



Strategic Review of Bridge
An Independent Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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STRATEGIC REVIEW OF BRIDGE: AN INDEPENDENT REPORT

This is an independent report on Bridge, prepared for the Bridge Board of Management. It is intended to provide a strategic review and examine four key issues which were identified by the Board of Management in July 2004:

- The relevance of the mission statement and objectives in the light of changes in the external environment
- The structure of Bridge: its governance, organisational structure, staffing and the involvement of other key agencies
- Practice: the programme content and best contemporary practice
- Development: the evolution of the programme, how it should respond to external changes and whether it should be restructured to achieve its full potential in the future.

Over a period of eight months, the author made 7 visits to Dublin, involving 14 days in Bridge and visits to the Probation and Welfare Headquarters, Prison Service Headquarters, Circuit and the District Courts, and the City of Dublin Vocational Education (VEC) Head Office

- I conducted a series interviews on an individual and group basis with: members of the Board, the Bridge manager, all the Bridge staff including the probation officers, the then Principal Probation Officer, prison-based senior probation officers, Circuit Court senior and probation officers, and District Court senior probation officers.
- I have been able to discuss the role of Bridge and its value to the judiciary in Dublin, by meeting with five judges from the Circuit Court and five from the Dublin District Court.
- I was provided with statistical information from the Probation and Welfare Service, Prison Statistics from the Annual Report of the Prison Service and data on women prisoners in the Dóchas Centre of Mountjoy Prison.
- I had full access to all records and information collected by Bridge, including records on all the group modules, materials used by group leaders, and to information about the costs and revenue of Bridge. The Bridge manager compiled profile information on completers and non-completers of the last six programmes, and undertook a retrospective content analysis of probation records. I was able to observe all aspects of the work in Bridge, the way offenders were treated and the way offenders responded to staff and each other.
- I met the new Chief Executive Officer of the City of Dublin VEC, and the Principal of Whitehall House College, to discuss the links between the VEC and Bridge.
- I met with the Director of Prison Regimes and with senior staff from the Prison Headquarters to discuss the potential role of Bridge for temporary release prisoners, prisoners subject to supervision on release, and the supervision requirements for prisoners released on parole.
- I prepared an interim report for the Bridge Board in March 2005, and had feedback meetings about it with all Bridge staff, senior probation officers from Circuit and District Court teams and from two prisons, Assistant Principal Probation Officers, and the Deputy Director of the Institute of Criminology, University College Dublin.

Objectives of Bridge

Bridge was started at the end of 1991 as an intensive probation supervision initiative for young adult offenders from the Dublin area who would otherwise serve substantial prison sentences. It adopted the following mission statement as a guideline for the work of Bridge:

" to organise and evaluate a community based programme for serious young offenders in the Dublin area, that will prove to be an effective alternative to custodial sentences and that will reduce the incidence of criminal behaviour among participants while enhancing their personal development."

The original target group of offenders were those who:

- had committed serious crimes meriting a custodial sentence of at least two years (sentenced by the Circuit Court);
- were in the 16 - 25 year age group;
- were resident in the Dublin area;
- were sufficiently motivated to participate in the programme;
- were subject to conditions imposed by the Circuit Court or the prison authorities.

The Bridge programme

The core method was an intensive group work programme. Although over time the titles of modules have changed they have covered: thinking skills, offending behaviour, criminal lifestyles, anger management, addictions, drug and alcohol usage, education and employment, life skills, activities and creativity. The duration of the group programme has varied from 17 to 14 weeks. All but two of the programmes have been for male offenders; two programmes were run for women offenders only.

In recent years the Bridge programme has been divided into three phases, each with clearly defined aims and procedures:

- Phase 1 consists of referral and induction, and is usually of two weeks' duration.
- Phase 2 is the intensive group modules element with attendance at all group modules over a period of 3 to 4 months, with groups running on two or three mornings per week.
- In phase 3, the participants are supervised individually by Bridge probation officers.

Bridge also provides support and assistance in education, training and employment needs. Bridge staff undertake individual assessments of offenders' skills and experience and provide or arrange individual tuition or training. It has a Community Employment Scheme (CES) and participants in the programme and other offenders work towards accredited learning and skills.

Past evaluations and reports on Bridge

In April 1994 Kelleher and Associates produced an excellent evaluation of the achievements of the first years of Bridge, by examining the period between June 1993 and April 1994. Then in May 1997 the Nexus Research Co-operative produced a pilot follow up study, based upon the earlier study. This second report recommended more detailed future monitoring of cases and the more systematic collection of routine data on the characteristics of offenders attending Bridge. In June 2003 the Institute of Criminology at the University College, Dublin, produced a report on "The Feasibility of Assessing the Impact of the Bridge Project". It made numerous suggestions for improving the

evaluation of the programme and highlighted particular difficulties in the Irish Republic in collecting accurate conviction and reconviction data. In the past year, Deirdre Healy, a researcher at the Institute of Criminology, has been completing her Ph.D thesis on the effectiveness of community sanctions in Ireland, which has included the collection of case material and evidence from Bridge. This study should be completed by the autumn of 2005, and will provide some further comparative evidence of the relative value of the Bridge programme.

