



HM Inspectorate  
of Probation

**HM Inspectorate of Probation**

1st Floor, Manchester Civil Justice Centre,  
1 Bridge Street West, Manchester M3 3FX

[HMIP.Enquiries@hmiprobation.gov.uk](mailto:HMIP.Enquiries@hmiprobation.gov.uk)

[www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation](http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation)

Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice  
Minister for Prisons and Probation  
Minister for Victims and Safeguarding  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Justice  
Chief Inspectors of Criminal Justice  
HM Chief Inspector, Ofsted  
Victims Commissioner  
Chief Executive, Care Quality Commission  
Chief Inspector, Estyn  
Chief Executive, Healthcare Inspectorate Wales  
Chief Executive, Care Inspectorate Wales

29<sup>th</sup> October 2024

## **Re: Consultation on our thematic inspection and research programmes for 2025/2026**

### **1. Background**

- 1.1. Under the Police and Criminal Justice Act 2006, we are required to consult key stakeholders on our inspection frameworks and programmes. It is our practice to consult more widely, with those we inspect and associated bodies who can provide valuable insight and information as we develop our framework and programmes.
- 1.2. This consultation sets out proposals for our upcoming thematic inspection programme and research programme for 2025/2026 in sections 2 and 3. These are the proposals that we are consulting on.
- 1.3. We would very much welcome your comments on these proposals by **Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2024**.

### ***Core programmes***

- 1.4. We have completed probation inspections in two regions so far (Kent, Surrey and Sussex, and East of England), with the third region near completion. This

has included inspections of probation delivery units (PDU) in each region and regional inspections.

- 1.5. Our current youth justice service (YJS) inspection programme should be completed by January 2025. Our new inspection programme is due to start in Spring 2025 and we are currently piloting our proposals.
- 1.6. We are also aiming to start inspecting approved premises next year, from April 2025.

### ***Thematic inspections***

- 1.7. We apply a number of criteria to identify and prioritise our thematic topics as follows:
  - Has this been identified as an ongoing area of weakness/concern in our core inspections?
  - Is this a ministerial priority?
  - Are there major change programmes or major national changes being applied to the operating model that require external oversight and assurance?
- 1.8. Under our current thematics programme (2024/2025), we are completing thematic inspections of the following:

#### **Adult**

- Unpaid work
- Recruitment, training and retention

#### **Youth**

- Youth out of court disposals

### ***Research programme***

- 1.9. We are committed to reviewing, developing and promoting the evidence base for high-quality probation and youth justice services. We will add value through our research programme by: making valuable contributions to the policy and operational evidence base; ensuring that our inspection standards, frameworks, organisational positions and effective practice products are evidence based; and by providing technical advice so that our inspections are robust and impactful.
- 1.10. To help us prioritise topics for new research projects, we apply the following criteria:

#### **Current level of risk**

- Significant changes to policy, service delivery or caseloads
- Risks to public protection/ safeguarding
- Findings from inspections, research and other forms of evidence

### **Potential impact**

- Potential impact of our findings
- Ministerial and other key stakeholder interests
- Quality of current evidence
- Development of inspection standards

### **Other**

- Suited to research or inspection
- Estimated resource requirements and timescales

1.11. We are currently progressing research projects on the following topics:

- Transitional safeguarding
- Approved premises
- SFO reviews and learning culture
- Youth justice work with victims

1.12. In addition to our primary research projects, we have continued with secondary analysis of our inspection data and the publication of Academic Insights papers and reflections from research videos. See: [Academic Insights \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/academic-insights/) and [Reflections from research](#).

### ***Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI)***

1.13. We will be maintaining our contribution to the Joint Targeted Area Inspection of child protection.

1.14. The JTAI programme is led by Ofsted. Inspectors assess how local authorities, the police, health, probation and youth justice services are working together in an area to identify, support and protect vulnerable children and young people.

1.15. The JTAI theme for September 2023 to May 2024 was the multi-agency response to serious youth violence. The theme for September 2024 to May 2025 is the multi-agency response to children who are victims of domestic abuse.

