

## Research Activity – Review of the Year 2020-21

### **Issue**

This paper provides Management Committee with a review of the progress and activity of the research programme for 2020/21.

### **Timing**

Routine.

### **Recommendation**

The Management Committee is invited to **note** the content of this paper.

### **Background**

The Research Governance Group (RGG) was established in 2018 to oversee the research agenda and work related to the published Research Framework.

The RGG has committed to providing the Management Committee with an annual progress report on activity related to the research agenda.

### **1. Research Governance Group**

The RGG meets formally twice a year and meetings took place in April 2020 and November 2020. The first meeting of the current reporting year took place in April 2021. Notes for all of these meetings are available on [SharePoint](#).

The current membership is:

- Martin Jones, RGG Chair
- Mary McMurrin, Member Representative
- Cassie Williams, Representative from RADAR Group
- Mike Maguire, External Academic Adviser
- Faith Geary, Chief Operating Officer
- Angela Colyer, Head of Policy
- Glenn Gathercole, Lead for Policy and Research
- Kate Ward, Policy and Research Manager

RGG will next meet in November 2021, where it will review the published Research Framework and Terms of Reference of RGG.



## **2. Review of the Year**

Following Government advice to limit social interaction in response to the COVID-19 outbreak and to prevent an unnecessary burden on the prison and probation estate, in March 2020 the MoJ NRC made the decision to limit research within HMPPS until further notice. No new applications for primary research were accepted by the NRC. This included applications relating to primary data collection methods such as interviews, focus groups, workshops and surveys, regardless of whether they are face-to-face, over the telephone or online. Only applications involving secondary data analysis that do not pose a risk of potential harm to individuals and impact negatively on resources (e.g. analysis of centrally supplied data at HMPPS/MoJ HQ) were to be considered.

This also impacted on research already underway, which was mostly put on hold.

This was reflected across many research institutions and so activity related to research was very curtailed for most of 2020 and early 2021.

In September 2020, the NRC published its medium-term recovery plan setting out how research is slowly being brought back online. We are now seeing more enquiries into future research although prison-based research will still be restricted and can only involve staff and use non-contact methods of data collection.

This review should be read with this in mind.

## **3. Business Plan Deliverables for 2020/21**

Update our research priorities and publish on web pages

A research update, and a futures paper, with revised recommended priority areas for research, were presented to the July 2020 Management Committee meeting. Management Committee agreed the revised priority areas, which are:

- Small scale study outcomes for BAME or other minority group prisoners
- Research into women's experience of the parole system
- Efficacy of remote hearings/comparison with face to face hearings
- Procedural justice and parole
- The experiences of vulnerable offenders

The membership was informed of the new priority areas together with a link to the research information page on [SharePoint](#) in the Policy Hub Quarterly update issued on 23 July 2020.

We have also updated our research information on our [web pages](#).

Further expand relationships with the research community and partner with external academics to support research agenda

In spite of the restrictions, we have continued to build links across the research community within the CJS and more detail about the activity can be read in Section 8.

## Consider findings from two IPP studies completed and how they can contribute to IPP progression

*Russell Webster and Prison Reform Trust – A study of the recall of people serving indeterminate sentence for public protection*

In 2019, a group of Parole Board members attended a workshop run by Russell Webster as part of his evidence gathering for research on the experience of recalled IPP prisoners. The final report from the study was published in December 2020 – [“No life, no freedom, no future”](#). Staff from the Policy Hub attended a webinar in February 2021 where the findings were discussed in more detail. We are now looking at the findings and any impact on policy and practice for members.

*Lisa Smith, ISP project lead HMPPS Psychology (Research application PB 07-2018) - Understanding the experience of the Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) Sentence and Prisoner Progression PhD. [this includes a small study on IPP in East of England by trainee HMPPS psychologist Chloe Dower].*

Whilst COVID-19 restrictions meant some aspects, such as resident interviews, could not be progressed, analysis of the Parole Board interviews continued. Themes have already been identified and findings are being drafted. Once the parole section has been completed, the intention is to write a paper that can be shared. The final report is awaited.

### **4. Funding**

The RGG only has access to a limited budget held within the Policy Function and so cannot fund research studies, which can be a deterrent for potential academics interested in submitting proposals on the Board’s priority areas. However, the RGG can provide letters of support for funding applications and can consider supporting small scale research in terms of incidental expenses.

The RGG is starting to develop links with funding institutions so that it can signpost academics to possible sources of funding. However, many funders have specific criteria on the areas of interest that they will fund and so the RGG would need to make approaches with a specific proposal rather than general enquiries.

### **5. Data sharing**

Consultation was undertaken with a number of organisations that carry out research including HMCTS, NPS, HLPR, and guidance from the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) has been considered. Subsequently, a standard Data Sharing Agreement (DSA) has been produced that can be adapted for each research study where decision letters or summary decisions will be shared.