Participation in Bridge 1992 – 2004

From April 1992 until April 1998, 190 offenders participated in the Bridge programme and 80% had completed the core programme. In the period between April 1992 and April 1994, 85 offenders had commenced the group work phase in ten groups (Nos. 1 - 10): 72% were on supervision ordered by the Circuit Court and 28% on prison release conditions, and 31% were aged 17 - 19, 53% were aged 20 - 22, and 17% were aged 23 - 26. From May 1994 to March 1998, a further 105 offenders participated in 13 group work programmes (Nos. 11 - 23). The proportion of offenders on supervision ordered by the Circuit Court reached over 85% and only 15% on prison release conditions, and the age profile also changed with 8% aged 17 - 19, 15% aged 20 - 22 years, 52% aged 23 - 29 and 15% aged 30 and over. From April 1998 to September 2001, five group programmes (Nos. 24 - 28) were delivered, during which 79 cases were referred, 51 of whom (65%) commenced the programme and 41 (80% of starters) completed it. From October 2001 to October 2004, seven groups (Nos. 29 - 35) were delivered with 100 referrals made, 74 of whom (74%) commenced the programme, with 48 (65% of starters) completing it: 19% were aged 19 - 22, 48% aged 22 - 25, 25% aged 26 - 29 years and 8% aged 30 and over. The mean age for non-starters was 23.6 years, for non-completers 26.3, and for completers 25.6. The mean LSI-R (Level of Service Inventory - Revised) scores were: 34.8 for non-starters, 30.1 for non-completers and 30.8 for completers. Only 8 out of 100 offenders referred scored less than 25 on LSI-R.

Full information on the sources of referral was only available on completers of the programme. The majority had come from the Circuit Court through supervision during deferment or probation orders (52%) or through a Circuit Court review in custody (23%). Nearly all the remaining cases came from prisons either via temporary or day release (17%) or through post-release supervision from custody (4%). Two cases came from the District Courts, one on appeal.

Up to the present 315 offenders have commenced the group work phase of Bridge in 35 programmes and 237 (75%) have completed it. The number of programme attendees per group has gradually increased from 8.5 in the first ten groups, to 10.2 in groups 24 to 28, and 10.6 in groups 29 to 35. The number of programmes starting in each year has reduced from 5 per year in the first two years (1992 - 94), to 3.5 in the next four years (1994 - 98), and 1.4 per year between 1998 and 2001. Most recently (2001 - 04) two groups have started each year. Over this period the vast majority of cases have been subject to supervision ordered by the Circuit Court, but in the past two years an increased proportion have been subject to conditions for early release from prison.

Evidence of the effectiveness of the Bridge programme

Information was collected on 42 offenders who had completed the Bridge programme in 5 groups, between February 2002 and July 2004. Probation and Welfare Service records provided evidence of their subsequent history of convictions and sentences, employment, training and education history, evidence of subsequent drug use, and the stability of relationships with partners and families. The

average period since completion across the whole sample was 20 months. Of these 42 completers, 19(45%) had been reconvicted at least once and 16(38%) had been re-sentenced to custody. However, in 23 cases there was no evidence of a subsequent conviction and sentence. The youngest group of offenders (aged 19 - 22) were less likely to be reconvicted, with seven out of nine not reconvicted. In the age group 23 - 25, 9 out of 21 were not reconvicted, in the group 26 - 29, 6 out of 9 were not reconvicted, and one of the 3 offenders aged 30 and older was not reconvicted. The probability of reconviction appeared to increase with the LSI-R scores: those with scores of 16 - 25, five (63%) were not reconvicted, of those scoring 26 - 35, fourteen (61%) were not reconvicted, and of those with score of 36 and above, 4 (36%) were not reconvicted.

Information about three key social factors was analysed: employment, college attendance and training; current level of drug use; and the stability of accommodation and relationships with partners and family. The findings showed that: 24 (57%) scored positively on at least one factor, and 18 (43%) scored positively on all three factors. Two offenders who were employed had been reconvicted, but neither had received a custodial sentence; four offenders who were considered 'drug free' had been convicted and one had been imprisoned; and three offenders who were considered to be in stable accommodation and relationships had been reconvicted and one had been imprisoned. Of the 16 offenders who had been imprisoned, all but two had been rated negatively on all three factors. There was a strong association between fewer and less serious reconvictions and positive ratings on one or more of the factors. Caution must however be exercised in interpreting this data as: it is only about completers, it is derived solely from probation records, there was no valid comparison group available, and the periods at risk since completion varied across the sample. However, these associations are in line with evidence found in other studies of the effectiveness of intensive community based programmes, where employment, social stability and the absence of drug use are significantly associated with reduced reconvictions and further custodial sentences.

