

Offender Assessment and Supervision Planning: Helping to achieve effective intervention with offenders

[Contents](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#)

Report of a Developmental Thematic Inspection undertaken in collaboration with 46 Probation Services 1999

FOREWORD

This report marks the culmination of a complex collaborative inspection of 46 probation services which volunteered to participate, undertaking much of the work themselves under our oversight. It also represents a milestone in a longer term programme to develop more fully offender assessment, supervision planning and review. This will ensure that the work of probation staff has a discernible and demonstrable impact on the behaviour of offenders supervised in the community. Thorough assessment of the risks presented by offenders and their offence related needs, clearly articulated in supervision plans which detail the outcomes of planned interventions with offenders, are cornerstones of our work launched in 1998 entitled "Strategies for Effective Offender Supervision". This inspection forms part of that initiative.

Most services and their staff have begun to recognise that more consistent approaches to offender assessment, supervision planning, programmes of intervention and information exchange are needed. Many have started to make their own contribution to one or more of these elements and this inspection reveals a diversity of methods being employed. The report also highlights serious weaknesses, especially in linking offender assessment to supervision planning and then to effective programme delivery and review. At the same time encouragement can be drawn from the fact that more recent supervision planning by probation staff was significantly better than

older work, but further progress is needed.

The report points to ways forward which will require staff and management energy at a time of turbulence in the service. However, the issues identified transcend matters of structure and organisation. They form the core of probation business in its efforts to supervise offenders and to protect the public, from which services must not be distracted and are therefore deserving of attention. There are already encouraging signs that services will work together, with us and others in the Home Office, to achieve the improvements needed in offender assessment and supervision planning as bridges to making supervision even more effective.

SIR GRAHAM SMITH CBE
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. INSPECTION BACKGROUND, TERMS OF REFERENCE AND CONTEXT

Background

Terms of reference

Context

2. INSPECTION METHODOLOGY

3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4. DETAILED RESULTS

Introduction

Results from the case data form

Results from the supervision plan quality checklist

Analyses of aspects of the overall quality of supervision plans

Results about supervision plan reviews

Results from discussions with committee members, service managers and staff -

element three of the inspection

Results from discussions between officers, offenders and local

internal inspection staff -
element four of the inspection
Comments from outside the service
APPENDICES

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

More than 500 people contributed to the design, planning and execution of this inspection. It relied on their commitment and effort. Each of the 46 participating local probation services had a lead officer. Demands were made on local administrative and information staff as well as on local managers and practitioners, either in getting material together or by contributing to the teams which assessed the quality of probation officers' work. Some assessing teams included sentencers and others independent of the probation service. Staff and committee members from eight selected services were also involved in discussions with HM Inspectorate of Probation and a small number contributed to a more detailed analysis of their work. Sincere thanks go to all those locally without whose efforts this inspection could not have happened.

The 46 probation services worked together within eight consortia and one cluster of three services. Each was led by a coordinator who made an invaluable contribution to the whole exercise by ensuring that the complex arrangements between services were effective.

The inspection design and materials were subject to helpful comment from many sources which the planning group valued even if not all the ideas found expression in final versions. In particular, we received help from those developing the work outlined in "Strategies for Effective Offender Supervision", many service managers and staff, some of whom piloted draft instructions and materials, the Home Office Probation Unit and Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, academics and, colleagues within the Inspectorate. A number of those who offered advice formed part of a reference group to the inspection, able to give very specific guidance on particular issues.

The planning group which was central to the inspection and comprised of Mr John Eastwood, HM Assistant Chief Inspector of Probation; Ms Linda Hartley, Assistant Chief Probation Officer, West Midlands, acting as the

lead officer for the Association of Chief Officers of Probation; Mrs Chris Bull, Senior Probation Officer together with Mr David Wallace, Probation Officer, Lincolnshire Probation Service; and, Ms Pat Edwards, HM Inspectorate of Probation who played a major part in the detailed planning work and inspection events. In addition, Mr Peter Ramell, HM Inspectorate of Probation statistician, not only occupied a key role in the planning group but was responsible for the extensive data analysis, ably assisted by Mrs Di Bell who ensured that the data from just under 4,000 records made sense. Miss Michelle Berry provided our administrative support. My sincere thanks to you all.

The text for the national report has been subject to detailed discussion both by the planning group and within the Inspectorate. It seeks to reflect the points raised by the Association of Chief Officers of Probation in the spirit of the collaboration which underpinned the inspection, but the responsibility for the national report, its conclusions and recommendations, rests finally with the Inspectorate.

In addition to this national report, each service has produced a local report, built around the national data and text. Local reports contain findings and conclusions relevant to the local area, drawn together by those with responsibility for internal inspections, to be presented to the area probation committee.