One of the key challenges was in relation to consent from individuals to share their data for research purposes. We have ascertained that this is not required where it would be impractical and the ICO states:

***Legitimate interests:*** you can process personal data without consent if you need to do so for a genuine and legitimate reason (including commercial benefit), unless this is outweighed by the individual's rights and interests.

Three DSAs have been issued to date which have all been through rigorous scrutiny by the other parties.

The outstanding concern is how the Board notifies individuals about how data is used, and whether there is an option to withdraw permission. The Parole Board has a Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notice which sets out how we may use data and this is on our web pages, and a link appears on all our emails. However, this is unlikely to be seen by serving prisoners. Discussions are under way to establish if a statement about how we use data can be added to communications with prisoners.

## **6. Current studies underway (approved by RGG)**

One of the functions of the RGG is to assess research applications received through its Research Framework. The following are approved studies underway.

- *How Parole Board members (and judges) make decisions about perpetrators of domestic abuse (intimate partner violence) – University College London*

Data review and analysis has been completed. Thesis is currently being written up and hoping to complete viva by the end of the year. Will provide a summary to the Board and hopes to publish in one or two journals.

- *The role of intermediaries (communication specialists) at Parole Board Oral Hearings – Portsmouth University (led by a Parole Board member)*

Data collection has concluded. 39 Parole Board Members completed the research questionnaire. Response currently being evaluated and a report will be presented to the November RGG. After that, it is their intention to prepare a draft academic paper for publication which they hope to submit to a peer reviewed journal for publication by the end of the year. The findings will provide the basis for developing guidance for members.

- *Investigating the effects of setting on the structure of questioning in Parole Board hearings: a comparison between remote hearings and in-person hearings – Sheffield Hallam University*

Digital recordings of three-member oral hearings from before and during the pandemic are being evaluated. Member interviews will take place in the autumn. Findings are due early in 2022.

- *Exploring the potential of Natural Language Processing techniques in criminal justice agencies: An investigation of racial disparities in release decisions from the Parole Board – Leeds University*

This is a PhD study being supported by the Board. A small-scale interim study is underway to look at any disparity of outcome in cases where a VPS

was read out at the oral hearing. This is mainly to test data extraction methods using decision summaries. The primary study will commence towards the end of the year and the student will spend one semester with the Board.

- *Emerging from custody and thriving in the community: a mixed method analysis of individuals who have served long custodial sentences (feasibility study) - Nottingham Trent University*

Data is currently being evaluated and an interim report is due in late autumn.

- *A legal anthropology of personality disorder Birkbeck College and University College London*

This study will form part of wider research into approaches to risk in decision-making in cases of personality disordered prisoners. The study will involve member interviews and observing oral hearings over the autumn.

- *A two-year National MAPPA research project, 'The integration of practitioner, academic and offender knowledge to deliver excellence in the multi-agency risk management of violent and sexual offenders in the community' Policing Institute for the Eastern Region, Anglia Ruskin University (commissioned by the MoJ)*

This study has been widened to include the perspective of the Parole Board. The study will involve a workshop with members from various regions likely to be held in late autumn.

Enquiries for future studies took place with academics from Birmingham University (the role of prisoner families); Legal Education Foundation (remote hearings); MoJ Data Science (predictor tools); Barrow Cadbury Trust (management of young adults); Psychology departments at Goldsmiths and Royal Holloway (student dissertation topics); Parole Board for Scotland and Southampton University (future of parole).

We have supported a number of PhD and Masters students from the Cambridge University Criminology department by providing data and factual information for their studies.

## **7. Hood and Shute proposed follow-up study on sexual offending**

It was with great sadness that we learnt the news that Roger Hood had passed away in November 2020. Roger was a huge and influential academic in criminal justice research and was still publishing important work until quite recently. In discussions with Stephen Shute and Martina Feilzer (who both worked with Roger on the original sexual offending study from the 1990s) it has been agreed to shelve the proposed follow up study. This may be revisited in the future.

## **8. Activity**

### Link to Practice

Cassie Williams, the project lead for RADAR, sits on the RGG and provides updates on the progress of the initiatives taken forward under the RADAR umbrella. This supports the principle of research informing practice and policy development. Through discussions with academics and reviewing published research various suggestions in terms of the development of the new decision format were shared with RADAR.

Findings from existing research have been carefully reviewed when developing member guidance on topics such as Young Adults, Restorative Justice, Terrorist/Terrorist related cases, and others. Engagement with the sources of such research has further enhanced the integrity and credibility of these pieces of guidance.

However, this is still an area to be developed, with the aim of identifying relevant published research to share with the membership and cross reference with guidance, where appropriate.