Court Reports prepared by Probation and Welfare Staff

To be able to consider the context in which offenders in Dublin have been referred to Bridge, it was essential to examine information on reports written for the criminal courts. The Probation and Welfare Service completed nationally 4,678 pre-sanction reports (PSRs) in 2000, compared with 4,156 in 2003, and in Dublin 438 fewer reports were prepared in 2003 compared with 2000. In the Circuit Court in the Eastern Region (which includes Dublin) 279 fewer PSRs were prepared in 2003 compared with 2000. This reduction in the number of PSRs prepared for the Circuit Courts appears to have had no significant impact on the number of probation orders and orders for supervision during deferment made in the Eastern Region, or in Dublin. In District Courts in the Eastern Region there was a 34% reduction in the number of probation orders made in 2003 compared with 2000, but there was an increase of 35% in the number of orders for supervision during deferment.

Community service reports (CSRs) are also prepared by the Probation and Welfare Service for both District and Circuit Courts. In the Eastern Region the Circuit Court increased its requests for CSRs from 61 in 2000 to 90 in 2003 (47% increase), slightly above the national trend. There was an increase in the number of orders made for supervision during deferment in Circuit Courts from 25 in 2000 to 37 in 2003. The age profiles of male offenders who were the subjects of PSRs or CSRs between 2000 and 2003 have remained fairly constant.

From the data it was possible to calculate how many different sentencing disposals were made in Dublin Courts in 2003 when PSRs and CSRs were available to the courts. In all 321 probation

orders were made in all Dublin courts in 2003, of which 27 were made by the Circuit Court; and 1,276 orders for supervision during deferment were made, of which 145 were made by the Circuit Court. In all, 233 probation orders and 918 orders for supervision during deferment were made on male offenders between the ages of 18 and 39; of these 20 probation orders and 86 orders for supervision during deferment were made by the Circuit Court. Multiple counting of individuals can occur and therefore the actual number of individual offenders will be lower than these estimates.

LSI-R scores on offenders appearing for sentence in the Dublin Circuit Court in 2003

In the first six months of 2003 the Circuit Court teams, who had received training in the use of the LSI-R assessment system completed 89 reports in which LSI-R scores were calculated. Fifteen different probation officers undertook the assessments. The 89 cases included three female offenders who were excluded from the analysis. The male offenders comprised 80 on whom PSRs were prepared, and 6 on whom CSRs were prepared. The LSI-R scores ranged between 6 and 42. Using the bands recommended for use by the Probation and Welfare Service: 9% were low (0 - 10), 32% were medium (11 - 25), 43% were high, and 15% were very high (36 and over). If the LSI-R scores are grouped into two bands, 36 cases (42%) were rated as low/medium, and 50 (58%) were rated as high/very high. Of those with the higher LSI-R scores, 10 (20%) were aged 18 - 21, 27 (54%) were aged 22 - 29, and 11 (22%) were aged 30 - 39, and two (4%) were aged 40 or more. All of these offenders except one, who was aged over 40 and was also a serious sex offender, could have been eligible for the Bridge programme. It is estimated that of the offenders on whom PSRs are prepared for the Circuit Court in Dublin, about 60% would have high or very high LSI-R scores.

Interviews with probation and welfare staff

In the interviews conducted with probation and senior probation officers from the court and district teams, there emerged a range of views about the purpose and value of Bridge, and the factors influencing staff decisions about referrals to Bridge:

- Lack of provision for persistent offenders sentenced in the District courts who were multi-problematic, and many of whom were young offenders.
- The use by District courts of shorter prison sentences for persistent offenders, who were not convicted of serious offences, but who did not comply with standard probation supervision.
- Probation staff in District teams did not consider it possible to refer cases to Bridge and more often linked them into local projects in the areas in which they lived.
- Because only two groups were run each year, there was always a possibility that any offender would not be available at the precise time a Bridge group started.
- Ambiguity about who was eligible or suitable for Bridge. Suitability was too often determined by differences in probation officers' perspectives. Most officers believed the eligibility criteria were too "narrow" and should be widened and more clearly specified.
- Uncertainty about whether Bridge should provide only a group work programme or a wider programme of interventions.
- Great variation in views about whether the Bridge "group programme" fitted many offenders' needs. Examples of local projects which fitted better some offenders were cited.
- The recent lack of provision for offenders aged 18 - 21 was frequently mentioned, as was the exclusion of women. Some specialist provision for women, probably in a women-only centre was needed.

Views of sentencers

As part of the review, judges from the Circuit Court and the District Court for Dublin met with the author, to discuss the value of the intensive supervision and the Bridge programme.

Five Circuit Court judges including those who sat in Trial Courts and the Dispersal Court, felt they had a good understanding of the work done in Bridge with offenders, and considered it a suitable alternative to custody for offenders whose offences were serious but not grave, and who had not responded to previous supervision or custodial sentences. They were agreed that they looked for offenders who gave strong indications of a commitment to change their behaviour, as being the most suitable for a programme like Bridge. They relied on probation officers to be able to identify offenders who would be suitable for Bridge, however they were concerned that not infrequently proposals for Bridge were not included in pre-sanction reports when they had “expected” at the time of the adjournment that they would be. They felt that the current referral system to Bridge had not served the judges or Bridge well. They agreed that probation and supervision orders (including during deferment) could be tailored to meet the specific nature of the Bridge programme. They had confidence that Bridge and the Probation and Welfare Service would re-enter cases promptly, when there is evidence of non-compliance. They heard few cases involving women, but often such cases were complex and individualistic, and some specific provision for women would be welcomed.

