

Research Activity – Review of the Year 2024/25

Issue

This paper provides Management Committee with a review of the progress and activity of the research programme for 2024/25.

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 2024/25, the Parole Board received a number of enquiries into future research, approved a new study, and was able to progress and support the conclusion of other studies.

Research Governance Group

The RGG meets formally twice a year. During 2024/25, it met on 22 May 2024 and 20 November 2024. Minutes from these meetings are available on [SharePoint](#).

The membership during the reporting year was:

- Faith Geary, Chief Operating Officer/Interim Chief Executive Officer and RGG Chair
- Lucy Linton-Briggs, Interim Chief Operating Officer
- Mary McMurran, Parole Board Research Member (last RGG meeting November 2024)*
- Georgina Rowse, Parole Board Research Member (first RGG meeting November 2024)*
- Sally Lopresti, Parole Board Research Member (first RGG meeting November 2024)*
- Cassie Williams, Management Committee Representative
- Mike Maguire, External Academic Adviser (until November 2025)*
- Sharni Ecott, Head of Policy
- Glenn Gathercole, Lead for Policy and Research

- Kate Taylor, Policy and Research Manager

As incoming Chief Executive Officer, Cecilia French observed the November 2024 meeting and will chair the group going forward.

** 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. Revisions to these are due in May 2025.

Business Plan deliverables for 2024/25

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 Parole Board's current research priorities for 2023–2025, as set out by RGG and endorsed by the Management Committee 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.

The Parole Board's research priorities are due to be revised in 2025.

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 2024/25.

- 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*

For the first half of the reporting year the researcher undertook a six-month internship with the Ministry of Justice as part of the Data Linking team, which she completed in Autumn 2024. The internship provided an opportunity to

develop skills for efficient data de-duplication and linkage, which is a key aspect of the research study.

Following the internship the researcher has returned to the substantive work of the research project, using the learning gained to further analyse the data and moved on to the write up phase of the project.

By the end of the reporting period the researcher had completed her PhD write-up and submitted her thesis to her supervisors; with the viva expected to take place in Summer 2025. In the next few months, we will meet with the researcher to explore her findings and look at how the Board may benefit from the research. A summary of the findings will be shared and a more detailed discussion will take place in terms of whether the text mining algorithm could have any functional application for the Board.

2) *Understanding the experience of the Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) Sentence and Prisoner Progression PhD – HMPPS Psychology Services Group*

The researcher is currently writing the PhD thesis which is planned for submission in Summer 2025 with a viva following at the end of the year. Once completed the aim will be to provide a summary relating to each of the separate research studies, including one for the Parole Board – which can be disseminated accordingly. The researcher has also offered to facilitate a member and staff workshops on IPP prisoners, and this will be discussed with the IPP Taskforce and the Learning & Development Team.

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

The researcher has now finalised an article entitled "Challenging Parole Decisions in England and Wales: reconsideration and setting aside". The researcher met regularly with the Policy Hub, (including requesting data from the legal and reconsideration team) and presented findings to both the Chair and Vice-chair of the Board in advance of submitting a paper for publication. The report has been accepted for publication in the Modern Law Review and is with the Copy Editor. A confirmed publication date is awaited.

The researcher presented a summary of findings at the Criminal Bar Association Assizes Seminar in May 2024 and the Vice chair of the Board was invited to respond.

The researcher continues to meet regularly with the Policy Hub, including requesting data from the legal and reconsideration team. He is now working on the next strand of his study looking at transparency; he has provided input into Peter Rook and Michael Topolski's transparency review and met with the newly appointed CEO, Cecilia French.

The researcher is a member of a small working group looking at developing a parole research event in Autumn 2025. Internationally, he will give a Keynote Speech at the 7th Polish Penitentiary Congress in Poland in May 2025 on 'High Risk Offenders and Parole'.



4) *Terrorism-related cases before the Parole Board of England and Wales - 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. The research was on hold for a period, but the researcher is currently looking to arrange the last few interviews and move on to the analysis phase of the study.

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

This is a follow up study to the researchers completed research *Investigating the effects of setting on the structure of questioning in Parole Board hearings: a comparison between remote hearings and in-person hearings*.

