



effective practice

Where we see our standards delivered well, in practice.



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

AN HM INSPECTORATE OF PROBATION EFFECTIVE PRACTICE GUIDE



Developing operational structures and the Senior Probation Officer role

Insights from a thematic inspection of the role of the senior probation officer and management oversight in sentence management and court teams

January 2024

Acknowledgements

This guide is based on information sourced while undertaking *A thematic inspection of the role of the senior probation officer and management oversight in sentence management and court teams*. The inspection was led by HM Inspector David Miners, supported by a team of inspectors and operations, research, communications and corporate staff. The manager responsible for this inspection programme is Helen Davies.

In collaboration with Helen Amor, effective practice lead, David Miners has identified some of the key themes linked to effective practice in the work of senior probation officers. We have presented these to support the continuous development of middle managers and practitioners.

We would like to thank all those who participated in any way in this inspection. Without their help and cooperation, the inspection and effective practice guide would not have been possible.

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ISBN: 978-1-915468-86-4

This publication is available for download at:

www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation

Published by:

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation
1st Floor Civil Justice Centre
1 Bridge Street West
Manchester
M3 3FX

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Introduction

About this guide

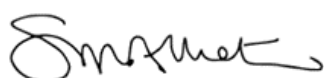
HM Inspectorate of Probation has a duty to identify and disseminate effective practice.¹

We assure the quality of youth offending and probation provision, and test its effectiveness. Critically, we make recommendations designed to highlight and disseminate best practice, challenge poor performance and encourage providers to improve.

Here we consider the operational structures and roles required to provide effective management oversight and to support the work of senior probation officers.

I am grateful to all the areas that participated in this thematic inspection, and for their additional help in producing this effective practice guide. We publish these guides to complement our reports and the standards against which we inspect youth offending and probation.

I hope this guide will be of interest to everyone working in probation and prison services and seeking to improve practice. We welcome feedback on this and our other guides, to ensure that they are as useful as possible to future readers.



Sue McAllister

Interim HM Chief Inspector of Probation



Finding your way

Using the links within the Contents page you can easily navigate to sections of interest. We have also used different approaches to appeal to different readers.



Tools for practitioners



Recorded interviews



Reflection questions



Useful links



Denotes a task to undertake, alone or within a group

Contact us



We would love to hear what you think of this guide. Please find current contact details via the [HM Inspectorate of Probation Effective Practice page](#).

¹ **For adult services** – Section 7 of the *Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000*, as amended by the *Offender Management Act 2007*, section 12(3)(a). **For youth services** – inspection and reporting on youth offending teams is established under section 39 of the *Crime and Disorder Act 1998*.

Background

The Probation Service manages a complex and challenging caseload. Individuals managed by the Probation Service are either sentenced to community orders by the courts or released on licence as part of their prison sentence. Many have complex needs and challenging histories. Their compliance and cooperation with supervision arrangements cannot be assumed, and they may be unmotivated to accept help to address their problems. Some may actively misdirect, attempt to intimidate, or manipulate their probation practitioner. The independent serious case reviews of Joseph McCann (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2020), Damien Bendall (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2023), and Jordan McSweeney (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2023) evidence these challenges. It is therefore vital that the teams delivering these key services in courts and the community are supported and that their work is overseen effectively.

The role of the senior probation officer (SPO) is central to effective management oversight. There have long been concerns about the workload of SPOs and the consequent impact on the effectiveness of management oversight. These concerns have been highlighted in our core inspection programme 2021–2023 and in independent serious case reviews. Our thematic inspection provided an opportunity to take a closer look at the topic.

Our standards: what we looked for and our expectations

For our thematic review, we inspected against the areas listed below. These were drawn from our core inspection programme and tailored to the topic: the role of the SPO and management oversight in sentence management and court teams.



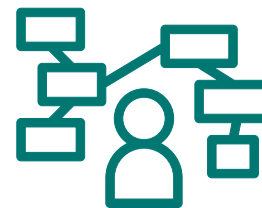
The questions that the inspection set out to answer were as follows:

- Do the **policies, strategy, and arrangements for management oversight** enable the delivery of an effective service?
- Do the **operational structure and arrangements for management oversight** enable the delivery of an effective service?
- Does the **oversight of work** support high-quality delivery and professional development?
- Do the **skills of managers** support the provision of effective management oversight?
- Does **management oversight** enable the effective management of the risk of serious harm?
- Do the **policies and arrangements for management oversight** help drive improvements in multi-agency working?