Five District Court Judges, including three who were relatively recently appointed, also provided helpful comments on intensive supervision and the role of Bridge. They expressed concerns about limited provision for young people aged 16 - 17; young adults aged 18 - 21, women offenders, and perpetrators of domestic violence. They had relatively little knowledge about the Bridge programme and would welcome more specific information about it. In discussion about the current content of the Bridge programme, they welcomed the focus on education, employment, addictions, leisure time activities, health needs and victim awareness. They felt the programme could be of value to District Court judges, if probation officers proposed it in reports, and a suitable means of restricting its use to offenders who really needed such intensive supervision could be devised.

From the range the data available and from the discussions with the judiciary and with probation staff, it is clear that there are probably large numbers of persistent offenders appearing before the courts in Dublin who could be significantly assisted by participation in Bridge and should be referred. Circuit Court judges would clearly welcome more proposals in reports for Bridge, and the District Court judges would be willing to consider the possible use of Bridge requirements for a limited number of offenders sentenced in their courts.

Offenders released from prison

Information has been compiled about offenders from Dublin who will be released in 2005, subject to post-release supervision orders made by the Circuit Court. These 51 individuals are all male, and 65% of them are aged between 30 and 39 years old, and 35% are aged 21 to 29 years old. Two-thirds (67%) will be subject to 12 months of supervision, and a high proportion (71%) are likely to be subject to non-residential drug or alcohol treatment conditions. The majority will be released from Mountjoy (53%), Wheatfields (20%) and Midlands (12%) prisons.

There will probably be an increase in the number of prisoners considered suitable by the prisons for early release conditions, who could also be eligible for future Bridge programmes. The

recommendations of the Irish Parole Board to the Minister of Justice result in a small number of offenders being released from prisons, subject to probation supervision on licence. Such cases could be case managed by probation staff in Bridge, who could provide the level of support statutorily required and the reports on their progress, as well as initiating recalls if needed.

The prison senior probation officers were concerned about increasing the number of prisoners released early on supervision, as there were problems in finding suitable forms of supervision in the community. They were of the opinion that Bridge was a suitable place for many of these cases. The author had discussions with the Director of Prison Regimes in the Prison Service, about sentence planning and early temporary releases (TRs), and met with two Assistant Principal Officers responsible for decisions to release prisoners. Currently there is great pressure on prison places, particularly in Dublin, where overcrowding is a significant problem. The Prison Service would welcome additional programmes to which prisoners could be released and especially as ones such as Bridge, which provides assessment, release plans and structured supervision. Protocols already exist between Bridge and the Prison Service, and it may be possible for prisoners to attend Bridge for two weeks assessment, on either a day release basis or a full weekly renewable TR. The recent National Economic and Social Forum Report on the Reintegration of Prisoners (2003) made major proposals for reform which included: a focus on sentence planning for the prison service, and a key role for the voluntary agencies in providing increased support for released prisoners. Both these proposals fit well with the view that Bridge could make a significant contribution to improving prisoner re-settlement in Dublin for persistent offenders.

Women offenders and Bridge

Bridge has provided two women-only programmes. The first began in November 1998, when nine women attended the programme and all completed it. A second began in April 2001, when eight women commenced and six completed it and two were subsequently taken onto the CE Scheme. There is no specialist facility for women which offers individual support in the community. At present women prisoners are the fastest growing section of the prison population, and there are already overcrowding problems. According to the Annual Report of the Irish Prison Service (2003), 413 women aged 15 years and older were committed to prison under sentence in 2003. Probation Statistics on pre-sanction reports prepared on women indicate that 59% of them resided in the Dublin area. However, only 4% of the women had had reports written for the Circuit Court, and the vast majority of probation orders and orders for supervision during deferment are made by District Courts. If Bridge continues to restrict its intake to offenders sentenced in the Circuit Court, only small numbers of women would be eligible for Bridge. The numbers would increase if women in prison who are eligible for temporary release were considered eligible for Bridge.

Bridge finances and comparative costs

For the past four years (2001 – 04) the annual income of Bridge has been reasonably constant. The cash income varied between €247,376 in 2001 and €10,217 in 2004. However, Bridge income also includes salaries and rent which are paid by the Probation and Welfare Service, and the salaries paid by City of Dublin VEC for the education worker and tutors. Therefore the actual total expenditure of Bridge was €584,473 in 2001 and €612,453 in 2004.

In the period from October 2001 to the end of September 2004, Bridge had 100 offenders referred to the programme, 68 of whom attended some of the programme, and 32 completed the whole

programme. Therefore allowing for only partial expenditure in 2001 (25%) and 2004 (75%) being applied to the 100 offenders, the average expenditure per offender over the period was:

- 161 offenders in contact with Bridge Staff €10,637 per offender
- 100 offenders referred to Bridge programme €17,095 per offender
- 68 attending the programme €23,140 per offender
- 32 completing the programme €3,422 per offender.