The researchers are nearing the end of this study and have submitted an article to the *British Journal of Criminology* based on the findings. These findings provided in depth consideration of the benefits and drawbacks of the shift to remote hearings, based on the interviews conducted for the study. Once the journal article is published the researchers are planning to convert the findings into an infographic to be published as a half-page piece for Inside Times. This is essentially a 'what you can expect from your remote oral hearing' and will provide prisoners with practical advice based on the findings of the research.

A second article has been submitted to the *Language in Society* journal. Both articles will be shared with RGG once available.

We have also had a brief discussion about the potential to come back and do a further study into remote hearings now that we are four years into this way of working for the majority of oral hearings. It would be a useful study to compare the findings from the initial study which was very early on in terms of the development of remote technology.

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

The researcher has recruited five prisoner participants for the study who are actively engaged in the research. Each of these participants is currently consenting to a full case study including interviews, observation of oral hearings, sharing of paperwork (dossier and written parole decisions) and interviews with associated professionals (Parole Board panel members and COMs/POMs).

The researcher has observed two of the participant's oral hearings and is ready to start interviewing Parole Board members.

In addition to the five participants already engaged in the research, the researcher also hopes to sign up additional participants. She has amended the participation recruitment process to include an extra step following contact from NRC. She is now writing to women to invite them to participate only after a HMPPS member of staff has confirmed that the women are aware of the research. The Policy and Practice Hub is supporting this recruitment by providing the researcher with introductions to OMUs.

7) *Understanding professional views about medication to manage problematic sexual arousal (MMPSA) - Nottingham Trent University*

The researcher is currently still recruiting participants to complete the online questionnaire. Once enough responses are received to complete the sample that data will be analysed. The data analysis stage is due to commence in the next few months. Then the results will be written up for publication in a peer reviewed journal.

Studies completed during the reporting year (approved by RGG)

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

The research study has now been completed, and a research report has been written. The researcher thanked RGG for their support.

The research report has been shared with the wider membership and will be uploaded to SharePoint and mentioned in our next member communication.

9) *A legal anthropology of personality disorder – Birkbeck Criminology Department, University College London*

The researcher has now completed her PhD and the thesis is currently under embargo for two years whilst she seeks publication as a book. The researcher thanked RGG and all the members who generously gave their time and thoughts to the research. A summary of the research and its findings was shared with the wider membership and will be uploaded to SharePoint and mentioned in our next member communication.

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

The researcher has now completed her PhD and thanked RGG for their support. She is currently working with Bristol University Press to turn the findings of this project into a monograph which will be published in 2027.

The researcher is also hoping to publish two peer reviewed journal articles based on the findings of this study in late 2025 and 2026.

A summary of the research and its findings has been shared with the wider membership and will be uploaded to SharePoint and mentioned in our next member communication.

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

The researchers have completed their research study and written it up for journal publication and are currently awaiting a decision. Once publication has been agreed a copy of the article will be shared with RGG. There was significant interest in the outcomes of this study from members who attended the panel chair conference last month, so we are keen to circulate the findings as soon as they are available.



12) 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

The research study has now been completed, and a research report has been written. The researcher thanked RGG for their support.

The research report has been shared with the wider membership and will be uploaded to SharePoint and mentioned in our next member communication.

Whilst information about the completed studies has been shared with the membership, RGG is now looking at each of the outputs as part of further development of practice and guidance and potentially inviting researchers to present their findings to the Board.

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:

- 19 members participated in interviews for the research study '*Identifying Parole Board Members' Views on the Quality of Case Formulations in Psychological Risk Assessment*'.
- One member held a Q&A session with four University of Greenwich MSc/MA students who were part of the literature review pilot.
- Five members submitted an Expression of Interest to join the Research Governance Group.
- 18 members completed the questionnaire for the research study '*Professional views about medication to manage problematic sexual arousal*'.

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.

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.

Faith Geary met with Harry Annison, Professor of Criminal Justice at Southampton Law School, **Southampton University**, to discuss his research into Parole Board Leadership in April 2024. Harry has proposed a number of



ways in which he could share the findings of his research with the Parole Board which we are currently exploring.

