following this feedback. This demonstrates the benefit of collaborative working in that it 'allowed' these discussions and amendments to take place.

4.6 Co-assessor model

The SRG is designed to be conducted by a group of professionals that is comprised of one lead and a number of co-assessor roles. The value of the SRG being conducted as a group assessment was recognised at a strategic and operational level for encouraging collaborative staff working and helping to ensure staff did not feel isolated. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, staff felt that increased clarity about how the group assessment model worked in practice would have been welcomed at the training stage. In practice, the model specified in the guidelines was not followed operationally across the sites. For example, some 'lead assessors' had limited involvement in the information gathering stage, but became more involved at the interpreting evidence stage. Challenges were reported in using a co-assessment model across the following two areas:

Limited understanding of SRG

Some lead assessors perceived that others working with the SRG had a limited understanding of how to use the approach and the principles of risk assessment per se. It was felt that ensuring all staff had the relevant training and understanding would have quickened up the process and enabled all those involved to have been able to share their expertise with each other.

Conflicting opinions

While some assessors viewed disagreement among the staff working on an offender's case as a good way of raising risk issues, others found it frustrating and time consuming.

“The one word that comes into my head is frustrating because you would have a group of people around you that just could not agree about what that piece of information meant and what that item meant...it would go on for hours.” (Staff)

Staff spoke about using three different approaches for dealing with such disagreement. Firstly, the lead had overridden other staff members decisions or secondly they presented all the information in the report. This had occurred where staff felt the disagreement was due to a lack of understanding and training about the SRG. However, where disagreement was felt to be beneficial assessors had adopted a third approach, by taking the group consensus or agreeing on ‘middle ground’. This again highlights how staff need more direction in how to use this group assessment in practice, to ensure consistent delivery across the sites.

4.7 Partnership working

A range of partners and agencies were described by staff as playing a key role in the risk assessment work of extremist offenders including the security services, the police, Imams, offender managers and psychologists (from the prison and probation service). Given the complex nature of extremist offending, staff felt it was vital that these agencies engaged with the process of delivery. However, the nature and extent of partner engagement was perceived to be underpinned by four features:

Existing relationships

The MAPPA process and having a cluster of similar cases were described by staff as facilitating a good working relationship prior to the SRG pilot. This was due to: assessors already being engaged with the partner agencies; assessors already meeting partners on a regular basis; and there was a level of understanding about each other’s roles already in place. Solid working relationships were also facilitated by having clear channels of communication in place with the partner agencies involved, for example a single contact point at each agency. However, staff turnover within partner agencies meant that relationship building processes and the partner representative’s knowledge of the SRG often had to start again.

Organisational ethos and experience of SRG

The police and probation services were felt to have contrasting aims and objectives. On the one hand having diverse perspectives round the table was helpful as it ensured a comprehensive picture of risk was presented. However, such differences in agency focus were also felt to have the potential to undermine coherent risk management.

“They [the security dept] have their own agenda with these prisoners, and their agenda is more about monitoring and observing... more about controlling it.” (Staff)

In addition, not having widespread support and awareness of the SRG across all agencies had resulted in a lack of partner attendance at some multidisciplinary meetings. A lack of understanding about the SRG was also reported as a factor in partners disengaging in the process, especially for example when there had been a disagreement over how to interpret some of the evidence.

Data sharing

The SRG model relies on the availability of cross-organisational information to conduct a robust assessment. During the pilot, some staff described not having access to all the information available on an offender and therefore being unable to provide the fullest possible assessment for the following four reasons:

- Agencies were reluctant to release data for security reasons or unless they were specifically asked for it.
- There was a lack of clarity over why agencies should share such information.
- Resource and logistical challenges, for example staff spoke about how agencies found it difficult to free up time to attend meetings as they had to tap into existing resources.
- The data sharing procedures in place, for example the files of high profile cases in prison were kept by security and assessors had to make a written application to retrieve the information.

Even if an offender’s data was fully shared, one site spoke about the difficulties they faced in confidentially storing such information due to insufficient systems in place. However such challenges had not been faced to the same degree across all sites, and the following two factors were reported as having facilitated this stage of the SRG:

- Overall strategic support, for example from the Deputy Governor.
- Staff members having carried out cross role or co-location working, such as being an assessor and belonging to the CTU. In addition to this, one site were looking at having a specialist team for the SRG with CTU clearance.