The second figure of €17,095 per offender represents the cost of one-to-one supervision of all cases referred to Bridge, even if they do not attend or complete the programme.

Compared to the cost of imprisonment, the cost per offender at Bridge is significantly lower. According to the Annual Report of the Irish Prison Service for 2004, the average cost per prisoner (not including capital costs) was €87,950 per prisoner (all prison establishments).

However, in considering the costs of intensive supervision like Bridge, account should also be taken of the wider economic and social costs of the offences committed by offenders, particularly those who commit serious offences and are persistent in their offending. Using costs estimated for England and Wales by the Home Office (Brand and Price, 2001), it was possible to produce estimates about the costs of the principal types of offence for which offenders attending Bridge between 2001 and 2004 were sentenced. Bridge completers who have not committed further offences would be achieving a saving of €6,840 per offence. If only on average they committed three offences fewer of the types they had committed before, then the saving could have been as much as €475,000 for the 23 offenders who completed the Bridge programme.

Governance of Bridge

Bridge is a charitable trust and limited company, and is independent and non-profit-making. The current Board includes individual members who are fully independent, together with representatives of funding bodies who assign staff, and stakeholders involved in referring cases and contributing to the programme. It also includes representatives from other key agencies (e.g. Garda Siochana).

Trustees have to be able to put the interests of Bridge first, and they should be able to make decisions that are completely objective and free from pressure from stakeholders. It is essential to keep the governance of Bridge separate from the interests of stakeholders. From my observations it is not currently clear that this separation exists in practice, in the current governance of Bridge.

Review of international evidence of intensive community supervision programmes

The international evidence indicates that the best intensive programmes make clear inroads into tackling the underlying problems of the offenders on them. Not surprisingly, greater progress is made with those who completed programmes successfully. The majority of sentencers who were questioned about intensive community programs in different jurisdictions believed they provided a useful sentence, bridging the divide between custody and conventional community penalties.

International studies indicate the importance of setting achievable and realistic aims and expectations as improvements are likely to be only gradual. Thus while intensive programmes can provide an important first step towards positive maturation and development, longer-term supports will always

be needed. Realism is also required when considering the potential impact of intensive programmes upon levels of custodial sentencing. Problems of net-widening and increased levels of breach are well recognized, and it is important to acknowledge that intensive programmes do not exist within a vacuum and that custody rates are likely to be affected by a range of other factors.

Evaluations in the United States indicate that intensive programmes must have a rehabilitative component to have a successful impact upon re-offending rates. Furthermore, the ability to tailor individual programmes to individual needs, targeting offenders' criminogenic risk factors, would appear particularly important. To have an impact upon re-offending rates, the evidence supports the 'What Works' principle of 'risk classification', which stipulates that the level and intensity of the intervention should be matched to the seriousness of the offending and the risk of re-offending. Many studies emphasise the need to tackle implementation and delivery difficulties, which are considerable for multi-modal programmes which combine supervision and elements of surveillance. Tensions can arise between the caring and controlling objectives. A range of other factors appear to underpin successful implementation and delivery, including the need for intensive programmes to provide high quality interpersonal contact, well-trained and cohesive staff teams, strong leadership, and establishing close working ties with other agencies and organizations is essential. Only through adopting an evidence-based approach to identifying suitable offenders and selecting the types of interventions, can successful outcomes be expected. Overall intensive community programmes using multi-modal methods appear to have good prospects of reducing offending.

Challenges and problems for Bridge

Three major areas of difficulty have arisen in Bridge since it began. These relate to: the number and type of staff employed full time or on a part time; eligibility and suitability of offenders for Bridge; and perceptions of Bridge as only a group work programme. There have also been a number of other issues which have also been problematic and challenging: the changing nature of substance misuse in Dublin, with a changing range of treatments available; evidence about the limited effectiveness of group cognitive programmes alone; and the development of a range of local projects and initiatives in Dublin, which may be perceived to compete with Bridge.

Strengths of Bridge

I have identified evidence of some particular strengths and valuable existing elements of Bridge: the atmosphere is friendly and caring, and offenders are treated with consideration and helpfulness; there is an experienced core of probation officers, who have a good understanding of current literature and research evidence about effective supervision methods; Bridge has a lot of experience of providing offenders with support in the areas of education, training and employment-finding skills and the CES is a valuable project; there has been clear and authoritative leadership in Bridge, and good support staff and a well led administrative team; the current building is in a good location in Dublin, and has good facilities; Bridge has achieved a good balance of resourcing and support from statutory agencies (in particular the Probation and Welfare Service), and the Board has a wide ranging membership from other organisation which has clearly contributed to its development.

