

## Research Activity – Review of the Year 2023/24

### **Issue**

This paper provides Management Committee with a review of the progress and activity of the research programme for 2023/24.

### **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 2023/24, 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.

However, due to extremely high demand for member time the Management Committee took the decision that members and resources should be prioritised to focus on core parole review work; the following statement was placed on the research section of the Board's web pages:

*Please note that the Board is currently at capacity in supporting research studies. Whilst it is still accepting applications, it is unlikely that access to Parole Board members and staff will be made available until early 2024. Applicants should bear this in mind when planning their research.*

### **Research Governance Group**

The RGG meets formally twice a year. During 2023/24, it met on 26 April 2023 and 22 November 2023. Minutes from these meetings are available on [SharePoint](#).

The membership during the reporting year was:

- Martin Jones, RGG Chair (until February 2024)



- Faith Geary, Chief Operating Officer/Interim Chief Executive Officer and 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 2025)\*
- Angela Colyer, Head of Policy (until November 2023)
- 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 RGG'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 2023/24**

Within the Parole Board Strategy and Business Plan 2023/25, there is one overarching objective linked to research:

- *Support evidence-based research and analysis of both our current operating model and impact of reforms*

This objective is a core function of the RGG, who work to ensure that evidence-based research is fed into best practice. The research priority areas, outlined below, have been developed to assist the Board with achieving this objective.

### **Research priority areas**

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 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 2023/24, 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 the Board may use data. This is on the Board's web pages and a link

appears on all official emails. However, this is unlikely to be seen by serving prisoners. RGG 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 2023/24.

- 1) *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 study is being undertaken by Leeds University in collaboration with the Parole Board. During the last reporting year, the researcher has been working on developing a complex extraction dataset. After extracting, classifying, and developing offending variables, the output will be integrated into analytical models along with the additional linked data from supplementary Excel files. The goal will be to delve deeper into how various factors are associated with parole hearing decisions. In February 2024 the researcher commenced a six-month internship with the Ministry of Justice as part of the Data Linking team. The internship includes an exploration of Splink, an open-source Python package for efficient data de-duplication and linkage. Understanding deduplication methods will assist the researcher with her PhD and insights will be shared back to the Board to help better understand the quality of our data. The researcher will return to the substantive work in Autumn 2024.

- 2) *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).*

The researcher has now completed the data collection stage of the project. The PhD is at the thesis 'write up' stage and is due for submission at the end of March 2025. After that point, focus upon dissemination of research findings and publication will take place. A summary research report from the regional study in the East of England was produced and sent to the members who participated in the study.

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

The researcher has now completed her PhD and is currently finalising the thesis for the Birkbeck library, however it will remain embargoed whilst publication options are pursued. In the meantime, the researcher is preparing a summary for the RGG highlighting the key findings and recommendations. A shorter, two-page summary will be produced for research participants outlining the findings in an easier to access format.

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

The researcher has now submitted their PhD and is awaiting the examination at the end of May 2024 to determine whether it is passed or needs further work. After this is completed, the researcher will prepare a summary for the RGG.

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

The researcher has completed the research project and has prepared a report for approval by the British Psychological Society, after which plans to submit the report to the internal research board for dissemination approval. The findings from the research have also been used to inform a wider evaluation of the GPP Psychology Pilot, which is currently in the process of dissemination approval.

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

In December 2023, partway through this research study, the researcher left the Woolf Institute and moved to City, University of London. The Woolf Institute agreed that the researcher could continue to work on the research study at City and the funder, the Dawes Trust, also agreed provisionally. The details of the transfer are still being worked through with City and the research is currently on hold, but the researcher hopes it can continue in the near future.

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

The researcher is currently evaluating all published reconsideration decisions (c.600) and all published set aside decisions (c.75) to draw out learning in terms of how these process are working as well as casting light on Parole Board decision-making generally; as part of this work, the researcher submitted a report about IPP recalls and reconsideration to HMI Probation to assist with their thematic review – the report will be cited in HMI Probation’s final inspection report. Over Autumn 2023 the researcher presented at a number of events on the theme of transparency and parole. This was the second phase of the four-part study.

8) *Identifying Parole Board Members’ Views on the Quality of Case Formulations in Psychological Risk Assessment - Cardiff Metropolitan University*

This research study was approved by the RGG in June 2023 but was put on hold until April 2024. During this time the researchers reflected on the format of the study following feedback from one referee. It was suggested to move from a written survey of members to an interview which was felt to be a better way to conduct the study. A revised research application has been shared with the RGG and the external reviewer for comments. Once these have been received, it is hoped the study will commence in Spring 2024.

9) *Remote chance? Participation and access to justice in remote parole hearings - Sheffield Hallam University*

The researchers have almost finished the data collection stage of the project. Their research partner, User Voice, has produced a draft report based on their interviews with prisoners and parolees who have recently had oral hearings. The researchers are starting to analyse this report. Unfortunately, they have struggled to conduct as many interviews with professionals who take part in oral hearings (e.g. legal representatives) as they had intended, but preliminary analysis shows some consistent themes emerging from the sample. The transcription and analysis of the 20 additional oral hearing recordings is ongoing.