JOE KUIPERS
HM Inspector of Probation

February 1999

"The history of the written and recorded case assessment, supervision plan and review system in this service has some parallels with the quest for the Holy Grail. No one is absolutely certain what it looks like, but everyone is certain that when they find it they will know it. The problem is that the person who goes on to claim to have found it finds that no one else agrees that it is it. The person then becomes a doubter themselves and the search

starts again."

(Quote from a senior probation service manager contributing to the inspection.)

1. Inspection Background, Terms of Reference and Context

Background

1.1 An internal HM Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) briefing note of May 1997, based on results from the thematic and area inspection programmes, identified the likely findings of an inspection into offender assessment and supervision planning would show significant variation by staff in:

- meeting the relevant elements of the national standards¹, both within and between services
- the application and use of questionnaires and instruments to help with the assessment of offenders
- the content, structure and layout of supervision plans and reviews
- understanding objective setting, in terms of measurable outcomes of the supervision process
- reference to partnership organisations and specific programmes in supervision plans
- the degree of management oversight of the quality of offender assessment and supervision planning
- offender participation in drawing up and agreeing supervision plans
- how supervision plans might be used as a key element of information exchange within and between services
- how the national Case Record Administration and Management System (CRAMS) was being used to handle offender assessment and supervision planning information.

1.2 It was anticipated that an inspection would lead to requirements for greater consistency of approach across probation services to offender assessment and supervision planning, thus underpinning the parallel work launched by HMIP in relation to the effective supervision of offenders². In particular, effective and evidence-based supervision requires services to have in place clear assessment processes to enable officers to write accessible reports and supervision plans, which include outcome-based objectives which in turn can be reviewed. Good offender assessment and clear supervision plans are the building blocks for effective practice. The

inspection results were expected by HMIP to have a significant long-term impact on services and would require considerable developmental work to be undertaken by services, HMIP and the Home Office Probation Unit, probably over a three/four year period.

1.3 The inspection was designed to involve as many services as possible, in part so that managers and staff could see for themselves the results of an examination into offender assessment and supervision planning, as a prelude to paving the way for any concerted action which might be required nationally to secure improvements. Recognising the long-term consequences of this inspection, and its relevance to effective offender supervision, HM Chief Inspector of Probation agreed that the early and full involvement of probation services in planning the inspection, through the Association of Chief Officers of Probation (ACOP), was desirable and likely to have a bearing on the overall success of the work.

1.4 This approach built on the successful collaboration between HMIP and ACOP concerning pre-sentence reports (PSRs), in which all probation services participated³. To this end, agreements about the scope, nature, timing and process of this inspection were reached between HMIP and senior members of ACOP in August 1997.

1.5 All services are required to complete two internal inspections each year⁴, the reports of which are to be submitted to local committees and copied to HMIP. A key element of the agreement with ACOP was that this inspection, undertaken under the guidance and direction of HMIP, would take the place of one internal inspection for those services which chose to take part. It was agreed that service staff would undertake the bulk of the inspection work to a design and specification agreed by the inspection planning group. For its part HMIP agreed that it would be responsible for the data analysis and would provide a database and a full template for local reports.

Terms of reference

1.6 Assured by ACOP that there would be sufficient service participation, HM Chief Inspector wrote to all chief probation officers (CPOs) and secretaries to probation committees in September 1997. The terms of reference (TOR) for the inspection were:

- 1. To assess the timeliness, structure and content of supervision plans in the light of the relevant national standard, information from*

"What Works" and knowledge about effective supervision.

2. To assess the overall quality of supervision plans and to understand the factors which might affect their quality; to see how well supervision plans reflect the work undertaken with offenders.

3. To evaluate the contribution to supervision planning by the use of specific assessment tools (e.g. risk of harm, offence related needs, likelihood of reoffending).

4. To assess the degree to which supervision plans reflect the issues identified in PSRs and/or pre-release documents.

5. To assess the rigour with which supervision plans are reviewed in terms of the intended supervision outcomes and the degree to which they address compliance with the national standards for the supervision of offenders in the community.

6. To assess the degree to which CRAMS will provide an appropriate structure for supervision plans and data transfer between services.

1.7 Services were requested to decide whether they wished to participate by October 1997 and to forward any information they considered relevant to offender assessment and supervision planning to HMIP. Fieldwork for the inspection took place during May/June 1998, and data analyses became available to HMIP from September.

Context

1.8 Central to good probation practice is an expectation that probation officers (POs) will assess the risks offenders present, the needs they may have related to their offending and their motivation to address relevant issues. Similarly, it is reasonable to expect that good assessments form the basis for sensible plans for the supervision of offenders in the community which describe what will happen, how progress will be achieved, and what the outcomes are intended to be. It is also reasonable to presume that supervision plans will be reviewed periodically to assess the progress being made by the offender, and to alter course if appropriate.