4.8 Interface with existing risk management practices

There are many risk assessment approaches currently being used by both prison and community staff and it is therefore important for offender engagement and economic reasons that the SRG does not duplicate effort. Linking the SRG to existing risk management processes was reported to have encouraged 'buy in' from the partners involved. With regard to specific assessments, given the current universal application of OASys (HM Prison Service, 2005), it was encouraging that staff felt the SRG could be used to supplement or complement this framework. For example, OASys was perceived to be a broader assessment, while the SRG went into more detail.

“If you’re looking at TACT offences, that kind of thing, it’s just on a completely different level to OASys,[SRG]t encourages you to look at it in context... and that’s where this assessment [SRG] is good.” (Staff)

Other existing risk management systems where it was felt that the SRG could have a beneficial impact were the pre-sentence report and MAPPA meetings. Despite this potential, there was a sense amongst some staff that there was still some distance to travel for the SRG to link in fully with other models. For example, the full 'interface potential' of the SRG and MAPPA was not felt to be fully exploited. Although there is the potential for MAPPA meetings to be brought forward six months prior to release, with the SRG then feeding into the process, this was not currently occurring. Finally, prison staff also saw potential for the SRG to be used alongside the Category A assessment. However as the timings of each had not coincided, this had not yet been possible.

It is important to note that this appraisal of interface is relatively limited primarily because it is based on a very small sample of cases. Further research is required to fully explore the process and operational resources required for the SRG to link into other assessment models.

5. SRG Perceived Outcomes

Having explored the foundations and processes supporting the SRG, this chapter now considers the perceived outcomes of the SRG pilot approach, drawing on the interviews conducted with staff and offenders. This chapter first discusses the outcomes of the SRG approach for the organisations where it was used and the staff involved in the approach. Importantly, the chapter then considers the outcomes of being assessed described by the offenders. The chapter also considers the various factors which affected the impact of the SRG pilot and contributed to the outcomes described.

5.1 Organisations

To fully explore the reach of the SRG pilot, it is important to first explore perceived outcomes for organisations hosting the pilot as these can also cascade down and influence staff benefits. When staff were asked to reflect on SRG outcomes at an organisational level, two key features were identified:

Robust risk assessment

Having a robust risk assessment approach for assessing the risk of those already convicted of this type of offending was considered to be a key organisational outcome of the SRG. In addition to this, it was felt at a strategic level that the SRG would be able to identify those offenders who were considered 'at risk' of committing an extremist offence, however this view was not widely shared due to staff's ethical concerns as discussed in Section 4.1. It is vital that organisations have a robust assessment for extremist offenders in order to discriminate between individuals, show that work has been tailored to address individual risk, and inform future management plans.

"We have devised in a short period of time, which could accurately point us in the direction of differentiating those people who have unpalatable views and who may well be extreme, but whose extremism is never going to go beyond the hand book for making guns. Or those people whose views are much more entrenched and whose anger and hostility is more at the surface...this tool [risk assessment] is about degrees of risk." (Staff)

However, at present there was some uncertainty among sites about how any findings based on the SRG would be used, and what the next steps were in terms of the pilot. This view was also shared at a strategic level and will need to be addressed should the tool be subject to wider use.

