Correctionalism, Desistance and the Future of Probation in Ireland

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Summary This paper argues that desistance research should provoke a reconsideration of the essential character of interventions with adults involved in offending behaviour. It begins by discussing broad accounts of the characteristics of late-modern penal systems as the background to an exploration of current developments in probation policy and practice. In particular, the discussion develops some contrasts between ‘welfarist rehabilitation’ and ‘correctional treatment’ as competing (but inadequate) paradigms for probation practice. In the context of these contrasts, the situation of probation in Ireland receives particular attention. Possible implications for practice of some important desistance studies are then developed, in order to stimulate discussion and debate about the extent to which desistance research might challenge the correctionalism that is emerging most clearly in England and Wales, but also in Scotland, Ireland and other jurisdictions. In the conclusion, bearing in mind persistent rumours about the possibility of organisational developments in Ireland that might mirror those in England and Wales, the prospects for more constructive developments are considered.