1.9 These underlying assumptions find expression in legislation, and in a variety of publications and Home Office documents, which address assessment, supervision planning and the obligations on services to keep

adequate records of their dealings with offenders. Most importantly, national standards published in 1995 set specific assessment and recording requirements concerning PSRs and supervision plans for those subject to the variety of community orders and post-release licences.

1.10 In addition:

- a Home Office circular from 1953⁵ set out the recording requirements on probation services in accordance with the Probation Rules of 1949. The record of supervision was intended to "facilitate assessment of the progress of the case and the planning of future work". The circular introduced the familiar parts "A", "B" and "C" of probation records, part "B" being the "summary of treatment and progress under supervision". Interestingly, the notes on the part "B" format highlighted the importance of the final summary which "should indicate factors likely to contribute to future success or failure". It is clear that the concept of supervision effectiveness has a long history. The national case record introduced in 1953 was amended slightly in 1976, but retained the similar basic framework
- the 1991 Criminal Justice Act (CJA) introduced probation supervision as a sentence in its own right. The Act strengthened the assessment responsibilities of officers to ensure that offenders for whom probation was proposed in PSRs were both suitable and in the right offence seriousness band for such a penalty. It also explained the requirement on services to protect the public from harm and to prevent the commission of further offences⁶
- an HMIP circular⁷ issued in 1993 rescinded the requirement for probation services to work to the national record and specified instead the information elements the record should include. It did not, however, lessen the assessment role of POs but reflected the new responsibilities of the 1991 Act
- the core competences for POs⁸ issued in 1994 included units P1 and P2 which centred on obtaining, verifying, recording and analysing information and framing potential responses in the light of that analysis. The competences also required officers to be able to devise and manage effective programmes of supervision in the community (unit P5). The new community justice standards⁹ strengthen assessment and review responsibilities and detail them more fully
- the HMIP thematic report on dealing with dangerous people amplified

the need for probation staff to undertake regular risk assessments of those under supervision¹⁰. Following this report comprehensive Home Office risk assessment guidelines for probation services were issued¹¹ which identified components of offender risk and needs assessments and included comment on current combined risks and needs scales

- the HMIP thematic report on probation orders with additional requirements emphasised that offenders should be assessed to ascertain their suitability for specific interventions¹². It also highlighted the need for services to monitor the effectiveness of any programmes of intervention, a theme reinforced in the HMIP thematic report on work with drug misusers¹³
- the HMIP thematic report on probation services working in partnership with other organisations stressed the importance of good assessment and information exchange. It also pointed to weaknesses in offender assessment and supervision planning and made recommendations to improve the outcome focus of assessment and intervention¹⁴. It advocated the use of the supervision plan as the primary information exchange document
- the ACOP/HMIP reports on PSRs highlighted that there were still too many reports which lacked offence analysis and offender assessment¹⁵
- a Home Office research study published in 1996 pointed to the need for systematic offender assessment before allocation to a supervising officer or any programme, whilst also focusing on the key role of the team manager in exercising greater oversight of assessment and intervention¹⁶
- crucially, the most recent HMIP report on effective offender supervision spelled out the requirements on service staff to assess offenders more accurately in terms of offence related needs (criminogenic needs), relevant social circumstances and risk factors as key elements in matching offenders to appropriate programmes. The report highlighted the relative weaknesses of current service practices¹⁷, reinforced in a recent Home Office research study¹⁸ which drew also on previous research work¹⁹
- the implication of the report on effective supervision was that staff would, as a result of good assessment, be in a position to supervise

offenders differentially, commensurate with their risks and needs, as long as contact levels did not fall below those required by national standards

- in October 1998 HMIP launched the *Guide to Effective Practice*²⁰ which followed on from *Strategies for Effective Offender Supervision*. This reinforced in a practical manner the messages of the main report and confirmed the need for good offender assessment, objective setting, supervision planning and review of progress
- the Prison/Probation Review²¹ emphasised the need for probation and prison services to work together in relation to the assessment of offenders who receive a custodial sentence. Continuity of effort between prison and probation services in supervising offenders will be a key theme for future working arrangements, whatever the outcome of the review
- the Home Office is in the process of procuring a new risk/needs assessment tool with the hope that it may be an integral part of the supervision plan, to be available during 2000 and to be informed by the results of this inspection. The procurement of this tool is closely linked to the HMIP effective practice initiative and will also reinforce the joint assessment responsibilities of those working in probation services and prisons.

¹ Home Office *National Standards for the Supervision of Offenders in the Community* (1995).

² HM Inspectorate of Probation *Strategies for Effective Offender Supervision* Report of the HMIP What Works Project (1998).

³ Association of Chief Officers of Probation/HM Inspectorate of Probation *Pre-sentence Reports: Quality Improvement Programme*. Report 1 (1996), Report 2 (1998).

⁴ HM Inspectorate of Probation *New Arrangements for Internal Inspections* (1995).