The characteristics of persistent offenders

There is increasing international evidence of a clustering of characteristics among persistent offenders. These include a number of key factors:

- limited personal, interpersonal skills, and cognitive skills and persistent anti-social attitudes
- poor education, qualifications and work experience, many with low levels of basic skills
- learning styles including difficulties using written, interactive, and group based materials
- poor family and interpersonal relationships, links with their children and own parents
- some may have problems with obtaining or keeping permanent accommodation;
- drug and/or alcohol abuse problems, sometimes involving prescribed drugs
- physical health, including eyesight, hearing, dental care, and access to primary health care
- mental or emotional health problems, diagnosed conditions, and other disorders
- criminal associates and life-styles supporting criminal behaviour and activities
- small number of women with complex personal, family, childcare problems, likely to be poly-drug users, and to have been the victims of abuse and domestic violence.

These multiple characteristics of persistent offenders are the primary reason why Bridge needs to become more multi-modal in its approach, and to begin to widen its provision to include at its core individual assessments, contracts and case management. It should be possible for individual offenders to attend more than once, and offenders should be eligible for Bridge regardless of whether they avoid custody or have their custodial sentence shortened by being released early.

Proposals for the future development of Bridge and sources of persistent offender participants

I have come to some clear conclusions about Bridge and its potential future. What the Board of Bridge and its stakeholders need to decide, is whether they want Bridge to continue in its present form and size, or whether they wish to take on the challenge of developing and expanding Bridge,

From the information available, it is fairly clear that Bridge should have no difficulty in finding eligible and suitable participants who are being sentenced. Eligibility could be widened to include offenders appearing in the Circuit, and some in the District Courts, who are identified as suitable and on whom PSRs are prepared; offenders with high or very high LSI-R scores (25 or more), aged 18-39, who have been convicted of offences for which a minimum one year custodial sentence could be imposed; offenders who have previously failed to benefit from probation supervision or custodial sentence, and normally resident in Dublin. In addition Bridge could take similar offenders leaving custody subject to release supervision on parole, post release supervision ordered by the Circuit Court, and temporary early release supervision. Hence the offenders coming to Bridge would be both court ordered and post custody, but all would have statutory and enforceable requirements to attend Bridge. Probation staff would be expected to propose to courts that early release, probation and supervision during deferment cases would have Bridge requirements attached in all eligible cases, unless exceptional evidence suggested otherwise. Parole, post-release supervision and early release cases which scored 25 or more on LSI-R and are considered suitable would also normally have a requirement to attend Bridge attached to their licence. All offenders would start Bridge via a multi-part assessment, which would contribute to the preparation of a Bridge contract, which would specify the precise elements of Bridge each individual would undertake during the first three months. All offenders would be subject to case management by one of the Bridge probation officers, who would be accountable to the Bridge manager for the statutory supervision of the offenders. In rare cases during the assessment phase it may become obvious that an offender was not suitable for the Bridge provision, in which case it would be necessary for other arrangements to be made for their legal supervision. The two week initial assessment experience would rigorously test the offender's willingness to comply with statutory orders and meet the requirements of attendance and behaviour,

to enable them to benefit from a Bridge contract. Failure to meet this test could result in an offender being breached or recalled

The facilities at Bridge should continue to be focused on providing an Intensive Probation Supervision (IPS) experience for persistent adult male offenders. Due to the nature of the current building it would not be possible to take women offenders, but in the future similar facilities could be provided for women in a separate location. Certain types of male offenders would not be eligible, including those with: a current or previous history of sexual offences; a current or previous history of domestic violence; with serious mental health problems; and those with serious learning difficulties.

Bridge Assessment

Currently offenders undertake a period of pre-group induction, and the level of structured assessment is limited and varies from individual to individual. The proposal is to make the initial Bridge Assessment a major element for the offender and one in which all aspects of the offender's life and aspirations are explored with him. It is suggested that a multiple assessment could be undertaken over two weeks, via six afternoon sessions at Bridge. In the case of offenders in prison, the assessment could be undertaken on a temporary release basis, prior to the point at which a specific Bridge requirement is determined.

This multiple assessment would have five distinct elements: (1) Offending behaviour and history; (2) Social circumstances and relationships; (3) Educational ability and employment history; (4) General and mental health, and drug and/or alcohol usage; (5) Self-assessment and personal goals and ambitions. The package of assessment would involve interviews, ability tests, psychometric tests, health and drug usage screening, computer based exercises and other tests. It would require the active involvement of all existing Bridge staff, and others who are experienced in health and substance misuse assessment.

Bridge contracts

After the assessment is completed, Bridge staff would bring all the elements together into an overall 'profile' document, which would be central to discussions and agreements with the offender about the content of a Bridge contract. The contract would be written in language that the offender could understand and would include elements from the offender's self-assessment and his personal goals. The offender and case manager would sign the contract. Contracts would normally have four parts: the case management element; the group modules in which the offender will participate; specialist assistance or resources to be provided to the offender from within Bridge; and other elements which would be available for the offender from other providers. Contracts would be reviewed every three months, when they could be reframed.

Case management

The proposed content of the case management would not be greatly different from existing supervision by the probation officers in Bridge. It would reinforce court or prison order requirements, and remind them of the parts of the contract about their involvement in Bridge provision and with organisations outside of Bridge. Case managers would meet regularly with offenders (once or twice a week for the first 3 months), and would be expected to deal with any social problems that may arise (e.g. benefits issues, housing problems), as well as exploring

offending, education or employment, health and drug/alcohol treatment, and other issues affecting the offender. Reinforcing learning from the modules, helping offenders to catch up on sessions missed, motivation and relapse would be other elements of case management meetings. Case managers would review progress with the contract, and provide brief reports on progress.

