



Editorial

This edition of *Irish Probation Journal* explores issues and challenges in research, innovation and development in policy and practice. In many instances, as we all experience, actual policy and practice can sometimes bear little resemblance to the theory, aspiration or the academic research that initiated it. There are compromises, calculations and practicalities which lead to evolution and sometimes quite different outcomes. Contributors to this edition explore research findings, policy development, how research applies in practice and lessons we can learn to be better and more effective the next time.

Mary Rogan, in her wide-ranging and stimulating Martin Tansey Memorial Lecture hosted by the Association for Criminal Justice Research and Development, tracks the evolving concept of rehabilitation within official thinking in Ireland from the foundation of the State, highlighting the influential role of the Department of Justice, and Charles Haughey as Minister, in the developing of interest in rehabilitation during the 1960s. She also critically examines the research challenges facing criminology in Ireland, the role of drivers and influencers in policy-making and the crucial practical issues confronting those 'selling' evidence-based policy initiatives.

Shadd Maruna and his colleagues describe how they have taken on the practical task of 'translating' and communicating desistance research findings into pragmatic action on the ground. Recognising that interest in desistance has been primarily 'ground-up', and that research impact has been inconsistent, the authors have set about establishing a 'knowledge exchange' to develop and flesh out the idea of desistance-based practice.

In the light of debates about motivation for criminality, and the effectiveness of early intervention strategies in tackling juvenile justice issues, Niamh Hourigan outlines the findings of a three-year study on





criminal gang participation in Limerick city. Acknowledging that there are rational reasons to engage in criminal activity in contemporary Irish society, she argues that those advocating early intervention as a means of tackling juvenile justice issues must give greater consideration to why families are enmeshed in criminality and develop appropriate responses.

James Corrigan looks at quality control issues and how inspection of delay in the Northern Ireland criminal justice system observes and tracks the practical factors in the consistent and accountable application of standards and guidelines.

The Northern Ireland Lord Chief Justice, Rt Hon. Sir Declan Morgan, in his address to the 2011 Annual Public Protection Advisory Group Seminar, highlights the importance of partnership working within the criminal justice system in the interest of victims, witnesses, defendants and the general public.

In 2011 the Probation Service completed a drugs and alcohol survey of almost 3000 offenders on supervision. Michelle Martyn analysed the data in a comprehensive report, and her paper outlines the key findings in that survey, highlights the importance of research in informing and constructing policy and practice responses in supervising alcohol- and drug-misusing offenders and proposes an agenda for action and further study.

Examining the role of alcohol in offending among those on Probation supervision, Janice Kelly and Vincent Egan present findings from their research on whether aggressive offenders who had consumed alcohol before offending are different to aggressive offenders who had not.

Probation Officers completing further professional study and training have a particular commitment to researching and testing practice in which they have experience and knowledge. The Probation Service has supported this professional training in developing a dedicated Masters in Social Work programme for Probation Officers in partnership with the School of Applied Social Science at UCD. Three 2012 graduates of this programme present papers on topics of special relevance and interest from their work and study.

Michelle Richardson explores how life sentence prisoners cope with their indeterminate sentences in prison and makes suggestions for practice. Aine Morris investigates the experience of homeless women offenders in supported accommodation on release. Margaret Prendergast outlines findings from her study on the application of the LSI-R risk/need assessment instrument in the Probation Service.

Addressing concerns regarding the management of vulnerable prisoners with mental health difficulties in prison, the award-winning High Support Unit at Mountjoy Prison was established in 2010. David Williamson traces the background to its establishment, highlights the value of a multi-agency and multidisciplinary response in this area of criminal justice and considers issues for the Probation Service in interdisciplinary working and in supervising offenders with mental health difficulties.

Motivational Interviewing (MI) has become an important and core approach in probation work with offenders. Sheena Norton highlights in her paper the value and relevance of MI skills in everyday practice.

There is a small but growing criminological research community in Ireland which is increasingly providing valuable insights and new learning on effective interventions and what works in reducing offending, and on offending generally, in the changing Ireland. Research and study do need to be encouraged, nurtured and supported. Continued and developing engagement between the research and academic community, interest groups, policy-makers and practitioners is a real opportunity for constructive and purposeful partnership. It will also make a positive contribution to planning and managing a better and more effective criminal justice system.

Irish Probation Journal has a role in advancing this development by offering a tangible forum for knowledge exchange, critical debate and dialogue. It will continue to publish and promote work by practitioners, new researchers and writers and established authors. The challenge to all of us is to learn and to be more effective for a better future.

Gerry McNally
The Probation Service

Jean O'Neill
The Probation Board for Northern Ireland

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