⁵ Home Office Circular 168 (1953).

⁶ Criminal Justice Act 1991 e.g. Section 8, paragraph 2.

⁷ HMIP 1/1993.

⁸ Home Office *Core Competencies for Probation Officers* (1994).

⁹ National Training Organisation *Community Justice Standards* (1998).

¹⁰ HM Inspectorate of Probation *Dealing with Dangerous People: The Probation Service and Public Protection* Report of a Thematic Inspection, Chapter 2, paragraph 2.3 (1995).

¹¹ Home Office *Management and Assessment of Risk in the Probation Service*. (1997)

¹² HM Inspectorate of Probation *Probation Orders with Additional Requirements* Report of a Thematic Inspection, Appendix 3, section 2 (1995).

¹³ HM Inspectorate of Probation *Tackling Drugs Together* Report of a Thematic Inspection on the Work of the Probation Service with Drug Misusers, Recommendation 7(b) (1997).

¹⁴ HM Inspectorate of Probation *Probation Services Working in Partnership: Increasing the Impact and Value for Money* Report of a Thematic Inspection, Chapter 1, recommendation at 1.3. Chapter 3, paragraph 3.6 (1996).

¹⁵ e.g. in 29 per cent of cases where there were previous offences, patterns of offending were not assessed and outcomes of previous sentencing were not considered in 31 per cent of cases (section 2.5 of the 1998 report); 29 per cent of reports did not assess the offender's capacity of motivation for change (section 2.6).

¹⁶ Home Office *Fitting supervision to offenders: assessment and allocation decisions in the Probation Service*. Research Study 153 (1996).

¹⁷ HM Inspectorate of Probation *Strategies for Effective Offender Supervision* Report of the HMIP What Works Project, Chapter 6, paragraph 6.1.1 (1998).

¹⁸ Home Office *Reducing Offending*. Research Study 187, Chapters 8 and 9 (1998).

¹⁹ Home Office *Changing Offenders' attitudes and behaviour: what works?*. Research Study 171 (1997).

²⁰ HM Inspectorate of Probation *A Guide to Effective Practice Evidence Based Practice*. See Chapter 2, re. assessment (1998).

²¹ Home Office Joining Forces to Protect the Public *Prisons-Probation Review* (1998).

2. Inspection Methodology

2.1 The inspection consisted of four elements designed to address the six TOR. This chapter gives only a broad outline of the methodology which had been set out in detail to services in a number of letters²². The 46 participating services²³ worked in eight self-selected consortia and one cluster of three services. Each service had a lead officer, usually an assistant chief probation officer (ACPO) and each consortium a coordinator. All arrangements were made through detailed correspondence with service lead officers and the consortia coordinators.

2.2 The four elements were:

1 **ELEMENT 1: a structured reading of supervision plans.** This was the central inspection component. The key aspects were:

- it was undertaken by all 46 participating services
- each service was asked to provide two samples of 45 supervision plans to be assessed. This number was chosen to provide a reasonably sized sample while avoiding excessive work for services in scrutinising cases. These samples included the full range of cases which required supervision plans to be drawn up. One sample represented very recent work (Sample A) and often included only the first supervision plan, and the other sample (Sample B) comprised cases which were closed, to give information both about supervision plans and their reviews. Supervision plans were supplemented with other relevant documentation. Two services chose to assess larger

samples of work

- the two samples of work from each service were read by reading teams drawn from two other services working in the same consortium. The reading teams were lead by the local lead officers who were carefully briefed about their task²⁴. Services did not assess their own work
- reading teams, which usually included approximately 10-12 people, were made up of senior and middle managers, POs and, where possible, independent persons (such as sentencers or academics). The reading exercise was designed to take one day and virtually all services completed it in the allotted time
- all cases required the advance completion of a case data form (Appendix 1), usually by the responsible senior probation officer (SPO), to give basic information about each individual offender. Supervision plans were assessed using a detailed quality checklist (Appendix 2) by members of the reading teams, which was then attached to the case data form to give a complete record for each case. The case data form and quality checklist were subject to much revision during the planning phase in the light of comment from many who offered advice and from the piloting of the forms by staff from Lincolnshire and West Midlands Probation Services. The case data form and quality checklist were made available to services well in advance of when they were required, with accompanying instructions
- the quality checklist drew heavily on the relevant elements of national standards and on the HMIP report on Strategies for Effective Offender Supervision
- the completed forms were forwarded to HMIP for data entry and analysis. The total sample comprised 3,959 cases. For seven services the total number of cases either prepared or read was less than 75 of the expected 90. Some of these were very small services which were unable to produce the number of cases required
- HM inspectors (HMIs) and planning group members visited one service from each consortium and one from the cluster (a total of nine services) to double read a random selection of assessed cases. This exercise was designed to validate, or not, the findings from services' assessments of each other's work. At the same time, local

lead officers were offered the opportunity to meet with HMIs to discuss how the arrangements had worked locally.