You can read a more detailed analysis of the core inspection data in [**A thematic inspection of the role of the senior probation officer and management oversight in sentence management and court teams.**](#)

Management oversight



Management oversight is a term used in the probation service to encompass the oversight of casework, staff wellbeing and countersigning (refer to [Annexe one](#)). During the inspection, and for the purposes of this guide, management oversight is defined as follows:

"... the formal process by which a manager, most often an SPO, assures themselves that operational delivery is undertaken consistently and to the required standard. This is in line with the definition used by His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). Management oversight may include formal and informal meetings between the SPO and the probation practitioner (PP). Similarly, countersigning activities, such as those for the offender assessment system (OASys), are part of the management oversight framework."

Key principles of management oversight

We have set out three key levels for managing cases effectively.² This guidance does not dictate how management oversight should be delivered in these three levels, but it does emphasise our expectation that it should take into account the unique demands of an individual case, and the probation practitioner's skills, knowledge and experience.

Level 1 – quality assurance of processes

There should be structures and processes in place to ensure routine quality assurance. These should enable an audit-type exercise to be completed on most or all cases. The audit should review the quality of practice and whether processes have been followed in line with national standards, contractual requirements or local and national policies.

Level 2 – management oversight through supervision

Management oversight through regular one-to-one meetings should include reflection on, scrutiny and evaluation of the individual's work. The manager should assess the strengths and weaknesses of the practice and interventions being carried out with the individual being supervised. In all cases, but particularly those where there is a raised risk of harm and concerns about safety and wellbeing, supervision should be regular, purposeful and clearly recorded and should contribute to the management of the case.

Managers should have sufficient knowledge about risk of harm and safeguarding. They should understand the assessment, planning and management processes, and should be able to recognise indicators of raised risk of harm and identify both good and poor practice. Those providing supervision should be trained in supervision skills and have current knowledge of the legislation, policy and research relevant to probation practice.

The probation practitioner should also know when to bring matters to the attention of their line manager.

² HM Inspectorate of Probation (September 2022). *key principles for the effective management of cases*.

Level 3 – management oversight of immediate risk

Management oversight applies where there is an immediate risk of harm or immediate safeguarding issues. Managers should be able to respond when these arise, and support their staff to make defensible decisions and prioritise the cases where there is the most immediate risk of harm and safeguarding concerns. This ensures that risk management becomes a shared organisational responsibility. Managers should ensure that there are systems in place for them to identify cases where there is a raised risk of harm and concerns relating to safeguarding. These systems should include ensuring that all staff understand their responsibility to raise these cases with their manager.

Examples of helpful systems include: monitoring police arrests, charges and call-outs (for example, for domestic abuse), monitoring any further appearances in court for new offences, monitoring cases where the initial screening has identified indicators of raised risk of harm or safeguarding concerns, and identifying cases where the classification of risk of harm would, under current guidance, require formal management involvement.

This guide shares examples of effective practice drawn from evidence gathered during fieldwork for this thematic inspection in the North East, Kent, Surrey and Sussex, London, Wales and West Midlands.



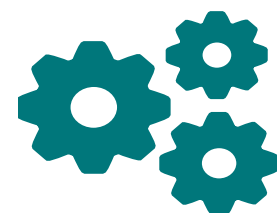
HM Inspectorate of Probation defines effective practice as:

“Where we see our standards delivered well in practice, with our standards being based on established models and frameworks, and grounded in evidence, learning and experience.”

The guide is aimed at a range of audiences; it is intended to support practitioners, middle managers and strategic leaders. It highlights effective practice identified in two areas:

1. sentence management and how the operational structure and culture enable managers to be proactive in overseeing cases
2. effective induction and training arrangements for newly promoted SPOs.

Operational delivery in sentence management



Effective operational delivery depends on an operational structure that meets the demands of the probation caseload and enables managers to be consistent in their oversight of cases. The thematic inspection identified a reactive working culture in many areas, which undermined management oversight and contributed to pressurised consultation and decision-making. Factors such as staff vacancies and the fear of serious further offences contributed to this culture, but the operational structure also played a significant role.

The balance between professional autonomy and the need for case consultation in the probation service is not straightforward. Bespoke decision-making is frequently necessary, for example, on cases with a similar profile. An individual may seem stable and compliant,

but this does not automatically mean their case should not be the subject of management oversight.

In the Academic Insights paper *Bias and error in risk assessments and management*, Hazel Kemshall (2021) acknowledges how practitioners are often required to make decisions with incomplete information under challenging circumstances. She outlined how personal bias and sources of error can undermine decision-making and highlighted the pressures on probation practitioners:

"Practitioners are required to make decisions 'under conditions of uncertainty' (Webb, 2002), often in less than optimal circumstances and with less than full information. Cases are often also complex, multi-faceted, and challenging."