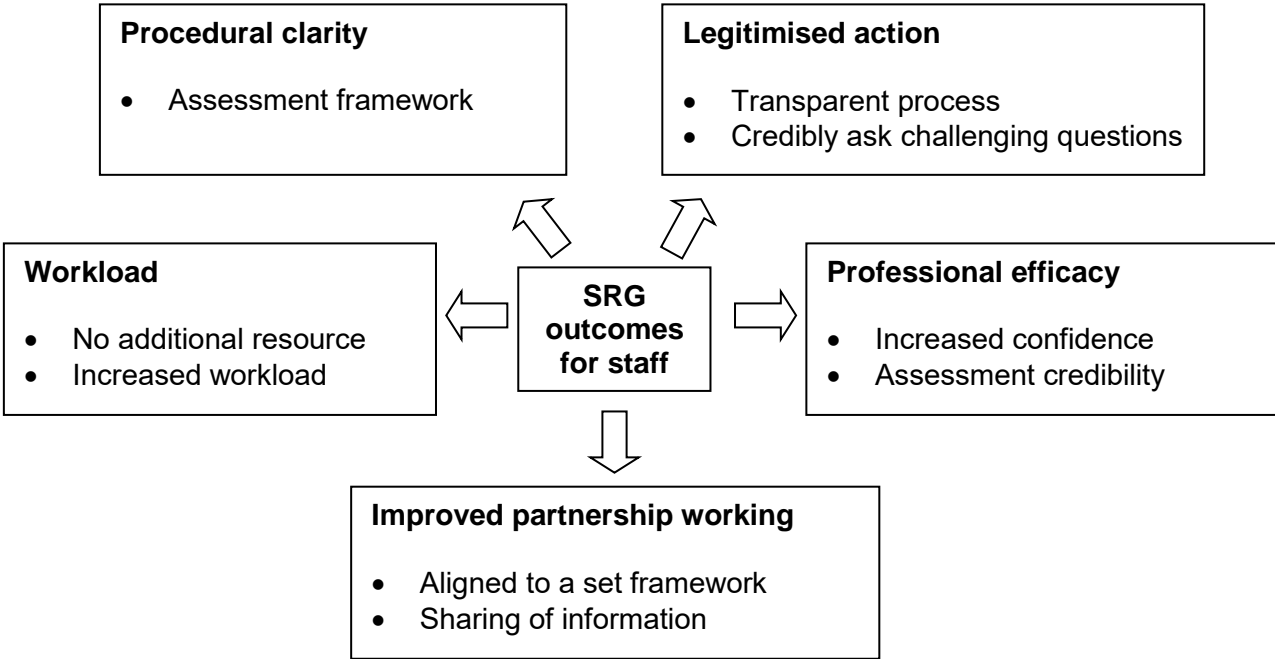
Resources

At a strategic level the SRG was intended to help sites make better use of resources in how they were already managing risk, and it was rolled out as a ‘cost neutral’ assessment. In one area with dedicated staff to carry out work with extremists, staff capacity for carrying out the assessment was not reported to have been an issue. In addition to this, the site’s previous experience of risk assessing this offender group had been very resource intensive. For example, at least three probation officers had looked at each assessment. It was also felt that after an assessor’s first SRG assessment, they were more confident in delivering the approach. As such, the SRG was seen as a way of having facilitated a more confident, better workforce. Such a workforce would therefore have resource savings in the long term at an organisational level. However, one of the impacts discussed at sites who did not have dedicated staff to work with extremists was an increased workload for operational staff. This is discussed in the next section.

5.2 Staff

As discussed in the preceding chapters, the staff interviewed were broadly very positive about the potential of the SRG to identify and manage the risk of extremist offenders and possibly other offenders who shared similarities with this group. The evaluation identified five outcomes of the assessment approach. These are shown in Figure 6.1 and discussed in the subsequent sections.

Figure 6.1 Perceived outcomes of the SRG assessment for staff



Procedural clarity

As outlined in Chapter 4, assessors talked about not having a clear sense of how to assess and manage the risk presented by extremist offenders before the introduction of the pilot. For example, OASys (HM Prison Service, 2005) had been used with extremist offenders but staff were aware of the limitations of this instrument with this group. Staff interviewed welcomed the introduction of the SRG as it provided them with a relevant and focussed, yet fluid framework which was tailored to address the complexities of this offender group.

“what this assessment tool enables you to do is look at your key themes...It’s a nice little prompt to begin to think [through] that process. ‘ok so this person is a high risk, there’s a prompt here, ask where’s he going to get the resources from to carry this through..., does he have the intelligence to carry this through, ask that question.” (Staff)

“I think the guidance is excellent, I like it. The people who’ve I’ve done the multi disciplinary assessments like it..., it’s fluid, it gets you thinking in different ways.” (Staff)

Legitimised action

Having a clear and transparent process by which to assess extremist offenders was also felt to legitimise the work being carried out with this group. At a strategic level, it was hoped that the SRG would provide staff with defensibility and quality assurance for their work with offenders.

