

Issue

This paper provides Management Committee with a review of the progress and activity of the research programme for 2022/23.

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

During the course of 2022/23, the Parole Board received a number of enquiries into future research, approved a couple of new studies, and was able to progress and support the conclusion of other studies. We also launched the Parole Board's new research priorities for 2023 – 2025.

Research Governance Group

The RGG meets formally twice a year. During 2022/23, it met on 28 April 2022 and 22 November 2022. The first meeting of the current reporting year took place in April 2023. Minutes from these meetings are available on [SharePoint](#).

The membership during the reporting year was:

- Martin Jones, RGG Chair
- Mary McMurran, Parole Board Member (until November 2024)*
- Cassie Williams, Parole Board Member (until November 2024)*
- Mike Maguire, External Academic Adviser (until November 2025)*
- Faith Geary, Chief Operating Officer / Jane Browne, Chief Operating Officer
- Angela Colyer, Head of Policy
- Glenn Gathercole, Lead for Policy and Research
- Katie Fagan, Policy and Practice Manager
- Kate Taylor, 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.*

The Research Governance Group's terms of reference and the Research Governance Framework are available on the Board's website. These were last updated in November 2021, with the next review scheduled for November 2024.

Business Plan deliverables for 2022/23

Within the Business Plan for 2022/23, there were 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)

These objectives were reflected in the revised research priority areas for 2023-2025 (see below). The ongoing development of member guidance on terrorism-risk offenders was informed by recognised research findings.

Research priority areas

At the meeting in November 2022, the RGG considered revised research priorities for 2023–2025. These were endorsed by the Management Committee with effect from April 2023, these are:

- Research into procedural justice and impact of parole reforms on the system and people
- Research into the experiences of vulnerable prisoners
- Research into the experiences of minority group prisoners
- Research and insight relevant to terrorism risk offending cases
- Research relating to Serious Further Offences.

Data sharing

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

In the reporting year 2022/23, two DSAs were issued, which both underwent rigorous scrutiny and were 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. We did not identify a solution for this in the reporting year.

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 either approved in the previous year and were still ongoing or approved in the reporting year 2022/23.

- *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 research is being undertaken by Leeds University in collaboration with the Parole Board.

RGG approved a smaller sub study that explored the role of Victim Personal Statements (VPS) in parole decision-making. The sub study report was shared with RGG in April 2022 and helped the researcher to refine the techniques that will be utilised in the full study.

To gain a better understanding of the work of the Parole Board, the researcher undertook an eight-week placement in the Policy Hub in summer 2022. During that time, she focused on understanding the organisation but also started to capture data required for the full study.

Decisions covering a three-year period from 2017/18 onwards were extracted, anonymised, and transferred into a secure research environment for analysis. The researcher then reviewed 200 decisions to identify the data to be extracted and the variables. The next stage will be to write code and test the feasibility of the extract process, refining it as necessary. The full research study will continue into the next reporting year.

- *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).*

This research reached the second data collection phase. Interviews were conducted with eight Parole Board members and the findings of this initial study were being prepared for a journal article. Interviews with IPP prisoners, individuals on IPP licence, and HMPPS staff who assess and manage IPP prisoners/individuals also commenced. These interviews were aimed at understanding the psychosocial factors that impact IPP progression and gaining a better insight into the IPP experience. The data collection is hoped to be completed by September 2023, with the submission of the thesis and completion of the PhD expected in March 2025.

- *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*

The data (30 decisions for both ISP and EDS cases) was provided to the researchers in August 2021. Unfortunately, this study was subject to delays due to the lead researcher taking some time off work; however, the research did progress during the reporting year.

The researchers began working with an external company, to develop a programme that would utilise machine learning to enable data scraping of Parole Board decisions. This looked feasible based on the decisions they held at the time; however, with the roll out of the new decision template feasibility was being explored. A revised DSA was signed and a further set of decisions in the new template format were provided to the researchers for testing. Should they decide to proceed with the next step of the proposed feasibility study they will come back to the Board with more details.

- *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 prisoners with personality disorders. Research data collection finished in September 2022, with the transfer of Parole Board decisions and the completion of an oral hearing observation, interviews with a total of eight Parole Board members, and interviews from the rest of the research project with five former prisoners. The researcher is currently writing up the research focusing on themes of engagement in treatment and risk, and how the construction of personality disorder is understood by prisoners and Parole Board members, and its impact on risk.

Preliminary findings were presented at the one-day conference "Recovery, Rehabilitation and Remission in Mental Health", hosted at Birkbeck's Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Mental Health. The researcher is hoping to submit the thesis during Summer 2023 and to provide a report for the Parole Board shortly afterwards.

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

Despite experiencing some delays due to COVID, the researcher completed 20 first-stage interviews with mandatory life sentence prisoners (i.e., in prison before their release). The researcher re-interviewed 12 of these men five months after their return to the community and is completing these follow up interviews before moving on to the analysis phase of the study.