Within the paper she covers four core areas for practitioners and organisations involved in risk management to consider:

1. personal bias and sources of error
2. how to combat bias and error, and how to improve decision making
3. selecting risk assessment tools, and
4. ensuring that organisational processes and responses to risk management are safe



[You can access the Academic Insights paper, *Bias and error in risk assessments and management*, here.](#)

Problem-solving, decision-making and task management become harder the more demands we have on us. If we have high workloads, feel stress or are working in a complex environment, those thinking errors are more likely to occur.

Since 2022, the probation service in Wales has developed a 'learning organisation' approach in a bid to transform the operational culture and to improve service delivery. There are five strands to the approach: the development of a shared mental model; culture enquiry; cultural narrative; leadership and team development; and human factors tools/approaches. Crucially, the development of the approach has involved the investment of the whole management group and extensive engagement with staff.

This 'cultural reset' and implementation of the model have been a joint initiative with the Probation Culture and Change team in collaboration with Effective Practice Service Improvement Group (EPSIG).



This HMPPS insights event features Dr Sanjay Bhasin, who talks about how HMPPS can become a learning organisation: **[Video \(YouTube, 58:51\): The Benefits of HMPPS Becoming a Learning Organisation \(HMPPS Insights\)](#)**

HMPPS human factors model development

The HMPPS human factors model (see [Annexe two](#)) acknowledges that we will all make mistakes and that we must learn from these if we are to reduce the harm from further errors. One of the ways organisations become highly reliable is by changing their approach to reporting errors. This means accepting that mistakes will happen and encouraging the reporting of mistakes through acceptance and learning from those mistakes. We equally

need to understand why things go right most of the time so that we build a true picture of the work as done.

The Probation Culture and Change team, in collaboration with EPSIG, identified the following factors as relevant to probation delivery:

- Developing a **shared mental model** where colleagues understand their own role, responsibilities, and tasks alongside those of others.
- Being aware of **unconscious bias** in how we receive information/make decisions.
- Making arrangements to **overcome what gets in the way** of effective communication and decision-making.
- **Learning from errors and failures** to improve the system and our management of risk, in its widest context.
- Developing processes and products to **enable effective communication** and improve our **outcomes**.
- **Developing psychological safety** to promote error wisdom.

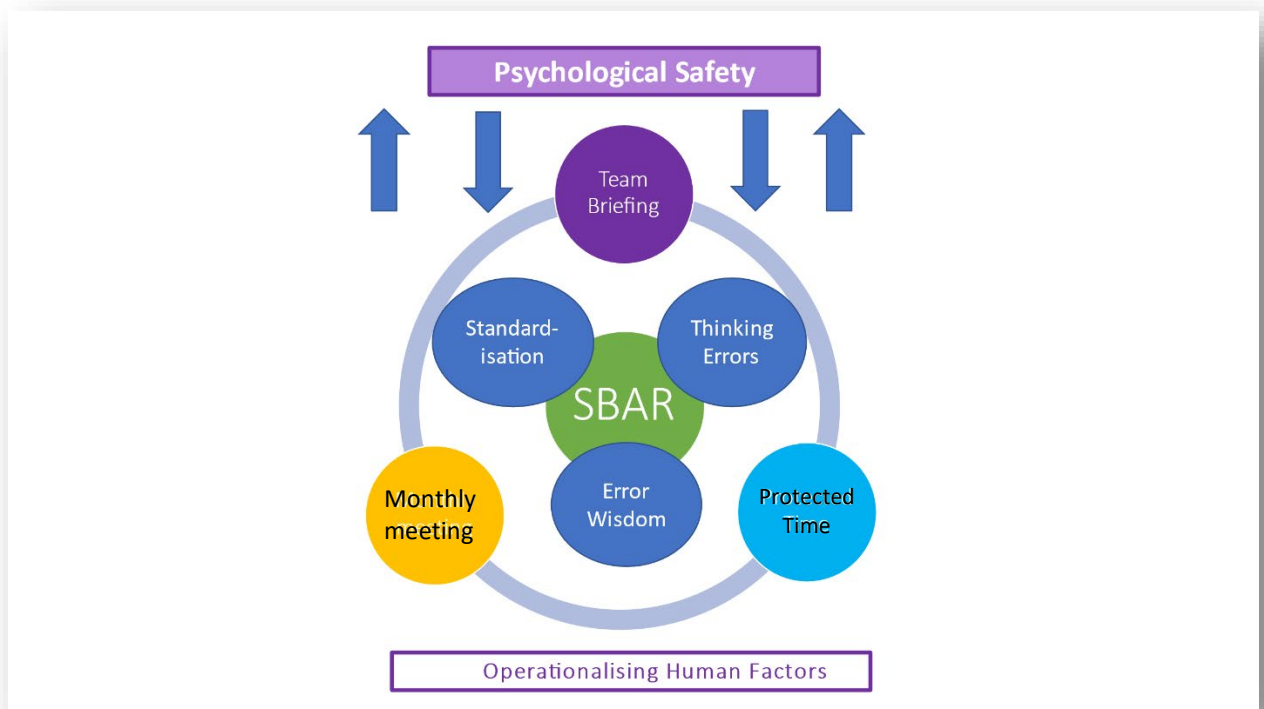


Figure 1. HMPPS human factors model developed by the Probation Culture and Change team

The **human factors methodology** is represented in **Figure 1** by the three dark blue ovals. Standardisation is used to overcome thinking errors and to develop error wisdom.