“Looking for something of substance that we could use...I suppose in some respects you feel a bit vulnerable if you’re constantly being told well we don’t know if this is appropriate with this client...something that’s got some research background...rather than guessing and plucking something out of the air.” (Staff)

Consequently, the SRG was perceived as a way of providing staff with a framework that enabled them to credibly ask challenging questions of the offender. Operationally, staff reported how the SRG framework had acted as a useful prompt for knowing how to approach challenging questions and areas. Importantly, these were areas that may have been ‘skipped’ or missed prior to the SRG pilot.

Professional efficacy

Staff working in both prison and probation hoped that the SRG would facilitate increased professional efficacy. Having a clear process and feeling confident in asking challenging

questions had given some staff a greater sense of competence in their role. At a strategic site level, staff spoke about how the SRG increased assessor's confidence in their assessment skills, especially when it reinforced preconceived ideas they held about the offender's risk. As discussed, the SRG was felt to have a beneficial impact on legitimising assessors' actions and decisions, and it was felt to bring credibility to the risk assessments they made, which was also helpful when assessors were discussing the offenders risk assessment with other partners. In addition, the SRG could also beneficially impact the professional development of staff. For example by encouraging them to develop their understanding of this group of offenders and in this type of risk assessment. Staff interviewed were keen to get involved with the pilot as they saw it as something 'new and interesting'.

The sense of professional efficacy and development was however not always positive. At a site level for example some staff had some professional concerns about the decisions being made for this very high profile group. The lack of training and confidence among some staff in using the approach meant that staff were, or could potentially be, being asked to work at a level beyond which they were capable or confident.

In addition there was some uncertainty among staff interviewed about what exactly the SRG was measuring. In some instances the SRG had reinforced what the staff member had thought or was felt to provide different information about an individual's risk across the four areas from that indicated at the screening stage. However in other cases staff were less confident in the findings presented in the final assessment report, where for example assessors felt they did not have all the relevant information from partners to feed into the report. This has implications for the defensibility of the assessment and requires further empirical investigation and testing.

Improved partnership working

In the previous chapter the importance of partnership working on the process of delivery was described. The SRG was also felt by staff to have a beneficial impact on within and across organisation working. This was expected to be facilitated through encouraging transparency and quality assurance across all partners involved. The SRG was also expected to highlight which partner agencies should be working together for individual offenders, and enable all involved to deliver within a set framework. At a site level, while staff discussed some challenges to getting full engagement with the SRG across all partners, such as the security service and Imams, it was also described as having a positive impact in encouraging partnership working and a more joined up approach. For example, one site described the SRG as providing police with information on an offender's ideology and the risk this may

represent in the broader context of their life. In addition to facilitating external multi-disciplinary working, the SRG was also reported to have had a within-site beneficial impact by encouraging closer working and information sharing between psychologists and offender supervisors.

Workload

An impact of the pilot discussed at sites who did not have dedicated staff to work with extremists was an increased workload for operational staff. This then had an impact on the work they were able to conduct, especially in terms of SRG caseload and not being able to deliver the SRG to all eligible offenders. While this may suggest the need for a semi-specialist assessor team, this was not necessarily a best use of resources across all sites. For example, another case study site had a specialist team in place but reported little demand for their services. The sustainability of rolling out the SRG further with no additional resource needs to be considered, especially if the SRG is expected to be used effectively with all eligible offenders within a given site.

5.3 Offenders

This section discusses the impact of the SRG on offenders from the perspective of staff, before presenting the outcomes discussed by offenders assessed.

Earlier chapters have shown how staff had found it challenging to engage extremist offenders in any assessment process or intervention before the SRG pilot. As such, at a strategic level it was hoped that the SRG would help engage offenders, make the risk assessment process more transparent to them, and facilitate their understanding in why decisions regarding their risk management had been made. At a site level, staff hoped that the SRG would ‘facilitate a journey’ with an offender and so enable staff to monitor an individual’s progress in addressing their risk. While staff acknowledged the potential range of positive impacts on offenders, some concerns were raised by probation staff. Here, some considered that the ‘intrusive questions’ asked of the offender could have a negative impact on the assessor–offender therapeutic relationship. However, this concern was not reiterated by the offenders interviewed for the evaluation.