1.16. JTAI reports can be viewed on the Ofsted website here: [Joint inspections of local area services - GOV.UK](#)

## 2. Thematic inspection programme – suggested topics

- 2.1. We will be looking to carry out up to four thematic inspections during 2025/2026.
- 2.2. **We would like to get your views on which topics from the below list should be included in our thematic inspection programme for 2025/2026:**

*Adult*

- a) **Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS):** CRS provision and related areas such as tendering, contract management, local autonomy, performance, and quality, are recurring themes which have emerged from our core inspections. We recently published our Research and Analysis Bulletin on the interventions landscape ([Research & Analysis Bulletin: The interventions landscape for probation services delivery, challenges and opportunities](#)), in which many probation professionals found that CRS were not sufficiently responsive to referrals or how well the individual was engaging. The accommodation offer was especially criticised, with regional leaders identifying access to stable accommodation as a significant gap in interventions provision.
- b) **Local strategic partnerships:** Probation leaders attend a range of local boards e.g. violence against women and girls boards, local safeguarding partnership, community safety, combatting drugs partnerships, reducing reoffending boards, and serious violence duty boards. A thematic into this area would involve taking a closer look at the benefits and impact of local strategic partnerships, exploring how probation leadership and clear accountability contribute to successful outcomes. Through our core inspections we have seen instances of strong partnership arrangements. However, we have also found examples of ineffective partnership working between probation, police and social workers, leading to the breakdown of strategic relationships regarding domestic abuse and child safeguarding.
- c) **Online sexual offending:** In recent years, the number of individuals sentenced for online sexual offences has increased significantly, and many of these individuals are managed within the community. This topic would involve inspecting Probation Service work with this cohort. We previously conducted a thematic review into sexual offending in 2019, however, online sexual offending was excluded from that thematic.
- d) **Rehabilitative Activity Requirements (RAR):** We last inspected this area in 2017 - [The Implementation and Delivery of Rehabilitation Activity Requirements](#). Here we found that there was a lack of sufficient progress in delivering planned RAR activities and in achieving intended outcomes, which was caused by insufficient attention to effective offender management – this had the potential to undermine the confidence of sentencers. A future

thematic inspection into RARs would involve specifically looking at the work delivered, available resources and sentencer confidence in RARs.

- e) **Safeguarding vulnerable adults known to the Probation Service:** The way in which vulnerabilities, such as substance misuse, age, and mental/physical health, are addressed has been identified as an area of development for the Probation Service at a strategic and service delivery level. Whilst it is the role of the Probation Service to protect the public, it also has an important role in ensuring that people who are managed within its services are kept safe.

#### *Youth*

- f) **Youth justice services strategic arrangements:** We have seen a range of issues around YJS strategic arrangements. The span of control of service managers has increased significantly since being absorbed into children's services. Resource constraints are affecting partner agencies contributions at a strategic and operational level, and these gaps undermine the multi-agency approach. The Probation Service is not always meeting its statutory obligation to second staff to YJSs, and as experienced YJS managers move on, there is a risk of youth justice being lost in wider children's services. A thematic inspection into this area would provide an opportunity to look in depth at the strategic landscape, delivery models, enablers, and barriers.
- g) **Child First and trauma informed practice:** Increasingly, YJSs describe their work using the terms of 'Child First' and 'trauma informed'. A thematic inspection into this area would explore what this means to YJSs in practice and how well it's being delivered.
- h) **Children's participation and engagement:** Child participation, collaboration and engagement continues to be a priority for many YJSs, with most identifying this as a priority in their plans and service/ local authority principles and values. Our Inspectorate is currently working on a participation strategy, which will include children's participation for our new YJS inspection programme (2025). A thematic inspection into this area would assist in feeding into reviewing this work and also into the gathering of effective practice evidence. We could focus on looking at how children are engaged and the way this drives service delivery and improvement.

#### ***Consultation questions – thematic inspections***

We are seeking your views on which of the topics under 2.2. should be prioritised for our thematic inspection programme for 2025/2026. We are also open to receiving additional suggestions on thematic topics from respondents, to be considered. Where additional suggestions are proposed, please outline the following in support of your proposals:

- What is the compelling evidence to suggest your proposal needs to be covered as a thematic inspection in this next financial year?
- If you offer more than one proposal what priority order do your suggestions take and why?
- Which project(s) described above would you replace with your proposal(s) and why?

***Q1: Do you have any preferred thematic inspection topics from our list set out under 2.2. for 2025/2026?***

***Q2: Do you have any additional proposals for thematic inspection topics for 2025/2026?***

### 3. Research programme – suggested topics

3.1. We are looking to commission one new research project for 2025/2026.

3.2. **We would like to get your views on which of the below topics should be prioritised for 2025/2026:**

**a) Youth justice interventions landscape:** Research in this area would seek to increase understanding of the current youth justice interventions landscape, with a focus on what is working well and what is not working well, and the key enablers and barriers to the delivery of a sufficiently comprehensive range of high-quality interventions. This project would involve liaising further with the Youth Justice Board and the Youth Endowment Fund. We have recently published research on the probation interventions landscape: [The interventions landscape for probation services: delivery, challenges, and opportunities.](#)