Examples of **thinking errors** can be:

- **Search satisfaction** – once the first plausible answer has been found we stop looking.
- **Feedback bias** – making decisions based on the information available, and not considering whether information is missing/should be challenged.

Both of the above thinking errors are commonly referred to as a lack of professional curiosity.

Professional curiosity is defined by HMPPS as follows:

“being professionally curious is a process of always questioning and seeking verification for the information you are given rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value” (HMPPS, 2020).³



HM Inspectorate of Probation published two effective practice guides on professional curiosity in October 2022, which can be found below and can be used by professionals as toolkits:

[Effective practice guide: Practitioner – professional curiosity insights guide](#)

[Effective practice guide: Middle managers – professional curiosity insights guide](#)

Error wisdom is defined by Dr Paul Greig as:

“the ability to foresee and avert harms arising from errors. This skill is developed in a number of ways, through training, experience, adherence to well-designed procedures, and by critical analysis of one’s own and others failures”.⁴

Once ‘thinking errors’ and ‘error wisdom’ are understood, then processes can be designed to accommodate them and learn and improve when things go wrong. Measures can be put in place to capture risks before they escalate, and root causes can be better understood to enable improvement activity to be more successful.

Figure 1 also demonstrates how the human factors model is operationalised in practice:

- **Psychological safety** is developed through adopting the approaches. For example, the specific way in which team briefings are managed, and how behaviours are role modelled and staff are encouraged to fully engage, encourages the development of psychological safety. The safer staff feel over time the more they will share and the greater the impact.
- **Situation, Behaviour, Assessment, Recommendation (SBAR)**: the structured communication tool is how communication occurs within the applications, encouraging professional autonomy.
- The *applications (team briefing, protected time and monthly meeting)* link together and as a whole seek to maximise impact.

For sentence management teams in Wales, this has resulted in a new operational structure based on daily morning check-in meetings; a daily open hour when SPOs are available; monthly meetings; and the SBAR approach to discussions and decision-making.

³ HMPPS (2020). *Professional curiosity*. Internal HMPPS report: unpublished. Quoted in R Webster (2022). *Putting professional curiosity into practice*. HM Inspectorate of Probation.

⁴ Greig, P. (2016). *Perceptual Error in Medical Practice*. Nuffield Department of Clinical Neurosciences, University of Oxford.

The HMPPS Evidence Based Practice Team are evaluating the approach⁵ in order to:

- understand how it can support existing organisational strategy
- determine what enables successful implementation within an HMPPS context
- understand the effectiveness of protected time and monthly meetings.

Effective practice example:

The human factors approach to sentence management in North Wales

In the probation service in Wales, senior leaders have implemented a 'learning organisation' approach in a bid to transform the operational culture and improve service delivery. This has been supported by the EPSIG human factors project team and has involved extensive engagement with staff. The development of the model has required a comprehensive assessment of organisational culture and the investment of the whole management group. One senior manager stated that:

"You can't drop the method out of the sky and hope that it works."

As a first step, a comprehensive evaluation of the organisation's work culture was undertaken, which included an analysis of the culture in the individual probation delivery units (PDUs), including North Wales. The evaluation provided an overall categorisation of the maturity of the organisation and highlighted potential areas for improvement. The matrix used for this evaluation has 10 dimensions and 91 questions (see Figure 2 below).



Figure 2. Cultural matrix used to implement the learning organisation approach

⁵ The evaluation takes the form of a hypothesis, based on a theory of change underpinned by a logic model, as it is not possible to carry out a formal impact assessment of the approach. The evaluation is expected to identify early indications of the perceived impact on performance, communication and team working, safety and culture and behavioural change.

The changes to the operational structure and processes in North Wales have been implemented in the following ways:

Daily checklist team briefing

This is held at the start of the working day. It is chaired by a practitioner and attended by all team members, including the SPO. The set agenda is agreed following consultation with the team members and is routinely reviewed. The agenda covers areas such as individual workloads, potential risk points, staff absences and cases where there are concerns or where it is anticipated that a decision may be required during the working day. Wellbeing and successes also feature in the daily checklist meetings.