10) *Trauma-informed perspectives on women's experiences of the parole process - University of Greenwich*

The researcher has now received all the required approvals for this research. RGG is currently working with the University of Greenwich to put a Data Sharing Agreement in place so that the research study can commence.

11) *A content analysis of Parole Board outcome letters in cases where release has been directed for IPP prisoners, to explore themes and concepts considered by the Board in relation to the release decision - HMPPS: North-west Psychology Services*

Now all necessary approvals have been received, the researcher has been working with HMPPS teams to collate the sample. The researcher has selected a random sample of 20 IPP prisoners who were released into the community after their most recent oral hearing (this is eight more than her originally planned sample size) and is now working to collate a random sample of IPP prisoners who were not released and who were directed to remain in closed conditions. It is anticipated that the data collection stage will be completed very shortly, with data analysis commencing in the very near future.

**Studies completed (or stopped) during the reporting year (approved by RGG)**

12) *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 (MAPPA review) – Policing Institute for the Eastern Region, Anglia Ruskin University*

Two members attended the National MAPPA Research Reports Launch event in April 2023. At the event the researcher presented the key findings of the research; highlighted the changes implemented as a result of the recommendations and provided consideration of the next steps; this was followed by a Q&A panel session. The members provided useful feedback to the Board on the event. The findings were subsequently presented at the HMPPS Responsible Authorities National Steering Group (RANSNG) where it was agreed that the National MAPPA Team will work with the Parole Board to develop a plan to help improve awareness of MAPPA amongst Parole Board members and the work of the Parole Board among MAPPA agencies.

There was one recommendation for the Parole Board, which is set out below, together with the response from the Responsible Authority National Steering Group (RANSNG) in blue:

*Parole Board practitioners should be provided with opportunities to learn about MAPPA and its relevance for parole hearings - [The National MAPPA Team will work with the Parole Board representatives on the RANSNG to develop a plan to help improve awareness of MAPPA amongst Parole Board members.](#)*

The National MAPPA Team are due to present a break-out session at the 2024 Parole Board conference which will fall in the next reporting year. The Policy Hub, working with RGG has also produced an information resource for members on SharePoint: [MAPPA](#)

13) *The role of intermediaries (communication specialists) at Parole Board Oral Hearings – Portsmouth University*

A focus group consisting of six members, secretariat staff, and an external colleague from PPCS was held in June 2023, where the researcher presented the findings from this study. During the focus group, a discussion took place about the development of guidance on intermediaries for Parole Board members, and what members would benefit from having included in the guidance.

The Policy Hub worked with the researcher to develop guidance for Parole Board members. The guidance has been through full peer review with contributions from stakeholders. Management Committee has cleared it for publication, and it will be issued to the membership in the next reporting year.

14) *Remote studies: there were two independent studies on remote parole hearings:*

- a. *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 Services*
- b. *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*

RGG hosted a member Q&A session in December 2023, where the researchers of these two independent studies on remote hearings presented their findings. There was significant interest in the event and 17 members attended, along with a number of staff from the Secretariat and colleagues from HMPPS.

The researchers provided a brief written summary of their studies that were shared with the attendees in advance of the event. Attendees were also provided with a link to the full research reports.

Both researchers gave a brief presentation of their study, after which there was an open and lively discussion with attendees. This allowed members to bring any critical challenge and consider the recommendations from the two studies, as well sharing their own thoughts and experiences. Other attendees provided their own perspectives on the findings from the studies.

Following the Q&A session it was agreed to develop a quick reference guide that outlines the learning that can be taken from the research findings. The Policy Hub, in collaboration with the researchers, is hoping to have a draft ready for RGG approval early in the new reporting year.

15) *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*

Upon thorough review and consideration, the researchers have concluded that it is not feasible for them to continue with this study. This decision was reached after carefully evaluating the requirements and potential for success. They encountered significant challenges around the expertise required in Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence. They were reticent about bringing in support from an external organisation. Whilst the relevant expertise is to be found within NTU, they have been unable to find someone with the capacity to collaborate with them on this study. This left them with the option of running the study entirely by themselves. While they have the knowledge and interest required to deal with the complexities of parole decisions, the computational knowledge was outside of their competence. NTU has confirmed that all data shared with them has now been securely destroyed as set out in the DSA.

The research team very much appreciated the opportunity provided by the RGG to conduct this study and maintain their stance that the objectives of the project would be of great importance. They hope a team with appropriate resources and expertise will undertake a similar initiative. Should this happen, they are happy to share any relevant insights from their experience.

## **Other activity**

### Member engagement

The research sections on *SharePoint* were regularly updated to inform members when there were research opportunities available.