The report now draws on the three offender interviews to describe the outcomes they perceived were linked to the SRG pilot. For a number of reasons, isolating the offender outcomes was difficult. For example, it was often too early in an individual’s prison sentence for them to articulate what the assessment outcome(s) had been. The interplay of other

factors, such as changing beliefs and ideologies as a result of exposure to Imams and intervention programmes in the prison may also play a part in influencing the reported outcomes. Again, this makes it difficult to pin-point offender outcomes directly to the SRG assessment process.

Whilst the pilot assessment approach was designed for all types of extremist offenders, the offenders interviewed had all been convicted of AQ influenced extremism offences. Making any claims regarding the generalisability of these outcomes to other groups of extremist offenders is therefore not possible. Further, caution should be applied in generalising these outcomes to other AQ influenced extremists as they are not homogenous in their religious and political beliefs, influences and views. Finally, caution must be applied in extending the outcomes experienced to other offenders, including offenders assessed in the community as the offenders were all from the same prison and were assessed by the same psychologist. Their assessment experiences and subsequent outcomes will therefore be shaped by these factors, which may vary for offenders assessed by different assessors and/ or in a different environment/s. It is with these caveats that the subsequent section should be read.

The primary offender outcomes identified related to their experience of the assessment and to their time in prison. A secondary outcome regarding 'willingness to engage' was also discussed.

Improved relationships and imprisonment experience

It was clear from speaking with the offender sample that some had experienced challenges during their sentence regarding how they were perceived and treated by some prison staff. Consequently, offenders felt fortunate to have been treated fairly by the SRG assessor during the process of their assessment. As a result of engaging with the same assessor throughout the assessment, offenders felt understood and listened to. This helped them to think about and understand some of their previous behaviour and actions.

"It's very helpful to speak to somebody. It releases the frustration." (Offender)

For offenders, a consequence of feeling more engaged and consulted was an improved view of professionals working within the prison. In contrast to their earlier views, offenders saw professionals as 'normal' and approachable. As such, offenders developed a respect for staff authority and the work that prison staff were doing. This was particularly important for one offender who directly linked his assessment experience with improvements in his prison behaviour, his relationships with prison staff and his overall imprisonment experience.

Previously this offender had been subject to negative and stigmatising behaviour from prison staff on account of his conviction and so his resulting behaviour towards them was unruly. For this individual, going through the assessment was a two-way process whereby he could discuss issues with the assessor, who listened and tried to understand him, and vice versa. Based on their discussions and as the assessor's knowledge of the offender developed, they identified improvements in the offender's understanding and behaviour. The assessor then promoted these improvements and acted as a conduit between the offender and the prison officials. This resulted in the prisoner demonstrating positive behaviour towards prison staff and staff reciprocated. Consequently, the offender described an improved experience of imprisonment on account of less negative and stigmatising behaviour from staff. In this case the assessor dedication and liaison between the offender and the prison service was a key element at the heart of improved relationships and improved prison experiences.

“Between last year and this year the wing itself has amazingly changed in the way that they treat me and the way they, I am their friend with the staff and everybody else....most of the trust now that I have gained for the prison I believe is due to her (the assessor).” (Offender)

Willingness to engage

A possible secondary benefit of being involved in the assessment process was also suggested by offenders. This was offender's willingness to engage and warrants attention in future research. For example, one offender mentioned that since being assessed he was willing to take part in the counter-radicalisation course offered by the prison. However, another offender was more skeptical about the thought of engaging in courses as no one could be forced to attend and engage in them. A further view suggested an improved willingness to engage with the Imams and learn about aspects of his religion which he was less familiar with. The potential for the assessment process to possibly help offenders engage in other activities, including courses or education during their sentence should not be discounted.

6. Recommendations

A key part of the SRG process evaluation is to make recommendations regarding staff training, and delivery processes to inform the future utility of the approach and any future impact evaluation. It was clear from the staff and offender interviews that the SRG has great potential to understand the risk presented by extremist offenders. Based on the findings presented in this report, the following areas are proposed for further development.