This is not designed to be a long meeting (15 minutes maximum). The structure and agenda promote a team approach to problem-solving, for example reallocating work when staff are absent or responding to workload pressures. It also enables the SPO to provide immediate guidance and, where appropriate, escalate actions.

Daily protected time

Daily protected time (or 'open hour' as it is known in North Wales) is a set daily hour when SPOs are available for consultation with their staff teams. This does not have to be about cases, although these are normally the focus of discussions. SPOs expected to be inundated with requests for consultation when the structure was introduced, but this has not transpired. SPOs reported that the arrangements have helped to address the reactive work culture and allowed for more considered decision-making. It was highlighted to us that these arrangements enable SPOs to develop the confidence and professional autonomy of the probation practitioners.

SBAR (Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation)

The use of a structured communication tool to facilitate consultation on cases replicates the processes in other industries that use the human factors approach, such as aviation. The purpose of the SBAR structure is to ensure that essential information is shared and understood. The structure also prevents information overload and ensures the focus is on the issues salient to risk. The SBAR can be communicated either verbally or by email to the SPO before a discussion.

Monthly meeting

Monthly team meetings are held with all team members. They include a focus on human factors to enable and embed the model and principles. It is critical that leaders model a culture of learning where it is safe to admit when something goes wrong, and this is the intention of the monthly meeting. Talking about mistakes and learning helps to create psychological safety. It also enables the team to develop 'error wisdom', which supports the development of new systems, processes and learning. The monthly meeting also provides the means to communicate how teams are responding to escalations from team briefings. It ensures that there is a two-way flow of communication so that teams understand the response of the business to the issues that affect it. Consultation with staff is central to the human factors approach.

Probation practitioners and PQiPs made the following comments about the impact of the changes to the operational structure:

Daily checklist team briefings

"brings in the human aspect of work, we are more aware of each other. It felt like everything was just about targets before..."

"the morning check-ins are a safe circle, no one sits down...makes it more personal"

SBAR (Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation)

"keeps information in order and organises thoughts..."

"time to breathe and think...what do I really want to say? Putting it down on paper you realise you don't really need a manager for this"

Protected time

"it was difficult to find time with a manager before open hours were brought in"

"I feel safe talking to any manager operating open hour..."

The human factors approach has become integral to daily operations within the PDU and is now in place across all departments, and in both operational and non-operational work. The model remains in the adoption phase, supported by EPSIG and the Probation Culture and Change Team. Early learning suggests that the model:

- makes conversations more **focused**
- plays a key role in **managing business risk**, as it increases the **reporting of risks and near-misses**
- helps staff to identify **concerns about practice**
- **has a positive impact on SPOs' time**, as they use protected time to have focused discussions
- **empowers staff** to make decisions and **focus on solutions**
- provides a good way for unpaid work and sentence management staff to **share information on risk-related behaviour**.



We spoke to Siobhan McKeaveney and Elizabeth Swinden, who are both SPOs in the North Wales Probation Delivery Unit to find out more about the human factors model, how it was introduced in their teams and how it has been embedded:

[Video \(YouTube, 19:58\): Effective Practice: The human factors approach to sentence management in North Wales \(HM Inspectorate of Probation\)](#)

Our inspection found that the new approach helped practitioners to become more confident and gave them greater professional autonomy. By anticipating potential crises and the necessity for daily review, the revised structure reduced anxiety and enabled more considered decision-making.

Factors critical to success:

How do regions implement the human factors model?

- **Reset the organisation's culture** before introducing the approach – regions should consult with the Probation Culture and Change Team to ascertain their readiness and ensure they are in the best position to achieve good outcomes.
- **Invest time** and commitment; for example, leaders should:
 - 1) commit to enabling staff to use applications and tools, alongside managing operational pressures and unblocking barriers
 - 2) launch the approach with joint briefings from senior and middle leaders, to provide clear messaging and a collaborative approach, and to set expectations
 - 3) demonstrate 'error wisdom'
 - 4) allow staff sufficient time to gain a reasonable understanding of the scientific basis of the approach.
- **Ensure leaders maintain a regular presence at briefings** (checklist and monthly), to support identified escalation routes and provide feedback
- **Provide positive messaging:** leaders should endorse and model the approach; ensure that the tools and approaches are adopted at every level; support 'error wisdom'; and slow down communication.
- **Design the approach properly, in consultation with the people who do the job and who are experts.** Models need to be adapted to regions and will be co-created with the team and senior and middle leaders.
- **Build social capital:** invest in relationships, and make use of colleagues with operational knowledge and experience of applying the human factors approach to support implementation.



For further information and guidance related to the human factors model, please email crosscutting.epsig@justice.gov.uk. Communications to this functional mailbox will be picked up by the Probation Culture and Change team and EPSIG.



