

An Experiment in Upside-Down Management in Probation

Project Information Sheet

You have been invited to take part in this research 'Experiment'. This project is being managed by me, Andrew Bridges, a former Chief Probation Officer and former HM Chief Inspector of Probation. It is being undertaken under the supervision of the University of Greenwich for a potential PhD.

Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Take time to decide whether or not to take part and feel free to talk to friends, family or other people about your decision. Use the contact details at the end if you would like more information or to ask any questions.

What's the idea behind this project?

The starting point is the idea (OK, *my* belief) that HMPPS has not hitherto been clear about precisely **WHAT** it wants its Probation practitioners to be achieving with each case. Furthermore, almost all assessments and/or inspections of quality of Probation practice are almost always only applied **in retrospect**, long after the work itself has been completed.

Accordingly, as the basis for this Experiment, a definition of success is prescribed in the form of 'the **Three Purposes of Probation**', with each Purpose being given a clear definition of its own. Following on from that basis, this Experiment puts forward an app, called the "*How'm I doing?*" app, which practitioners can use in their everyday practice, so that they can tell for themselves, and '**in real time**', how closely they are working to these 'definitions' of good quality Probation practice.

The potential benefit that this project could lead to, is that if Probation practitioners are clear in their own heads about **WHAT** they are being asked to achieve (including how that is defined), then they can be liberated to use their discretion in **HOW** they go about achieving those Purposes. That is likely to lead to Probation practice that is not only more satisfying for the practitioner, but also is more importantly a more effective way of improving quality practice than requiring staff to work through ever more detailed and constantly-amended instructions and guidance 'from above'.

Whereas the current micromanagement approach often stifles initiative, the idea here is instead to find a way of liberating the initiative of each Probation practitioner, through focusing that initiative on **HOW** to achieve the Three Purposes with each individual case. For a fuller description of the idea behind this project, see my *Modern Probation Theory (MPT)*, on andrewbridgesprobation.com.

Note that this project is an Experiment to 'road test' just one potential component of that wider MPT, which I describe as "a specific version of practitioner-centred management." (The term 'Upside-Down Management' references Lord Timpson's own book describing how he managed Timpsons.)

What am I being asked to do?

Essentially, the Three Purposes mean that as a practitioner you can regularly, and at any point, ask yourself these three questions with each and any of the current cases you supervise:

- "*Am I helping to Reduce this individual's Likelihood of Reoffending (LoR)?*"
- "*Am I helping to Implement the Sentence?*"
- "*Am I helping to Contain this individual's Risk of Harm to others (RoH)?*"

The "*How'm I doing?*" app is in essence a form which indicates what 'Doing it well' looks like, for each of these Purposes, at key stages in the supervision process; you give yourself a Yes or a No to each of the criteria to indicate whether or not you think you are 'on course' with that Purpose. The app will itself of course need piloting, to iron out any snags, before progressing the project to scale.

I will emphasise at this point that the object of the exercise is not to provide a basis for competition between practitioners, but actually the opposite. It is so that you can see for yourself, in real time, How you are doing, and providing a basis for increased sharing and mutual support within your own team - as I'm sure you often do already. I am telling your managers that this is not to be used as a 'performance metric' for comparing individual practitioners or even teams.

Why me? – why have I been invited to take part?

I need at least 20 current Probation practitioners in order to conduct this Experiment, and of course I need them all to be willing volunteers. I can't promise that it won't be extra work, at least at first, because during this project you'll be trying out this "*How'm I doing?*" app in addition to your mainstream duties. However, my aim will be to keep that 'extra' element to a minimum, helped, I hope, by it being an app, and at the very least by keeping the data entry to a 'critical few'. Moreover, my expectation is that, once you are familiar with the app, because of its relative simplicity it will become second nature to think in its terms, and the extra work will seem minimal.

If you are interested in taking part in this Experiment, I will be asking you to make use of the app with each and all your current cases, ideally for 12 -18 months. You will of course be free to stop your participation at any time, though I am asking you to consider that, if you commit to making a start, you are taking on an involvement that will last at least a year.

What will happen if I take part?

I intend to hold briefing sessions with groups of practitioners who have at least initially shown an interest in participating. If possible, I will hold the briefings in person, but otherwise they'll be online. I can go through the realities – and the wider theory if you wish – and respond to questions and any observations. It is up to you whether you want to add any background reading to this, because that is not essential. I will subsequently invite you to make a commitment to start your full participation. (And yes, I confirm that you will be able to withdraw early if you wish, as this is a voluntary project; and depending on the reason for your withdrawal, that could be a 'finding' in the evaluation!)

Naturally, I expect to be able to introduce the "*How'm I Doing?*" app at each briefing, because your view of that will almost certainly be the factor that enables you to decide whether to participate.

Do I have to take part?

I reiterate that participation is completely voluntary. Obviously, I would prefer that you stick with it once you start, but in reality you are free to withdraw at any time.

What are the possible risks or drawbacks of taking part?

As outlined above, you are in effect taking on some extra work, especially at the start.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

If, after the familiarisation phase, the majority of volunteer participants continue to use the app, and if they also then find that it has been useful to them in the way intended, then the Experiment is likely to be deemed a success; the success of this component of the overall Theory (MPT) would suggest that this comprehensive practitioner-centred approach to managing Probation should be adopted by HMPPS. The key specific benefit to Probation practitioners would be to liberate them to use their initiative in their day to day practice, as set out in MPT.

What about my confidentiality, and the confidentiality of those I supervise?

No personal identifiable data will be collected. Names of practitioners and of those being supervised will be replaced with either pseudonyms or numbers, and the 'key' will be known only to me.

How will this project be reported?

Whether it is successful or not, it will be written up - either as a thesis submitted to the University of Greenwich, or at the very least as a report. Either way, it will be accessible without charge.

Who is conducting this research? – You are welcome to contact:

Andrew Bridges napa@napacic.org Web: andrewbridgesprobation.com Phone: 07810 055459

To be added when approval has been received:

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethical approval through the University of Greenwich's University Research Ethics Board.