Group modules

It is suggested that three broad types of group modules: cognitive, information and education, and activity-based, are planned and provided, along the lines of those that have previously been available in Bridge. This could result in some modules running more frequently than others, with a pattern of participation which would be different for each individual offender.

The cognitive modules would be similar to those already run in Bridge, with the emphasis on the use of social learning theory, improving thinking skills and decision making. These groups would focus on offending behaviour, impulsiveness and problem solving. The range of cognitive groups could be changed over time, but each cognitive programme should have a delivery manual and be led by practitioners who have been appropriately trained.

The information and education modules would have the primary purpose of providing offenders with accurate and localised information, and increasing their awareness of pathways to changing their lives for the better. The two major subjects for these groups would be: drug and alcohol awareness (e.g. existing addictions module) and employment, education, training and skills.

The activity modules could be similar to those occasionally provided in the past in Bridge. Three types are suggested: (1) survival and life skills, which could include: money management, parenting, cooking, first-aid, accommodation issues (e.g. rental agreements, utilities provision); (2) healthy living and recreation, which could include activities: (e.g. five-a-side football, swimming, gym skills), healthy eating and weight management, giving up smoking; (3) introduction to creative skills, which could include: art, photography, pottery, drama, creative writing and poetry. Many of these groups could be run in Bridge, but others would need external venues. As has been done in the past, tutors and group leaders could be employed on a part-time basis to lead such groups, but Bridge staff could where they are qualified also participate.

Specialist support and assistance within Bridge

Currently there are two forms of specialist support provided in Bridge: that by the education specialist, and the CE Scheme and its staff. My suggestion is that both are retained and developed. An additional employment and training specialist should be appointed, and if possible part-time tutors engaged to increase the amount of direct tuition and assistance provided in Bridge. The aim would be to prepare offenders better for longer term tuition, courses and training schemes in the community. Greater use could be made of the computer room and the IT facilities, if participants could be assisted in its use, and shown the information available from the internet and the worldwide web. It may also be possible to provide some individual tuition in arts and crafts, so that they could start to learn some skills, before linking them into external sources of further training and development. The CE Scheme offers limited financial incentives and the means to obtain certification of work achievements. It currently has 8 places, but some are allocated to offenders who are not part of the Bridge programme, but in the future the places will be solely for Bridge participants. If some

additional places should be provided, more opportunities could be available, as part of a Bridge contract. Negotiations with the City of Dublin VSC would be needed for both to be achieved.

It also suggested that consideration be given to providing a new range of special support at Bridge, in response to health and substance abuse problems. A weekly clinic in Bridge to undertake health screening, providing links with community and hospital based treatment would be valuable provision for most Bridge participants, as would be a weekly substance abuse clinic, where participants could be individually assessed, have their usage accurately monitored, receive advice and guidance, and be referred to appropriate community or residential treatment and support. Both types of clinic would require appropriate facilities in Bridge. Specialist practitioners from the health services (e.g. a community or psychiatric nurse from a local health centre), and a drug/alcohol specialist would be needed. Such clinics could be developed gradually over time.

Specialist support and assistance outside of Bridge

Bridge already has a large network of links with other projects and agencies in Dublin, and offenders have been linked with many, facilitated by Bridge staff. What is suggested is that such linkage is recognised in Bridge contracts, and the work is seen as part of the Bridge programme. Their network includes; a range of education, training, vocational skills schemes and access to colleges and other establishments; CE Schemes in local areas; specialist advice in welfare rights, legal aid and accommodation; drug and alcohol-abuse treatment; and mental health support and treatment. There may be a need to establish other links, for confidential external counselling for other difficult or stressful problems (e.g. marital problems, experience of sexual abuse). Bridge already has an excellent reputation for establishing and maintaining links with external agencies providing assistance for participants, but these will need to be constantly updated and developed.

Growing Bridge: future staff and building needs

I consider that there is the potential to ‘grow’ Bridge in the next three or four years. A business plan setting out short and long term plans would be needed to identify stages of development, finances, essential negotiations, and agreements. It should be possible to increase the number of offenders who attend Bridge, trebling or quadrupling the current levels of completions to over sixty or more

One critical aspect of growing would be the need for additional staff, and there are a number of different ways in which they could be obtained. These could include:

- One or two extra probation officers could be assigned, based on a significant increase in the number of offenders supervised and the resulting case management demand.
- One post exists for an employment and training specialist, to work alongside the existing education specialist, and this post could be filled quickly.
- If the CES gained additional places it would require at least one or two posts, in addition to the existing ones and a larger team would have to be supervised by the existing education specialist and by the newly appointed employment and training worker.
- Bridge could explore the possibility of employing a practitioner with qualifications in educational or clinical psychology, or at minimum a certified psychologist. Such a person would undertake psychometric and other clinical assessments, contribute to group modules, and provide specialist individual training. Such a post could be part-time and be filled via a secondment from a college or education authority.