Reflection questions

Thinking about your practice as a leader/senior or middle manager working within your region:

- How can you develop a work culture that enables more considered decision-making?
- How do you develop professional autonomy and decision-making?
- How do you prioritise cases?

The senior probation officer role



The pressures and responsibilities of the SPO role have been recognised in both internal reviews and external reports.⁶ Our thematic inspection report includes recommendations to address these concerns. We also identified some good practice and effective arrangements.

Key take-aways

Delivery of effective SPO management oversight requires:



an operational management structure that **meets the complex challenges** of the probation caseload and **prioritises** public protection



an **operational structure** that enables SPOs to prioritise management oversight and ensures that responsibility for HR, performance, administration and facilities management is shared effectively



a national comprehensive **induction** and **learning** and **development** offer to support SPOs



the **QDO role** **aligned** to operational delivery

In this section, we share examples that demonstrate some of these key take-aways and other learning points to support the role of the SPO.

Induction and professional development

Effective practice example: new manager induction and training and the Fundamentals First Programme in Kent, Surrey and Sussex

Kent, Surrey and Sussex have developed a regional package for new managers which runs over six sessions.

The six sessions cover the following key areas:

1. effective leadership
2. HR processes and policies
3. equality and diversity
4. reflective supervision
5. public protection – responsibilities as a manager
6. quality and performance – management information.

⁶ HM Prison and Probation Service (2022). *Managerial Role Review*. HM Inspectorate of Probation (2021). *Annual Report 2021*.

The induction package is supported by the following offer:

- All new managers are advised to apply for the First Line Managers programme, which is delivered by talent and capability teams; however, there is waiting list.
- Weekly human resources surgeries are held to discuss attendance management and performance.
- Coaching is available for managers who need additional support.
- Specific sessions for managers are held as part of the Fundamentals First Programme, which is mandatory for all staff up to SPO grade.

SPOs who have completed the induction were positive about its content and delivery. They viewed the areas covered as relevant and the workshops provided a supportive environment to learn and develop as a new SPO.

The Fundamentals First Programme

The Fundamentals First Programme started in September 2022, in response to HM Inspectorate of Probation's core programme findings and in recognition of the need to go back to basics. The programme is delivered over a 12 to 18-month period by a quality development officer (QDO), the HMPPS Public Protection Group and relevant guest speakers. It aims to upskill practitioners and managers across sentence management and in specialist roles such as courts and interventions.

Specific SPO-related themes include:

- core principles of case management oversight through the lens of Regional Case Audit Tools (R-CAT)⁷
- touch points model and management oversight
- OASys guidance changes and countersigning.

While it is too early to assess whether the programme has had a measurable impact on the quality of sentence delivery, SPOs feel the programme is applicable to practice and were positive about the content and delivery.

"There is no leader in KSS that has not had a significant amount of additional input."



We spoke to David Bailey, SPO KSS Quality Development Team, who delivers the Fundamentals First Programme. [**Video \(YouTube, 08:50\): Effective Practice - The Fundamental First Programme, Kent, Surrey and Sussex \(HM Inspectorate of Probation\)**](#)

⁷ RCAT is a Tier 1 assurance tool, undertaken by regions to assure quality at or nearest the point of delivery. It aims to facilitate localised audit and improvement work and to provide a degree of consistency across regions. As a national audit tool, it reduces the need for locally-developed tools.



You can find out more about [KSS Fundamentals First Programme](#) in the attached overview document.

Operational delivery structure

Effective practice example: Quality Development Officers (QDOs) managed in PDUs, Wales

The effective practice strategy in Wales builds on the National Core Quality Management Framework (CQMF). It supports regional quality management activity at, or nearest to, the point of service delivery. It recognises the critical importance of the QDO role in improving practice:

"QDOs have a critical role in the delivery of our effective practice strategy by supporting Probation Service Wales in developing practitioners and monitoring the quality of services delivered. QDOs have also proved to be an effective method of communication, ensuring important messages and changes in practice are cascaded to staff." ⁸

QDOs are line managed within the PDUs, which ensures that they remain close to operational work and can make a direct contribution to improving practice. While they are accountable to the head of the PDU, their tasks and responsibilities are coordinated through the regional quality and effective practice (QEP) manager to make sure there is a consistent approach. The QEP manager has weekly check-ins with QDOs, providing a steer on the effective practice themes to be cascaded within operational teams. An 'effective practice calendar' is populated with evidence-based research. This includes HM Inspectorate of Probation reports, serious further offence reviews, complaints, and Offender Assurance Service Group (OASG) findings. National expectations and local needs are balanced to ensure that QDOs are available for individuals in the teams as well as for other tasks, such as delivering workshops.

The model in Wales involved the phased appointment of practitioners from within the PDUs, either as full-time QDOs or as a split role with case management. The QDOs provide quality assurance activities including workshops, briefings, case discussions and peer learning. They then review the impact of these activities on operational practice.