6.1 Implementation

Offender eligibility criteria: be clear and document whether the SRG is indeed relevant for extremists other than AQ influenced offenders. If it is not, consider developing an assessment approach relevant for domestic extremists. The issues and concerns raised by staff about using this approach with those who are deemed 'at risk' of extremism also need to be addressed. Lastly there are other offender groups, for example gun and gang crime, who share similar psychological, behavioural and need characteristics and who could potentially benefit from the SRG, or a slightly modified version. This of course requires empirical testing and validation in due course.

Assessor eligibility criteria: revisit the profile of staff who should be working with the SRG. Particularly, whether there needs to be a more stringent selection criteria or a qualification awarded before staff are able to deliver this assessment. For example assessors could go through an accreditation process like that for the Psychopathy Checklist – Revised (PCL-R; Hare, 1991) or the Structured Assessment of Risk and Need (SARN; Webster *et al.*, 2006). This is especially important as it was recognised at a strategic level that the role will become more challenging as terrorist groups become more sophisticated. Once assessors are selected there needs to be greater clarity over the lead assessors' role, and consideration given over whether the 'lead and co-model' is an appropriate approach to use across all sites. Specialist SRG regional units could also be introduced. However, this would need sufficient ongoing resource and a sufficient caseload. In addition to this an element of local response would have to be retained and there would need to be system in place for offenders who move area.

Training: extend the training available to staff, especially those with less experience of conducting risk assessments, or consider developing separate training packages dependent on an individual's level of experience and the nature of their involvement with the SRG. Training should cover the practicalities of using the SRG (including practical exercises of

carrying out an assessment) and equip staff with the relevant philosophical and Islamic awareness knowledge needed to work with this group.

SRG profile: ensure the SRG is prioritised when it is implemented at sites so staff view it as a core feature of their work. This approach needs to be given the same value as, for example, a pre-sentence report. This would be facilitated by ensuring staff have sufficient ring-fenced time to carry out the assessment, and providing additional resource. It was also suggested that the SRG is made accountable, to ensure it gets prioritised. For example, in prisons the SRG could possibly be included as one of the key performance indicators (KPIs). In addition to this it would also be important to raise awareness at a local and national level and ensure that there is more openness and less secrecy surrounding the SRG. Awareness raising should include the following five groups of staff: Governing Governors; security governors; Directors of Offender Management (DOMs); area counter terrorism co-ordinators; and relevant partner agencies.

Delivery

Consider revisiting the estimate of time and resource required to complete the assessment: this will facilitate the SRG being used to its full potential and structure the expectations of senior strategic staff and assessors. In addition, providing ring-fenced time and resource will facilitate the SRG being viewed as a priority among sites and partner agencies. However it is acknowledged that this will be dependent on the resources available and may not be possible given the current economic climate.

Review the items: review whether some of the items can be collapsed to streamline the assessment where there appeared to be some conceptual overlap. In addition, the guidance needs to be appropriate for use with all offender groups that currently come under its remit.

Ensure ongoing assessor support in place: as discussed in Chapter 3, support could come from a number of areas and it could be explored whether more experienced staff can act as local mentors to support less experienced assessors. In addition the use of secure online forums may also be a simple way of supporting operational staff.

Develop clear guidance for all stages of the SRG: this will include information on the collaborative nature of the assessment, the need for transparency in any decisions made, and clear instructions on how to interpret the information gathered and document the evidence. This will facilitate the SRG being used consistently across the sites, which is vital for defensibility and to ensure the SRG is being carried out robustly and ethically.

Partnership working: develop an SRG awareness package so that all partners are engaged and understand the aims and objectives of the framework. In addition, develop clear guidance about information sharing in the context of the SRG to further support partnership working.

Outcomes

Further evaluation of ERG:

Since this evaluation of SRG took place, the risk assessment has been further developed and improved using the findings from the study. The revised risk assessment has been named Extremism Risk Guidelines 22+ (ERG 22+) and has been rolled out for use across custody and community sites in England and Wales. The ERG 22+ identifies 22 factors using a case formulation approach to assess risk in extremist offenders. Validation work is currently being undertaken on the measure and further research is being carried out on the use of ERG 22+ with TACT offenders.

References

Boer, D.P. (2008). Ethical and practical concerns regarding the current status of sex offender risk assessment. *Sexual Offender Treatment*, 3(1), 1-6.