2 ELEMENT 2: a structured discussion by reading teams which focused on the impressions of the work and was intended to provide information to supplement element one. The key aspects were:

- the discussions took place after the supervision plans had been assessed by the reading teams so it was based on direct experience
- each discussion was led by the reading team leaders based on a structure designed by the planning group²⁵
- the contents of the discussions were fed back to inform HMIP and use is made of them in a limited way in this report. However, as these discussions were designed to be of greater relevance locally, their content should be addressed fully in the internal inspection reports.

3 ELEMENT 3: discussions with committee members, service managers and staff. The key aspects were:

- it was largely undertaken by HMIP (and planning group members where possible)
- inspectors visited one service from seven of the eight consortia and one service from the cluster. In the eighth consortium this element was undertaken as part of the local internal inspection arrangements agreed between the Inner London and Middlesex Probation Services (data forwarded to HMIP)
- the structure and agenda for these discussions were designed by the planning group.²⁶

4 ELEMENT 4: local discussions with POs and offenders. The key aspects were:

- services could choose whether to undertake this element or not, under their local internal inspection arrangements

- it was designed to give an opportunity to interview POs skilled in offender assessment and supervision planning, to share good practice
- the planning group designed a detailed structure and questionnaire to guide these local discussions²⁷, with information to be forwarded to HMIP
- only two services actually undertook this element of the inspection. Many services indicated that they had too many other demands to meet at the time of the inspection. This was unfortunate as element four could have helped to identify future action, both locally and nationally. One of the recommendations in this report seeks to take the matter forward.

2.3 Overall, services are to be commended for the effectiveness with which they implemented these complex requirements and for meeting the deadlines set. The raw data was received by HMIP at the end of July. Once it had been checked and sorted it was sent externally for data entry. The first analyses became available at the beginning of September.

2.4 To enable this national inspection to fulfil the demands of local internal inspections, each service was provided with its local data and a template for its local inspection report. The template included the contents of the national report with in-built opportunities for local commentary, provided on disc towards the end on November 1998.

²² The key letter was sent to services in March 1998.

²³ Eight services declined to participate for a variety of reasons, such as: the pre-occupation with the recent launch of new assessment tools in a number of services; a recent internal inspection into planning supervision; change of CPO, etc.

²⁴ Details available with services.

²⁵ Details available with services.

²⁶ Details available with services.

²⁷ Available in services, but to be revised by HMIP and ACOP in the light of experience, to support the recommendation that all services should undertake this element.

3. Summary of Findings and Recommendations

3.1 The main findings are set out so to address each of the six TOR. Many of the issues which need to be addressed are obvious from the findings. However, a number of aspects are highlighted, as are the means by which

they can be taken forward. Detailed analyses were applied to the results to test their statistical significance, using standard statistical tests. Many were significant at the 95 per cent level, i.e. the probability of their occurrence by chance was less than 5 per cent. Such results are clearly identified.

3.2 A total of 3,959 cases were scrutinised; 69 per cent related to court orders and 31 per cent to post-release supervision. To summarise the key findings:

- far too many supervision plans were either unsatisfactory or very poor and few addressed either comprehensively, or even partially, the requirements of the relevant national standard²⁸. Similarly, supervision plan reviews were too often of an unsatisfactory or very poor quality
- too often supervision plans did not draw explicitly on assessment processes or on previous assessments, such as those carried out for PSR and parole purposes
- offenders signed 51 per cent of supervision plans
- the structure of supervision plans was very variable and, even where an area had a specific format, officers did not routinely adhere to it
- few supervision plans conveyed an understanding by the officer of objective setting
- there was generally little evidence of management guidance or oversight of offender assessment and supervision planning
- supervision plans were better: when a structure was followed; when undertaken promptly; and, in the more recent sample of work (Sample A). Overall, they were better on offenders subject to community penalties than on those released from custody.

The six national recommendations are set out below:

1. There should be one national supervision plan format in place with effect from April 2000, accompanied by clear guidance on content.²⁹

2. Probation services should ensure that all supervision plans are satisfactory by April 2001 and set appropriate local

targets to ensure this is achieved.

3. Probation services should identify those practitioners known to produce good quality supervision plans, identify the factors which makes their offender assessment and supervision planning practices good, and use the information to spread good practice.

4. Probation services should ensure that there is better integration of assessment information into supervision plans.

5. Probation services should ensure that all supervision plan reviews are satisfactory by April 2001 and set appropriate local targets to ensure this is achieved.

6. HMIP should initiate and coordinate a series of regional seminars to disseminate the findings of this inspection and to consider future action, for those regions who wish to participate in such events.

