

## Research Activity – Review of the Year 2021/22

### **Issue**

This paper provides Management Committee with a review of the progress and activity of the research programme for 2021/22.

### **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 2021 and November 2021. The first meeting of the current reporting year took place in April 2022. Minutes from these meetings are available on [SharePoint](#).

The membership during the reporting year was:

- Martin Jones, RGG Chair
- Mary McMurrin, Parole Board Member (until November 2024)\*
- Cassie Williams, Parole Board Member (until November 2024)\*
- Mike Maguire, External Academic Adviser (until November 2022)\*
- Faith Geary, Chief Operating Officer
- Angela Colyer, Head of Policy
- Glenn Gathercole, Lead for Policy and Research
- Katie Fagan, Policy and Research Manager

\* RGG membership tenure for Parole Board members and the external academic adviser is for a minimum period of three years, renewable for a further three years, to a maximum of six years.



In November 2021, the Research Governance Framework was updated and re-issued. This is available on the Parole Board's website. The Research Governance Group's Terms of Reference were also updated in November 2021 and are available on the website. The next review of both of these documents is scheduled for November 2024.

RGG will next meet in November 2022, where it will review the current research priority areas and confirm how best to deliver the learning from completed RGG approved research.

## **2. Review of the year**

As highlighted in the review of the year 2020/21, the COVID pandemic had impacted on and caused delay to the research programme. However, since then, research has slowly recovered from the pandemic and there have been a number of developments in terms of research activity at the Parole Board.

Following the decision for prisons to exit the National Framework, the National Research Committee (NRC) updated its guidance for approving primary research within HMPPS. As such, the NRC is no longer working to the Medium-Term Plan.

The Parole Board has seen a number of enquiries into future research come through during the year, has approved a number of new studies, and has been able to progress and see the conclusion of other studies that were delayed due to the pandemic.

## **3. Business Plan deliverables for 2021/22**

### **Business Plan objectives:**

There were two research related objectives within the Business Plan:

- *Implement the new decision writing framework (RADAR)*

An update is provided in this paper under section seven.

- *Research into outcomes for BAME prisoners*

This is the Leeds University PhD study that is currently ongoing. An update is provided in this paper under section six.

A further objective from the 2020/21 Business Plan was still ongoing:

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

This is the Russell Webster and Prison Reform Trust study on IPPs, which published its findings in December 2020; and the HMPPS Psychology Services Group study on the experience of the IPP sentence and prisoner progression. An update is provided in this paper under section six.

Within the Business Plan for 2022/23, there are three objectives linked to research:

*2.2 Implement recommendations from the internal TACT review. TACT includes all cases with links to terrorism regardless of conviction, which includes:*

- *2.2.1 Ensure member guidance, practice advice, and training is evidence-based, taking learning from relevant research*

*3.1.4 Review and update research priority areas to reflect gaps in important evidence base*

*3.2.1 Promote learning about how we manage serious further offences (SFOs)*

### Research priority areas

In July 2020, the Management Committee approved the following priority areas where research studies would be particularly encouraged and supported, which were as follows:

- Small scale study on 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 RGG will review these for the next two years 2022-2024 and submit recommendations to the Management Committee to consider.

## **4. Data sharing**

A standard Data Sharing Agreement (DSA) is drawn up for RGG approved research studies. The DSA can be adapted for each research study.

In the current reporting year, three DSAs were issued, which all underwent rigorous scrutiny and approved by both parties.

The Parole Board has a Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notice which sets out how we may use data. This is on our web pages and a link appears on all our emails. However, this is unlikely to be seen by serving prisoners. A solution to this had not been put in place at time of writing and will be taken forward in the new reporting year.

## **5. Studies underway during the reporting year (approved by RGG)**

One of the functions of the RGG is to assess research applications received through its Research Framework. The following are studies that were approved in the previous year and still ongoing or approved in the reporting year 2021/22.

Studies directly relating to Business Plan objectives:

- *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*

RGG approved a smaller sub study that explored the role of Victim Personal Statements (VPS) in parole decision-making which has been completed. The report is to be shared with RGG in April 2022. The full study was currently being developed and will commence in the next reporting year. The student will be undertaking a two-month placement at the Board in summer 2022 where the data capture of all decisions over a three-year period will be undertaken.

- *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]. HMPPS Psychology Services Group (PSG).*

These two studies are still underway and were delayed due to the pandemic. The main research is due for completion in early 2025 but an interim report is expected in spring 2023.

The Prison Reform Trust report published in December 2020, together with the interim findings of the PSG study, will contribute to developing a briefing document, and best practice advice for members when assessing IPP prisoners for parole. The Board awaits the publication of the Justice Committee Inquiry report into IPPs to further inform this work.

#### Other studies

- *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*

The researchers completed one element of the study where they have explored the benefits and challenges of remote hearings. The other element of the project (the analysis of the questioning in hearings themselves) is still in progress, as this is a far more complex piece of work. Significant findings will not be ready until Summer 2022.

- *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 (30 decisions for both ISP and EDS cases) was being evaluated and an interim report is expected in the next reporting year.

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

This study forms part of wider research into approaches to risk in decision-making in cases of personality disordered prisoners. The study also involved member interviews and observing oral hearings. The study was still in the midst of data collection and will hopefully conclude towards autumn of 2022.

- *The impact of release on mandatory life sentenced prisoners' identities – University of Cambridge*

The study was subject to some delays due to the pandemic in the prisons however, started to gather pace in early 2022. The study will commence fully in the next reporting year.