- Another possibility would be to employ a specialist group worker, with knowledge and experience in cognitive and/or activity groups. This could also be done on a part time basis.

Another additional type of staff which would enhance the staff team would be secondments to provide a wider range of expertise and skills. In the short term Bridge could seek to negotiate having; a part-time health professional (e.g. a community or psychiatric nurse); and a part-time drug and alcohol specialist. In the longer term Bridge could explore the possibility of secondments from other criminal justice services, including: a part-time secondment of a police officer from the Garda Siochana; and the secondment of a prison officer from a local prison.

If Bridge develops along the lines suggested, consideration will have to be given at an early stage to the suitability of the existing building, and the requirements of a new location. A longer-term plan could be the provision of a self-contained women's centre (with a crèche facility), with facilities for women who need specialist assistance in a safe, women-only location, and not necessarily only for offenders.

Administrative staff and Bridge management

If Bridge grows it will also need additional support and administrative staff. In addition it would be essential to re-examine the role and responsibilities of the manager. It would be important to recognise that additional supervision and support would be needed for a larger and more varied professional staff group and that planning and management would become more complex, as would liaison with agencies seconding staff and providing funding. One way of achieving this could be to create a new post of Bridge director with overall responsibility, supported by an operational or centre manager, responsible for the day to day operation and staff supervision.

Evaluation and approaches undertaking research on Bridge

One important element of the original mission statement for Bridge was its commitment to evaluation and on-going research. I would recommend that Bridge retains this aspect of its original mission statement and develops new initiatives to achieve it. Bridge could explore the funding of a full or part-time researcher, who could be undertaking a higher degree at a local university and could undertake research on aspects of the methods used in Bridge and the different outcomes achieved with different types of persistent offender. Bridge could explore examine the possibility of allowing Bridge staff to undertake research on their own work, via registration for part-time higher degrees, which would encourage practitioner research of the kind developed in Scotland by Professor Gill McIvor and make Bridge an attractive employment location for practitioners from different disciplines. Bridge could also make bids with research partners to government, research councils and charitable foundations for specific funding to undertake research on the approach Bridge takes to offender rehabilitation. Bridge also needs to maintain and develop its own internal data gathering on the offenders, its interventions and its achievements. The current database does not appear relevant to Bridge practitioners. If an assessment of the kind proposed is implemented, this would provide an impetus to use the database more, and generate more reliable and accurate information. A new Probation and Welfare Service case management information system could be integrated with the Bridge system, alongside the routine use of LSI-R assessments on all offenders. Such developments focused on evaluation and research would enable Bridge in the future to provide increased evidence of its value in the supervision of persistent offenders.

Financial arrangements and future governance of Bridge

The current financial arrangements will need to be reviewed if there are changes in its governance and objectives. Assignment arrangements will need to be maintained and if possible extended, and comprehensive mechanism for drawing types of funding from different sources will be required. In the future it may be desirable to negotiate with probation and prisons financial agreements based on agreed numbers of referrals of offenders to Bridge. It is also important that Bridge establishes a wider range of fund raising activities, and appeals to private and charitable sources, to enable Bridge to achieve greater independence, and to fund initiatives that the statutory sector would be unable to support. Therefore a new Bridge Director role would have a key responsibility in fundraising, as well as negotiating financial arrangements with key stakeholder agencies.

If Bridge is to grow, it will be essential to modernise its governance. It should establish a clear role for trustees and to retain strong and co-operative working relationships with its stakeholders, particularly those that assign staff to Bridge. Clear and practicable mechanisms for consultation, sharing objectives and performance monitoring (of Bridge and of the stakeholders) will be needed.

Conclusion

It is difficult to predict future legislative changes in the sentencing of offenders in the Irish Republic, and in the law relating to early conditional release from custody, and indeed whether reorganisation of criminal justice services might occur. It is clear that the majority of other EEC countries are becoming increasingly more punitive and control-oriented. However international evidence shows that with persistent offenders, developing their self-awareness, changing attitudes to victims, and above all enabling them to make positive changes in their lives are the factors that are most associated with reduced offending and improved functioning. These are the ideals which prompted the foundation of Bridge in 1991, and still remain as important and relevant in 2005. Bridge is well-placed to offer provision comparable with the best that is available anywhere in the world and its mission statement should be adjusted to properly reflect its ambitions. It has the experience and the potential to deliver an improved form of intensive supervision and assistance for persistent offenders, who are difficult to supervise in conventional probation practice, and who have previously failed to respond to imprisonment. It can provide real and cost-effective interventions which judges, prison and probation staff, and other key agencies recognise are needed for this type of offender. It can also provide a location in which developments in effective work with offenders can be tested and evaluated, and their efficacy publicised. However Bridge needs to re-engineer itself, and expand its multi-modal programme to cater for a larger number of offenders. Bridge is truly a step in the right direction, not only for the offenders involved, but also for the criminal justice system and most of all for the long term safety of all people in Dublin.