TOR 1. To assess the timeliness, structure and content of supervision plans in the light of the relevant national standard, information from "What Works" and knowledge about effective supervision:

- 43 per cent of supervision plans were known to have been completed within the national standard requirement of 10 days after the commencement of supervision
- for those released from custody there was often not an immediate post-release supervision plan, reliance being placed on summaries and assessments completed at various points during sentence
- the proportion of plans drawn up within the time required by national standards increased from 37 to 48 per cent in Sample A. This significant improvement applied both to community orders and to those released from custody
- the structure of supervision plans varied enormously. 90 per cent of plans were supposed to have been prepared on the basis of a local format but it was clear that staff often did not follow the format.

There were also occasions when there were several supervision plan formats within the same service. There was, however, evidence of improved use of formats in Sample A

- during discussions with practitioners they often indicated that supervision plan formats appeared to them to be geared to data collection rather than to enabling them in assessment and making judgements. A number of services had clearly thought that having a sensible supervision plan structure would improve content automatically without other management input, but this was not evident, in part because often staff did not necessarily complete the required format. However, an important finding was that there was a link between the degree to which a local supervision plan format was used and the quality of the plan. Where teams were expected to use a format, and where this was followed, supervision plans were significantly better than where there was either no format or where an expected format was not followed
- the content of supervision plans showed similar variation. Even where structured approaches to supervision planning required officers to consider a variety of relevant factors, such work was often limited in analysis and depth. Officer judgement about the offender and appropriate supervision, as conveyed in supervision plans, was generally very thin. It appeared that the national standard in relation to the content of supervision plans had been largely ignored, although relevant headings drawn from it were often included in supervision plan formats
- concepts related to effective supervision had yet to find expression in supervision planning. Less than half the supervision plans were adequate in conveying that an offender was undergoing a structured and planned programme of intervention commensurate with their needs and the degree of risk s/he posed
- officers often had difficulties in understanding what was involved in objective setting and the difference between supervision outcomes and processes. In only just over a third of supervision plans were measurable objectives set satisfactorily but most did not have associated timescales. Sample A showed a significant improvement in setting measurable objectives but, overall, the position remained unsatisfactory³⁰
- objective setting for those on community orders was significantly

better than for those released from custody

- discussions with staff often conveyed the view that preparation of supervision plans had become a mechanistic process. Many staff said that meeting the national standard time demands undermined their efforts to produce good quality plans. This was not supported by the findings, which pointed to plans being at least as good, if not better, when completed within the required deadline.

3.5 In order to take matters forward, it is important that:

- the review of national standards³¹ is informed by the findings of this inspection
- training issues addressing objective setting need to be more clearly identified and met to ensure a consistent approach³².

3.6 In addition, it is recommended that:

There should be one national supervision plan format in place with effect from April 2000, accompanied by clear guidance on content.³³

TOR 2. To assess the overall quality of supervision plans and to understand the factors which might affect their quality; to see how well supervision plans reflect the work undertaken with offenders:

- only 40 per cent of supervision plans were judged to be satisfactory overall, which included just 2 per cent assessed to be "excellent". This was a result that services should take very seriously as it undermined their credibility, not least because it was a result consistently arrived at by a variety of different readers in the reading teams and fully endorsed by the double reading of a random sample of work undertaken by HMIP and the planning group members
- the overall results about supervision plan quality disguised significant variations between services. The proportion of supervision plans judged to be good enough ranged from less than 25 per cent in seven services (as low as 15 per cent in two) to over 60 per cent in five³⁴ (as high as 67 per cent in one)
- discussions with staff who undertook the reading exercise indicated that they rarely felt convinced that supervision plans had identified what supervision was intended to achieve, although in their view the

actual work with offenders was better than recorded in supervision plans, a judgement based on the content of other available records

- on a more positive note, virtually all main aspects of supervision planning were significantly better in the more recent sample of services' work (Sample A) than in the earlier sample, although the results still remained of considerable concern. Most of the criteria upon which judgements on assessment and planning quality were based showed movement in the right direction. In absolute terms, for the more recent sample 43 per cent of plans were good enough, compared to only 37 per cent of the older work (Sample B)
- the overall quality of supervision plans on black offenders tended to be better than those on white offenders but, for south Asian offenders, they were similar when compared with those for white offenders
- the overall quality of supervision plans on women offenders was significantly better than those on men
- only 32 per cent of supervision plans on those released from custody were good enough, compared to 44 per cent of those on community sentences, a significant difference. Plans for those released from custody showed some improvement in Sample A
- less than 40 per cent of supervision plans addressed the offence analysis well enough, which ranged between services from only 15 to 71 per cent. This was a major problem. Loss of focus on the offence undermined supervision plan credibility. Not surprisingly, supervision plans which dealt with the offence analysis well were judged to be better overall
- for those on community orders, the offence analysis was significantly better in the more recent work, but it did not show the same degree of improvement for those released from custody. The quality of offence analysis was significantly better overall for those on community orders than for those released from custody
- supervision plans paid too little attention to improving offender motivation when this was identified to be lacking
- where the risk of harm to the public was well assessed and clearly categorised, the supervision plan was significantly better than when

risk was either more loosely described or not assessed at all. However, planning for those categorised to represent the highest risk was no better than for those who were low-risk offenders