### Member engagement

An online research module was prepared for the member conference in November. Pre-recorded video-clips were uploaded to [SharePoint](#) setting out information about research, together with guest presentations from the researchers undertaking RGG approved research.

### Register of Member Expertise and Research Interests

The 'Register of Member Expertise and Research Interests' was launched at the member conference on 24-25/11/20 as part of the pre-recorded presentations covering the research work currently being undertaken at the Board. At the same time the Research page on [SharePoint](#) was updated with further information about the register, including the pre-recorded presentation for conference and the form to register interest. Members were subsequently reminded about the register in an article in 'Across the Board' on the 15/12/20 and then again in the 'Policy Hub Quarterly' on 05/02/21. The pilot commenced in January 2021 and will be reviewed by RGG when it meets in November.

### Networking

Following re-engagement with the Editor of Probation Quarterly, we arranged for Martin to write an article for the June 2020 edition. It was featured as the leading article and focused on how the Board has adapted during the coronavirus pandemic. This was followed up in the September edition with an article by Glenn Gathercole and Lucy Gampell (Parole Board member) on the research that led to the production of the booklet for families.

In November 2020, we issued our first formal research update that was circulated to over 70 recipients from across the research community, all of whom we have engaged with in some way.

A second update was issued at the beginning of April 2021. These updates inform our research network about our new priorities and some of the current work being progressed. Recipients seem to appreciate them and ask for colleagues to be added to the circulation list.

We also share information about research with NPS colleagues via the PB update that goes to Probation Regional Directors approximately every two months.

The December 2020 edition of the Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health (CBMH) Journal was a special parole themed edition guest edited by Gill McIvor (University of Stirling and member of the Parole Board for Scotland) and Nicky Padfield (Faculty of Law, University of Cambridge). Information was shared with members and uploaded to [SharePoint](#). Mary McMurrin, RGG member, is one of the Editors of CBMH. The abstracts and links to the articles are available on [SharePoint](#).

Helen Trinder, a Former Active Member provided a short audio recording to be included in the Howard League for Penal Reform's Early Career Academics Network (ECAN) online bulletin published in March 2021. This special edition of the ECAN Bulletin, edited by Dr Harry Annison (Southampton University), reflects on the challenges and experiences of 2020, and the provisional lessons which may be emerging.

In late March 2021, Faith Geary represented the Board at the Probation Institute Research Conference which focused on the theme of recalls.

The joint online event with the Centre for Criminology, University of South Wales 'Lessons from the Lockdown: Parole under COVID' took place in April. It was well-attended and was recorded for online viewing.

We are signed up to a number of publishing sites and registered for research alerts including Sage; Wiley; Elsevier; T&F; OUP; Springer. This will allow us to tap into over 20 journals that publish articles which may relate to parole. We are in early days of seeing how this works. We are limited by the time we can commit to reviewing the alerts, but this should be a helpful way to become aware of published research. Through this, we are also linked to the Academy of Social Justice Knowledge Hub. Here, best practice in social justice from across the MoJ and its agencies and local government, policing, health, academics, providers and voluntary, charitable and social enterprise organisations is shared.

As well as building engagement with universities and links with publications, we are keen to identify groups or thinktanks that may be relevant. Again, this is currently limited by resources.

#### MoJ National Research Committee (NRC)

The RGG acts as a consultee to the MoJ National Research Committee (NRC) to offer views on research applications where there is a link to parole. There were only two research application peer review requests during the reporting period. The Board continues to receive monthly updates on applications considered, and final reports received (but not necessarily published).

### MoJ annual return on funding and budget

The Board is required to submit a return to the MoJ to contribute to the annual Government Research and Development Survey undertaken by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). We provided our return in October 2020.

### MoJ Areas of Research Interest

The Evidence, Engagement and Experimentation (EEE) unit within the Data Analytical Services Directorate (DASD) reviewed the MoJ Areas of Research Interest (ARI) document.

The new ARI was drafted around the department's six strategic outcomes (as per its internal DASD Evidence Strategy) along with a section on 'Cross cutting research themes and methods'. The Board was invited to feed into key evidence gaps and questions. It is not a comprehensive list of *the* research questions, more *a* list of example questions, which along with a set of narratives will frame the MoJ's broad areas of interest and give external researchers an overview and way in. The new ARI published in December 2020 can be read here: [Areas of Research Interest \(ARI\)](#).

### Greenwich University Student Placements

As you may be aware, we have entered into an arrangement with Greenwich University to provide opportunities for two undergraduate criminology students to spend their placement with the Parole Board. Two students completed their placement earlier this year, and a further two are due to commence in September 2021.

**Glenn Gathercole**  
**Lead for Policy and Research**  
**September 2021**