⁸ Draft Probation Service Wales, Quality Assurance Framework v4. 2023–2025.

During the inspection, heads of PDU and SPOs were positive about the contribution of QDOs where they were able to engage directly with them to support the work of their teams.

"...[QDOs] are based in our PDUs and are responding to themes and areas of concern and quality improvement plans designed by SPOs for their teams, which are based on regional plans..."

"QDOs in offices are really helpful in terms of the link as a practitioner contact. They have more time and space to have quality conversations and do the quality assurance you'd expect..."

"I can go direct to the QDOs in our PDU and ask for support directly. We do RCATs as SPOs – when they bring up themes, the QDOs are receptive to me asking if they can respond to those."



Watch this discussion here to find out more about how the QDO strategy and model works in Wales. [Video \(YouTube, 21:05\): Effective Practice: Quality development officers managed in Probation Delivery Units, Wales \(HM Inspectorate of Probation\)](#)

The discussion was held between Deanne Martin, head of service, Claire Powell, quality and effective practice manager, and Nick Gale, quality development officer.



Reflection questions

As a senior leader, consider how SPOs are inducted into their role within your region:

- What support is provided to enable practitioners to transition into the role of SPO?
- How is management oversight modelled by senior managers to support new and existing SPOs?

Effective practice example: the role of the case administrator to support senior probation officers (CASPO), Caernarfon, North Wales

The lack of administrative support for SPOs has been recognised nationally, and funding has been allocated to provide case administrators to support senior probation officers (CASPOs). Seventy-five per cent of these additional posts have been filled and the CASPO role is helping SPOs manage their workload. For example, in Kent, Surrey and Sussex, the CASPO's tasks include monitoring the court training tracker, and in the North East, we heard how CASPOs provide support with judicial liaison, breach warrants and monthly productivity tracking.

In North Wales, senior leaders have given careful thought to how to support SPOs, specifically around management oversight functions.

We spoke with Eira Williams SPO in North Wales, who said that without the CASPO support her role would be:

"...extremely challenging. This allows SPOs time to focus on other tasks, such as SBARs, reflective supervision sessions and partnership working..."

CASPOs in North Wales support SPOs in a number of ways, including:



Tracking level 1 reviews, updating registrations, adding MAPPA management oversights to nDelius on behalf of the SPO, and ensuring that all level 1 information is recorded correctly.



Planning and diarising touch point meetings (TPM), ensuring that these take place, and sending reminders for TPM reviews.



Linking with victim liaison officers to make them aware of reviews that are due to take place and providing an opportunity to include the victims' views in the process.



Monitoring and tracking transfer cases in and out of the area.



Preparing for team meetings, creating the agenda, monitoring actions, recording minutes, liaising with and arranging guest speakers, sending diary invitations and booking rooms.



Responding to applications for annual leave.



Monitoring performance with specific roles such as Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) and resettlement; identifying priority prison release and specific cohorts requiring attention, monitoring of OMiC allocations, tracking the handover between the prison offender manager and community offender manager, and tracking Release on Temporary Licence paperwork.



Adding management oversight entries from supervision meetings to record actions required on cases, unpaid work cases and interface monitoring, and weekly tasking meetings.



Tracking R-CAT; generating the list of eligible cases for review to SPOs.

Paula Jennings, a business manager in North Wales, described how the CASPO has a wide-reaching impact on other roles.

"...the CASPO role also benefits the case administrators and senior administrative officers who are supporting the PPs. The CASPO supporting the SPO takes away tasks from them that they may have previously been given so they can focus on their own PP support tasks..."



We spoke with Alona Williams, CASPO, Paula Jennings, business manager, and Eira Williams, SPO in Caernarfon, who told us more about the CASPO role in their area and the specific tasks that support management oversight and SPO activity:

[Video \(YouTube, 18:30\): Effective Practice: The CASPO Role,](#)



Reflection questions

As a senior leader, consider:

- How does the operational management structure respond to the demands of the caseload, particularly in relation to public protection?
- Does the SPO span of responsibilities enable you to prioritise management oversight?

Annexe one

Management oversight practice in the probation service

The formation of the unified probation service has seen several policy initiatives in relation to management oversight. The main methods in the probation service are as follows:

The Touch Points model

The Touch Points model is designed to provide managers with a framework for management oversight activity that will assure them of the consistency of operational delivery. It does not set out how the touch point discussions between the SPO and PP should take place, but it does say that they should be recorded. The policy emphasises that the overall levels of management oversight should be responsive to the risk and complexity of a case.