- overall, less than half the plans were judged to address risk of harm to the public sufficiently well
- in Sample A, the degree to which supervision plans addressed risk of harm to the public showed a significant improvement on Sample B, both for community orders and for those released from custody. However, this aspect of the work was significantly better overall in community orders despite the fact that some of those released from custody often presented the greatest risks
- services where staff were more competent in setting supervision objectives produced better quality supervision plans
- three of the five best performing services were relatively under-resourced according to the cash limit formula which regulates probation resources nationally. Four of the seven poorest performing services were over-resourced according to the formula, suggesting that poor performance in relation to supervision planning was not related to a service's current level of resources³⁵
- staff often commented that management took relatively little interest in supervision planning. Service priority attached to supervision planning was generally low but discussions with service managers gave the impression that they were committed to improving this aspect of the work
- there was often limited service policy and guidance to underpin offender assessment and supervision planning but, where it did exist, it tended to be very detailed and complicated. Committee members usually viewed offender assessment and supervision planning as wholly operational
- all service managers and staff from the eight services who took part in discussions with HMIP considered supervision planning to be an essential activity. Without exception they acknowledged that the quality had to be improved and that the quality checklist designed for this inspection could make a useful contribution to that process. Many commented that for them the checklist designed for the inspection was the first specific document which indicated what a

supervision plan should aim to include, an interesting observation which reinforced the lack of impact this aspect of national standards had had

- one aspect which was not given sufficient attention during the inspection requested managers to examine with officers, who were known to produce good quality supervision plans, ways in which their good practice could be shared with other staff. This was an opportunity missed, addressed by the following recommendation.

3.8 It is recommended that:

Probation services should ensure that all supervision plans are satisfactory by April 2001 and set appropriate local targets to ensure this is achieved.

Probation services should identify those practitioners known to produce good quality supervision plans, identify the factors which makes their offender assessment and supervision planning practices good, and use the information to spread good practice.

3.9 To enable the implementation of these recommendations:

- during the interim period the quality checklist should be used as an indicator of what constitutes a good supervision plan
- committees and senior managers need to take a greater interest in the operation of offender assessment and supervision planning and devise simple policies which direct staff about **what** they are required to do, and accountability systems to review the quality of the work
- services will need to establish clear practice guidance and monitoring arrangements for middle managers to enable them to help officers to improve the quality of their work and to hold them more fully to account for poor performance³⁶
- a task group should be established to include representatives from the service³⁷, those with responsibility for the development of CRAMS, HMIP, the Research, Development and Statistics Directorate and the Probation Unit, to design a supervision plan format informed by the findings of this inspection and the emerging issues from the

effective practice initiative

- HMIP and ACOP need to discuss how to reassess the quality of supervision planning to establish if the required improvements are being achieved.

3.10 TOR 3. To evaluate the contribution to supervision planning by the use of specific assessment tools (e.g. risk of harm, offence related needs, likelihood of reoffending):

- many services were using a variety of assessment tools and instruments which could have been expected to produce a more thorough approach to offender assessment than was apparent from supervision plans
- there was more evidence of the use of assessment tools and checklists in Sample A, especially in relation to assessing risk of harm to the public and the offender's offence related needs
- SPOs reported that in 80 per cent of cases officers were expected to use an assessment tool to judge risk of harm to the public; in 70 per cent the likelihood of reoffending; and in 60 per cent their offence related needs. However, evidence from the file reading suggested that the use of these assessment tools fell well below expectations
- overall, the integration of information from assessment tools into supervision planning was generally very poor or non-existent in over 60 per cent of cases. For example, good risk of harm assessments which pointed to an offender presenting a risk to the public were often not translated into a supervision plan which demonstrated the pattern, content and desired outcomes of the period of supervision
- members of the reading teams pointed out that officers were frequently viewing a completed questionnaire as the assessment, rather than as a tool which provided the officer with information on the basis of which s/he was then required to form a judgement. In particular, readers often expressed concern when a tick-box approach was used without accompanying analysis or commentary
- officers expressed concern at the prospect of ever more detailed structured assessment procedures, not all of which were relevant to every offender. Many officers considered assessment processes to be bureaucratic and mechanical (e.g. ticking boxes) and not designed to

meet their operational needs

- when considering offender needs there was considerable evidence that assessment tools often generated no more than lists of issues which were then poorly addressed in supervision plans and programmes of supervision. However, services which achieved better offender needs assessments in their supervision plans were those which did better overall
- for both community orders and for those released from custody, offender needs were significantly better assessed in the more recent sample. In line with other findings, this aspect of the work was also significantly better for those on community orders overall.