The Board continued to support requests for information or top-level data from PhD and MA students at Cambridge. We continued to provide data and factual background information about parole that supports their studies. Examples of topics are:

- Release of mandatory lifers
- The EDS
- The IPP sentence

We also provided advice and support to a number of other enquiries, which to date, have not developed into submitted research applications.

#### **6. Studies completed during the reporting year (approved by RGG)**

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

The thesis was shared with RGG; we have been notified of plans to publish in journals later in 2022.

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

The findings were shared with RGG; this work is contributing to developing mandatory member training on questioning vulnerable prisoners during 2022, as well as associated guidance.

- *What has the experience of remote oral hearings been for residents in the Women's Estate? How can the pandemic adjustments shape future good practice for the Parole Board and witnesses from the perspective of service users – HMPPS Women's Estate Psychology Service*

The findings were shared with RGG; this work is contributing to developing future guidance on remote hearings and developing member guidance on women in prison.

- *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)*

Findings from this study are expected in late 2022.

Proposals for sharing findings from these studies with the wider membership were being developed with the Learning & Development Team and will be taken forward in the next reporting year.

## **7. Other activity**

### Link to practice

Cassie Williams, who was the project lead for RADAR, sits on the RGG and provided updates on the progress of the initiatives taken forward under the RADAR umbrella. This supported the principle of research informing practice and policy development. The focus of the work was on developing the new templates for decisions.

The templates share many features, with core case information captured on the front sheet, followed by a narrative explaining the panel's decision. They both apply the decision-making framework, with some minor differences to reflect whether it is a paper decision or an oral hearing decision.

The templates were signed off by RADAR and began roll out in December 2021. Feedback from members informed further enhancements and the final versions were fully implemented by the end of March 2022.

The RADAR steering group is due to meet in September 2022 for an evaluation meeting.

### Member engagement

The research sections on [SharePoint](#) were regularly updated to inform members when there were research opportunities available.

During the reporting year, there were four research opportunities for members to partake in RGG approved research. Members participated in the following research via interviews or focus groups:

- *Investigating the effects of setting on the structure of questioning in Parole Board hearings: a comparison between remote hearings and in-person hearings:* (David Peplow, Sheffield Hallam University) semi structured interviews
- *A legal anthropology of personality disorder (feasibility study):* (Becka Hudson, University College London) semi structured interviews
- *The integration of academic, practitioner and offender knowledge to deliver excellence in the multi-agency risk management (MAPPA) of violent and sexual offenders in the community:* (Natalie Mann, Anglia Ruskin University) workshop
- *What has the experience of remote oral hearings been for residents in the Women's Estate? How can the pandemic adjustments shape future good practice for the Parole Board and witnesses from the perspective of service users:* (Suzanna Dobson, HMPPS) semi structured interviews

## Closing down of the Register of Member Expertise and Research Interests

The 'Register of Member Expertise and Research Interests' was officially launched in November 2020. It was introduced as a tool for members to record their expertise and research interests.

A short discussion took place at the April 2021 RGG, where it was agreed to monitor the interest from the launch up until the end of June 2021, with a view to taking a further decision about its added benefit when RGG next met in November 2021.

Unfortunately, despite sending reminders to members about the register, there was limited sign up to the register. Subsequently, in November 2021, RGG agreed to close down the register. It was felt that member expertise and knowledge can still positively influence policy, practice and research and the new member activity review system (MARS) has the functionality to record member background and interests. This is due to go live in summer 2022.

## Networking

The Board continued to foster links with a number of universities, either through individuals already known, current or former members, or other stakeholders we met through the work of the Board.

Since November 2020, we have issued a formal research update twice a year to over 70 recipients from across the research community, all of whom we have engaged with in some way. These updates inform our research network about our new priorities and some of the current work being progressed. Recipients have noted the value of these updates, asked for colleagues to be added to the circulation list, and it has proved useful in putting researchers in touch with one another. The last update was issued in January 2022, with a further one to be issued in late 2022.

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

## JUSTICE report

JUSTICE is an all-party membership organisation (and registered charity), drawn primarily from the legal profession with a common commitment to the rule of law and the fair administration of justice. In October 2020, they established a working party to examine the role, powers, and procedures of the Parole Board and the broader parole system for England and Wales. The review placed a particular focus on groups overrepresented throughout the criminal justice system and those who face particular challenges in participating. The Parole Board was not directly involved with the working party but provided factual information to the group. Several current and former Parole Board members sat on the group, but in their own personal capacity and not as representatives of the Board. The final report was published in January 2022.

## Root & Branch Review of Parole

The Parole Board worked closely with the Ministry of Justice on all aspects of the Root and Branch Review of the Parole System since its announcement in 2020. RGG had a discussion about the review in April 2022 and noted the importance of considering the review when determining the future research agenda and priorities.

#### 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 was only one research application peer review request during the reporting period - *Prisoner experience of taking part in remote interviews for Psychological risk assessments*. This was approved by RGG. The Board continues to receive monthly updates on applications considered by the NRC, and final reports received (but not necessarily published).

#### University Student Placements

As you may be aware, we entered into an arrangement with Greenwich University to provide opportunities for undergraduate criminology students to spend their placement with the Parole Board. Two students completed their placement in early 2021, and a further student finished their placement with the Parole Board in March 2022.

#### **Research Governance Group November 2022**