**b) Probation work with the courts (with a focus on judicial views):** Probation practitioners in court consider the objectives of public protection and rehabilitation and aim to advise on safe sentencing options which enable the court to set the best possible conditions for a successful rehabilitative journey. We have continued to find deficits in court work across the PDUs we have inspected, and we recently published a report further examining the quality of pre-sentence advice: [The quality of pre-sentence information and advice provided to courts – 2022 to 2023 inspections.](#) New research in this area could focus upon judicial/sentencer views, encompassing broader views about probation and sentencer confidence in its work. The project could also be expanded to obtain sentencer views on both probation and youth justice services. Sentencer confidence in the delivery of probation and youth justice services is likely to be a key driver in sentencing behaviour.

**c) Partnership working in the Probation Service:** Cooperation, collaboration and co-production with a range of other agencies is vital, with all providers working together in partnership through a whole-system approach. Research in this area could seek examples of effective practice, incorporating the wider literature and latest developments in relation to localism and place-based partnership working, and potential learning from other sectors including youth justice. Areas of focus could be partnership working in relation to domestic abuse, safeguarding, or intensive community programmes. We would ensure that research in this area complemented any new thematic inspection on local strategic partnerships (see para 2.2).

3.3. Alongside our primary research projects, we will continue to publish Academic Insights papers, update our evidence webpages, and undertake secondary analysis of our inspection data. With regard to the latter, we will be focusing upon analysis of the youth inspection data once the current programme has ended, considering YJS groupings/typologies, critical success factors, and potential linkages to outcomes data.

### ***Consultation questions – research programme***

We are seeking your views on which of the project areas set out in section 3.2. should be prioritised for 2025/2026. We are also open to receiving additional project areas from respondents, to be considered. Where alternative suggestions are proposed, please outline the following in support of your proposals:

- What is the compelling evidence to suggest your proposal needs to be covered by HM Inspectorate of Probation, as a research project, in this next financial year?
- If you offer more than one proposal, what priority order do your suggestions take and why?
- Which project(s) described above would you replace with your proposal(s) and why?

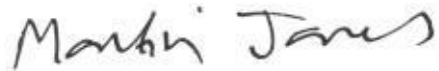
***Q3: Do you have any preferred research topics from our list set out in 3.2. for 2025/2026?***

***Q4: Do you have any alternative proposals on research topics for 2025/2026?***

## **4. Conclusion**

4.1. In this consultation we have set out suggestions for thematic inspection topics and research projects for 2025/2026. Ministers may ask us to conduct specific pieces of work or investigations over the course of 2025/2026, and we will respond to these and any risks as they arise.

- 4.2. We would very much appreciate your views on our thematic and research programmes for 2025/2026 by 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2024.
- 4.3. Please direct your responses and any queries to: [Amelia.Johnson-Manley@hmiprobation.gov.uk](mailto:Amelia.Johnson-Manley@hmiprobation.gov.uk)

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martin Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Martin Jones CBE

**HM Chief Inspector of Probation**



Cc.

**MoJ**

Antonia Romeo  
Ross Gribben  
Marie Southgate  
Claire Fielder  
Alan Webster  
Paul Norris  
Sally Grocott  
Martin Knight

**HMPPS**

Amy Rees  
Phil Copple  
Kim Thornden-Edwards  
Jim Barton  
Regional Probation Directors

**Wales**

Gary Haggaty, Welsh Government  
James Searle, Welsh Government  
Sian Brown, Welsh Government  
Dr Stephanie Perrett, Public Health Wales

**Youth**

Keith Fraser, YJB Chair  
Jacqui Belfield-Smith, AYM Chair  
Pippa Goodfellow, Alliance for Youth Justice  
Dame Rachel de Souza, Children's Commissioner  
Leroy Logan MBE, Transition to Adulthood  
YJS Managers  
James Warr, co-Chair YOT Managers Cymru  
Stephen Wood, co-Chair YOT Managers Cymru

**Other interested parties**

Andy Slaughter, Justice Select Committee  
Jenny George, National Audit Office  
Lucie Russell, User Voice  
Pia Sinha, Prison Reform Trust  
Anne Fox, Clinks  
Helen Schofield, Probation Institute  
Simon Shepherd, Butler Trust  
Jake Phillips, Probation Journal  
Magistrates Association  
Kevin Wong, British Journal of Community Justice  
Fergus McNeil, European Journal of Probation  
Professor Neil Chakraborti, Howard League Research  
Barry Goldson, British Society of Criminology, Youth Criminology and Youth Justice Network  
Ursula Kilkelly, Youth Justice Journal