Connell, J.I., Kubisch, A.C., Schorr, L.B. and Weiss, C.H. (1995) *New Approaches To Evaluating Community Initiatives: Concepts, Methods, And Contexts*. New York: The Aspen Institute.

Dernevik, M., Beck, A., Grann, M., Hogue, T., & McGuire, J. (2009). The use of Psychiatric and Psychological Evidence in the Assessment of Terrorist Offenders. *Journal of Forensic Psychology and Psychiatry*, 20(4), 508-515.

Douglas, K.S., Guy, L.S., and Weir, J. (2006) Historical, Clinical, Risk Management-20 (HCR-20) Violence Risk Assessment Scheme: Overview and Annotated Bibliography. Canada: Simon Fraser University.

http://escholarship.umassmed.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1362&context=psych_cmhsr.
Date accessed 7th July 2014

Economic & Social Research Council (2015). *Research Ethics Framework*. Swindon: ESRC.

Glasgow Caledonian University (2008). Promoting Risk Intervention by Situational Management (PRISM) <http://www.gcu.ac.uk/prism/understanding/index.html>

Government Social Research Unit (2006). *GSR Professional Guidance: Ethical Assurance for Social Research in Government*. Cabinet Office.

Gudjonsson, G. (2009). The Assessment of Terrorist Offenders: a Commentary on the Dernevik et al article and suggestions for Future Directions. *Journal of Forensic Psychology and Psychiatry*, 20(4), 516-519.

Hare, R.D. (1991) *The Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised*. 908 Niagara Falls Blvd, North Tonawanda, New York, USA, 14120-2060: Multi-Health Systems.

HM Government (2009) *Pursue, Prevent, Protect, Prepare: The United Kingdoms Strategy for Countering International Terrorism*.

HM Prison Service (2005) Offender Assessment and Sentence Management - OASys
www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/offenders/psipso/ps0/PSO_2205_offender_assessment_and_sentence_management.doc Date accessed 7th July 2014

Lewis, J., Ritchie, J., Ormston, R. & Morrell, G. (2013). Generalising from qualitative research. In J. Ritchie, J. Lewis, C. McNaughton Nicholls & R. Ormston. *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Researchers and Students*. (2nd Ed.). London: Sage.

Lloyd, M. & Dean, C. (2015) The Development of Structured Guidelines for Assessing Risk in Extremist Offenders. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management* (Forthcoming).

Monahan, J. (2012). The Individual Risk Assessment of Terrorism. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 18, 167-205.

Pressman, E (2009) *Risk Assessment Decisions for Violent Political Extremism*. Retrieved from www.publicsafety.gc.ca/res/cor/rep/2009-02-rdv-eng.aspx

Pressman, E, & Flockton, J. (2012) Calibrating risk for Violent Political Extremists and Terrorists: The VERA 2 Structured Assessment. *The British Journal of Forensic Practice*, 14, 4, 237-251.

Ritchie, J. Lewis, J. McNaughton Nicholls, C. & Ormston, R. (2013). *Qualitative Research Practice*, London: Sage.

Roberts, K., & Horgan, J. (2003). Risk Assessment and the Terrorist. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 2(6), 3-9.

Shingler, J., and Mann, R. (2005) *Collaboration in clinical work with sexual offenders: treatment and risk assessment*. In *Sexual Offender Treatment: Controversial Issues* edited by William L. Marshall, Yolanda Fernandez, Liam Marshall and Geris Serran Chapter 16. West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Silke, A. (2014) *Risk Assessment of Terrorist and Extremist Prisoners*. In A.Sike (Ed), *Prisons, Terrorism and Extremism*. London: Routledge.

Spencer, L., Ritchie, J., O'Connor, W. & Morrell, G. (2013). Analysis in practice. In J. Ritchie, J. Lewis, C. McNaughton Nicholls & R. Ormston, (Eds.). *Qualitative Research Practice*, London: Sage.

Webster, S.D., Mann, R.E., Carter, A.J., Long, J., Milner, R.J., O'Brien, M.D., Wakeling, H.C. and Ray, N.R. (2006). Inter-rater reliability of dynamic risk assessment with sexual offenders. *Psychology Crime & Law*, 12, 439-452.