During the reporting year, members were involved in the following research activity:

- Two members attended the National MAPPA Research Reports Launch event in April 2023

- Six members participated in a focus group following the conclusion of the research study in the role of intermediaries (communication specialists) at Parole Board oral hearings
- Four members were interviewed for the research study *Terrorism-related cases before the Parole Board*
- Seventeen members participated in the Q&A session to review the findings from two studies on remote parole hearings.
- One member and representatives from the Senior Leadership Team attended the launch of the Justice Working Party group launch of their latest report, ['Time Better Spent: Improving Decision-making in Prisons'](#).

## Networking

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

Since November 2020, RGG has issued a research update once or twice a year circulated to over 70 recipients from across the research community, all of whom RGG has 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 July 2023 and February 2024 providing an overview of the research work undertaken over the last year.

RGG upload 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.

HMPPS Insights brings people together from across the Criminal Justice System to learn, share, connect and celebrate the excellent and innovative work that is carried out. In August 2023, Martin Jones provided a guest blog for the Insights website and explained why research is important at the Board and referenced the RGG approved research on remote hearings (Sheffield Hallam study), intermediaries (Portsmouth University) and the study on decisions about perpetrators of domestic violence (UCL study). The blog can be read here: [HMPPS Insights Martin Jones blog](#).

Mary McMurrin, Parole Board psychologist member and member of RGG prepared an article for *The Psychologist*. The article sought to raise awareness of research at the Parole Board by providing a useful introduction to how the Board uses research at the Board and how researchers can apply to undertake research with us, it can be found here: [British Psychological Society](#). The article went online in January 2024 and appeared in the March 2024 print edition of the magazine.

Bradley Read, MSt student Cambridge University, recently published an article in *Criminology and Criminal Justice* about his study into prisoners' perceptions of parole. Whilst not a formal RGG study, access to some historical information was



provided. The article focuses on findings from the study which suggest some negative impacts on prisoner identity in relation to the parole dossier and he offers some possible options to minimise in conclusion. The article can be read here: [The parole dossier and its negative impacts on prisoner identity](#)

RGG had discussions with the University of Buckingham about a Delphi study to develop national guidelines for the use of structured professional judgement tools with gender diverse forensic and probation populations. Due to the restrictions in relation to paying for member time to participate in the study it did not progress.

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

RGG was still exploring a proposal to establish a Scholarship fund for enrolment on the part-time Masters course in Applied Criminology, Penology and Management run by the University of Cambridge. This will be looked at again in the new reporting year.

The Government Office for Science (GO-Science) have compiled a map of Science Advisory Committees and ALBs that provide science and evidence advice in government. Following discussions with the Research, Relationships, & Commissioning Lead with the Ministry of Justice Science Office, Data & Analysis Directorate the Parole Board has now been added to the map which can be found here: [GOS Map](#)

#### 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 eight research application peer review requests during the reporting period:

- An exploration of the recall decision making of staff involved in the community supervision of people sentenced to indeterminate sentences for public protection (IPP)
- How can the Aspire Unit better prepare Indeterminate Sentence for Public Protection (IPP) prisoners for release: exploring the views of IPP prisoners released from the Progression Regime (PR) and later recalled
- Remote chance? Participation and access to justice in remote parole hearings
- Trauma informed perspectives of women's experiences of the parole process
- The transformative effects of education in a prison based setting
- Exploring the reasons for Prisoners serving Indeterminate Sentences for the Protection of the Public being recalled to custody: the journey of recalled IPP's from leaving the gate to returning to custody
- Experiences of the Service User Feedback Questionnaire: Why do prisoners not complete it?
- A content analysis of Parole Board outcome letters in cases where release has been recommended for IPP prisoners, to identify themes and concepts considered by the Board in relation to the release decision.

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).

#### Letter of support

The RGG provided a letter of support to Russell Webster (Prison Reform Trust) and Dr Tim McSweeney (University of Hertfordshire) with a funding application to The Dawes Trust to commence a big data project on understanding parole success after release. RGG was advised that the application was successful. The researchers are now in discussions with MoJ Data First and the Office for National Statistics Research Accreditation Service to develop the dataset they are after and to work through the necessary protocol to access it.

#### Parole Board Literature Review Scheme trial with the University of Greenwich

RGG 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 RGG, on one of its 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 RGG with an overview of research on specific topics, breaking it down into more manageable and tailored resources. RGG would hope to share these with members, as well as feeding them into the development of guidance and practice. The Literature Review Scheme trial launched in September 2023 and will run into the next report year, until September 2024.

Ten students from across three separate courses, Criminology and Criminal Psychology (MSc), Criminology, Gender and Sexualities (MSc) and International Criminology (MA) submitted an expression of interest to the University to undertake a literature review in place of their dissertation. Dr Petrillo (Senior Lecturer in Criminology, School of Law and Criminology) reviewed all expressions of interest and considered that each student met the required standard to be able to produce a good quality literature review. One student subsequently withdrew from the course, however, nine students are currently still engaged in the pilot scheme.

The nine students have been meeting with Dr Petrillo, the senior lecturer in criminology at the university on a monthly basis to develop the skills necessary to complete a systematic literature review. This work will continue until the end of the academic year when RGG will review the completed literature reviews and consider if and how the pilot should continue.

**Research Governance Group  
November 2024**