- *A Thematic Analysis of the Experiences of Parole Board Members engaged with the National General Parole Process (GPP) Pilot – HMPPS Psychology Services Group*

The data gathering aspect of this research consisted of four focus groups with members, which were undertaken in October 2022. The researcher used Thematic Analysis to code the data and identify overarching themes which will feed into a wider evaluation of the GPP Psychology Pilot. The researcher

is currently in the process of writing up the findings. Once finalised, we will discuss how best to share the findings within the Parole Board.

- *Terrorism-related cases before the Parole Board – The Woolf Institute*

RGG approved this study in September 2022. However, there were delays in commencing the research while funding was secured. The Woolf Institute secured funding through the Dawes Trust and member interviews have been scheduled in the new reporting year.

- *Decision-Making at the Parole Board Over Time – University of Sussex*

The aim of this research is to develop a thorough understanding of how decision-making at the Parole Board has developed over time. We have shared with the researcher the historical PBMs from 2004 up until the end of 2016 to provide an audit of policy and practice development. The researcher is next going to review and evaluate reconsideration decisions. The researcher is keen to chronicle how reconsideration evolved from the early days of post-panel and re-referral work, the judgment in the case of *Robinson*, to more recent legislation.

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 to support their studies.

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

Studies completed during the reporting year (approved by RGG)

- *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*

Interviews with members were completed in 2022. The researcher has written up their findings and these were shared with the RGG for consideration. The researcher also presented his findings at MoJ Insights 22, held in May 2022 where he was joined by two Parole Board members who discussed the research.

Other activity

Link with practice

Since the introduction of RADAR, it was recognised that there were close links between RADAR and research, and it has been a standing RGG agenda item since May 2019. The RADAR steering group met in September 2022 for an evaluation meeting to discuss the previous eight months of decision template roll-out. The decision templates are now regarded as business as usual (BAU). They have been updated to reflect the changes made through the Police, Crime, Sentencing & Courts Act 2022, the amendments to the Parole Board Rules 2019

(as amended), and the Secretary of State's revised directions on open conditions.

The RGG will review the closure report at its first meeting of 2023/24 and will consider how best to maintain links with practice moving forward.

Member engagement

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

During the reporting year, there was only one new research opportunity for members to take part in RGG approved research. Members were invited to take part in a focus group for the following research study:

- *A Thematic Analysis of the Experiences of Parole Board Members engaged with the National General Parole Process (GPP) Pilot – HMPPS Psychology Services Group*

The Policy Hub delivered a session at both Parole Board Conferences 2023 entitled 'Practice Informed by Research'. This session covered the role of the RGG and highlighted how we develop evidence-based practice. The session was also used to launch the Board's new research priority areas to staff and members.

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 once or twice a year to over 70 recipients from across the research community, all of whom we have engaged with in some way. These updates informed our research network about our new priorities and some of the 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. During the last reporting period an update was issued in January 2023 providing an overview of the research work undertaken over the last year.

We have uploaded the yearly reviews of research activity prepared for Management Committee to the Board's website. These reviews provide a good overview of the Board's approach to research and are interesting background information in relation to our developing research agenda.

MoJ National Research Committee (NRC)

The RGG acts as a consultee to the MoJ National Research Committee (NRC), providing views on research applications where there is a link to parole. There were four research application peer review requests during the reporting period:

- An examination of the need for intervention relating to trauma within post-tariff IPP prisoners who have never been released;
- An evaluation of the probation officer's experience of the GPP project;
- Exploring the development and prevalence of Criminal Social Identify (CSI) in a sample of recalled prisoners and those serving sentences for Public Protection (IPP) and consideration of its role in the Risk Assessment and Risk Management Process; and
- An exploration of sentence planning targets related to trauma for post-tariff IPP prisoners.

The RGG provided feedback to the NRC on each of these.

The Board continued to receive monthly updates on applications considered by the NRC, and final reports received (but not necessarily published).

Transition to Adulthood's Young Adults and the Parole System

Following the publication of the research into Young Adults and Parole, one member and several staff attended Transition to Adulthood's Young Adults and the Parole System Report Webinar Launch event in March 2023. The Board provided feedback on some of the report's recommendations aimed specifically at the Parole Board. The full report can be read [here](#).

Parole Board Literature Review Scheme trial with the University of Greenwich

We began working with the University of Greenwich to develop and trial a Literature Reviews Scheme for the Parole Board. Master of Arts (MA) and Master of Science (MSc) students in the Criminology Department will have the opportunity to complete a Literature Review for the Parole Board, on one of our priority research areas, as part of their coursework. It is hoped that this will help the students to develop a new range of skills and put these into practice in a way that has real world application and benefits. The literature reviews would then provide the Parole Board with an overview of research on specific topics, breaking it down into more manageable and tailored resources.

We would look to share these with Parole Board members, as well as feeding them into the development of guidance and practice. The Literature Review Scheme trial was still being developed at the end of the reporting year but will likely run during the next academic year, September 2023 to September 2024. We plan to evaluate the success of the Literature Review Scheme pilot with the University of Greenwich after its first year and consider how it will contribute to future developments.

**Research Governance Group
November 2023**