We had an initial discussion with Marion Vannier, senior lecturer in criminology at the **University of Manchester** and research associate at the **University of Oxford**. In August 2022 Marion was awarded government funding to carry out a four-year project on hope amongst older life-sentenced prisoners in England and Wales (UKRI Future Leader Fellowship). She has been exploring the meaning and value of hope for prisoners and staff alike across three prisons. Marion is currently collaborating with the MoJ on aging prisoners' issues (ie. develop a good practice framework) and has presented some early thoughts with HMPPS and the Justice Committee in Parliament. Marion is looking at extending the study to further explore what hope might mean and how it might be employed in Parole Board hearings, with a focus on life-sentenced prisoners over the age of 50. She intends to submit an application to the RGG after she has secured an extension to her current funding. In the meantime, we have linked Marion in with a contact at the Public Protection Casework Section at the Ministry of Justice, who can help her understand what data they may be able to provide for the study.

Bradley Read PhD student at the **University of Cambridge** was exploring the Parole Board's annual reports as part of his PhD research. Bradley is now in the analysis and write up stage for that section of his PhD and is considering the next stage of his research study in which he hopes to access recordings of oral hearings. We met with Bradley for an initial discussion about this next phase of his research and he hopes to submit an application to RGG in relation to this shortly.

Russell Webster (**Prison Reform Trust**) and Dr Tim McSweeney (**University of Hertfordshire**) are progressing their Big Data First study looking at understanding parole success after release. The data submission and clearance procedure turned out to be rather slower than hoped but they have produced some preliminary findings and we have been meeting with them to discuss these.

Researchers from **HMPPS Women's Estate Psychology Services** and **Sheffield Hallam University** both recently completed RGG approved research studies looking at remote oral hearings. Following the conclusion of these studies the researchers contributed to a member Q&A session where they presented their findings and discussed best practice. They also went on to help develop a Remote Hearing Best Practice Sheet to assist members when undertaking these hearings.

In September 2024 Faith Geary, as Interim CEO, wrote testimonial letters to these researchers to thank them for this work and provided feedback on how the research informed member practice.

Early proposals for a **Parole Board Research Event** were discussed with Professors Annison, Padfield and Shute which we are hosting in November 2025.



We have had an initial conversation with Parole Board member Dr Alex Jack (psychologist), who is a lecturer in MSc Applied Forensic Psychology at the **University of Bath**. He has proposed a collaboration between the University of Bath and the Parole Board. The Board, with input from Dr Jack, would identify several projects or areas of interest, which would then be developed into viable research questions. He would then supervise the students in conducting this research. Dr Jack also suggested a second collaboration, as the course is a two-year programme with a placement year, he wanted to explore if the Board would be interested in taking a student for a year placement. The university already partners with the NHS, HMPPS, the private sector, and third-sector organisations. The placement could involve research, service evaluation, and/or policy. This would allow the student to contribute to work of the Board in a meaningful way, whilst also promoting the role of Parole Board member as a career path for Forensic Psychologist, which we have historically struggled to recruit. These are at early-stage discussions.

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

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 two research application peer review requests during the reporting period:

- An exploration of the barriers to progression of Automatic Life Sentenced prisoners from DoS
- An evaluation of the Determinate Risk Assessment Template.

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).

Parole Board Literature Review Scheme trial with the University of Greenwich

We are currently running a literature review pilot scheme with the University of Greenwich *Criminology and Criminal Psychology (MSc), Criminology, Gender and Sexualities (MSc) and International Criminology (MA)* students.

Ten students 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. Unfortunately, one student subsequently withdrew from the course. The nine remaining students have been meeting with Dr Petrillo on a monthly basis over the year to develop the skills necessary to complete a systematic literature review.

As part of their background research all nine students involved in the pilot, along with Dr Petrillo attended the Royal Courts of Justice to observe the public Parole Hearing.



In August 2024 we arranged for the students to attend a Q&A session with one of our Parole Board members, who has a background in research. It was an opportunity for the students to discuss their research topics and ask the member questions about their work and how they go about risk assessment. Four students attended the Q&A session, along with Dr Petrillo.

Dr Petrillo received literature reviews from five students, however, these were not all entirely relevant to the work of the Parole Board, some going too broad in their focus. In her role as gatekeeper, Dr Petrillo considered that three literature reviews were relevant to the work of the Board and of a standard good enough to be of use to the Board. We are currently considering how to utilise these and adapt and refine the approach we take going forward.

Research Governance Group
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