Reflective practice supervision standards

SPOs are expected to undertake four reflective practice supervision sessions annually with each member of staff. One of these sessions should be a live observation and the other three should focus on an in-depth reflective review of one or two cases. The purpose of these sessions is to provide management oversight, practice improvement and professional development.

One-to-one supervision meetings

The inspection confirmed that the main mechanism for management oversight continues to be a one-to-one meetings between an SPO and probation practitioner every six weeks. The one-to-one meetings are not confined to case discussion. The templates and processes brought in by the regions also include staff wellbeing and personal development.

Informal management oversight

The caseload profile demands that PPs respond to information and events on a day-to-day basis. Changes in behaviour or levels of risk can happen at any time and in some cases require the scrutiny of more than one person.

Countersigning

SPO management responsibilities include the countersigning of specific pieces of work completed by PPs in their team. This activity focuses primarily on OASys, but also includes parole reports in sentence management and dangerousness assessments in court teams.

Annexe two

The human factors approach

The human factors approach encompasses three domains that influence our behaviour at work:

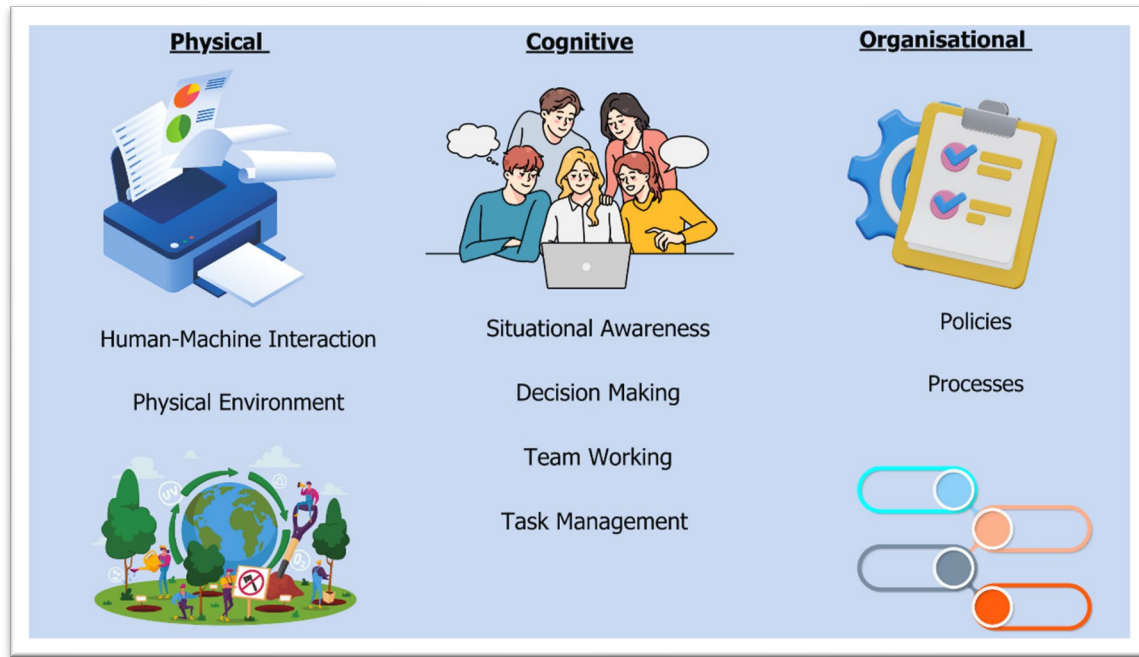


Figure 3. Human factors domains

1. **Physical** (ergonomics) – the physical interactions we have at work, and anything we touch and use, such as equipment.
2. **Cognitive** – how we gather, use and communicate information. This includes non-technical skills that develop as a result of multiple interactions with people, systems and protocols rather than specific training.
3. **Organisational** – the organisational psychology or how we interact with policies and procedures in the workplace, and the influence of the 'hidden curriculum'.

The theory of the 'hidden curriculum' is that these are the rules and procedures we learn about our workplace through observing people and social cues as team members. This influences the way we work in a team, and therefore our behaviour, which is as important as written procedures and policies. In groups, humans tend towards conformity, so in a pro-safety workplace, the hidden curriculum can exert a positive effect, but in an unhealthy culture it can lead to unsafe behaviours. Dr Paul Grieg and J. L. Darbyshire explore the hidden curriculum in more detail in the journal article [Medical educational theory in practice.](#)



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[TPM – Touchpoints Model](#) – Equip Portal

[HR – Staff Reflective Practice Supervision Standards RPSS](#) – Equip Portal

[OASys – Community OASys Countersigning Framework](#) – Equip Portal, OASys is the structure assessment tool used by probation practitioners to assess the risk and needs of people on probation.

[Core Quality Management Framework FINAL.pdf](#) – Equip Portal