3.11 Many of these matters are already being taken forward by:

- the procurement by the Home Office of a combined needs and risk assessment tool for use both by the probation and prison services
- the ongoing work in relation to effective and evidence-based practice
- the Government's new Crime Reduction Strategy.

3.12 To assist services with achieving improved supervision plans, it is recommended that:

Probation services should ensure that there is better integration of assessment information into supervision plans.

3.13 TOR 4. To assess the degree to which supervision plans reflect the issues identified in PSRs and/or pre-release documents:

- in 60 per cent of cases the objectives outlined in a PSR or pre-release report informed the objectives set in the supervision plan. However, overall, there was sufficient integration of relevant information available from other documentation in only 40 per cent of supervision plans. This is an important finding. For those on community supervision less than a third were supervised by the officer who prepared the PSR and for those released from custody only 15 per cent were supervised by the officer who undertook the PSR. This indicates that unless good information is included in the supervision plan, or at least cross-referenced back to the PSR, continuity of supervision by different officers is hampered
- for those released from prison, there was a pre-release report in about half the cases and just over a half of these were supervised by

the officer who completed that report, emphasising the need for reference to previous assessments and plans

- PSRs and pre-release documents often included good assessment work and supervision intentions, so it was particularly unfortunate that there was limited continuity between them and supervision plans. As a probation order is now a sentence of the court it can be argued that a supervision plan, or supervision intentions and outcomes, defined in a PSR but not clearly implemented is a failure to implement the order of the court as the court is likely to have been influenced by such proposals when sentencing. National standards require a supervision plan to be outlined in PSRs which propose a community sentence
- overall, when information from other sources was well integrated into the supervision plan they were generally better plans. Assessment material from various sources was only slightly better integrated into the supervision plans of Sample A.

3.14 In order to take matters forward, it is important that:

- probation services implement the recommendation concerning the integration of assessment information into supervision plans
- CRAMS should have the capacity for key assessment items from assessment tools to be incorporated automatically into the supervision plan, without additional data entry, to ensure that the relevant features of the offender assessment find expression in the supervision plan as a prelude to defining the relevant programme of supervision. One service was experimenting with a detailed supervision plan within the PSR, where possible, which could either be torn off and used in its own right or be "cut and pasted" into the supervision plan.

3.15 TOR 5. To assess the rigour with which supervision plans are reviewed in terms of the intended supervision outcomes and the degree to which they address compliance with the national standards for the supervision of offenders in the community:

- only 41 per cent of supervision plan reviews were satisfactory. Offenders appeared to be involved in less than half the reviews, judged on the frequency with which they signed reviews. However, most cases were reviewed, even if they were not completed at the

specified times. Reviews were significantly better for community orders than for post-release work

- supervision plan reviews were often described by staff, who carried out the scrutiny of the work, as being hampered by a lack of objective setting in the initial supervision plan
- the data indicated a strong correlation between the quality of the initial supervision plan and of the reviews. It seemed likely that some officers undertook the whole exercise of supervision planning more effectively than others, who paid this aspect of practice less attention. If such an analysis is correct, it points to the need for closer supervision of many officers by middle managers
- less than half the reviews described contact in relation to national standards and it was difficult to tell from many supervision plan reviews the degree to which offenders were compliant with key elements of national standards, such as contact rates and enforcement issues
- about half the reviews reassessed the likelihood of reoffending
- only 40 per cent commented on the current risk of harm presented by the offender at each review stage and even fewer assessed the effectiveness of any work undertaken to reduce the risk of harm, although sometimes this was included within separate risk assessment documentation but not cross-referenced
- reviews reflected that victim impact and awareness work had been undertaken in only a fifth of the cases
- a third of reviews assessed the effectiveness of methods of intervention and even fewer identified any new approach to be adopted in order to increase the impact of supervision
- just under a third of reviews reflected fully a well-planned approach to offender supervision
- the overall quality of supervision plan reviews showed significant improvement in Sample A for community orders but not for those released from custody
- many managers and staff commented on the desirability of

extending the concept of differential supervision to include the opportunity of introducing a process of differential review for cases, both in terms of content and frequency, based on the risks and needs presented by the offender.

3.16 It is recommended that:

Probation services should ensure that all supervision plan reviews are satisfactory by April 2001 and set appropriate local targets to ensure this is achieved.

3.17 To enable the implementation of this recommendation:

- the design of a supervision plan format and content should also address how the plan is to be reviewed
- those reviewing national standards should consider the findings of this inspection when drawing up the new standards for the review of supervision plans
- in the interim period, whilst a supervision plan format is being designed and national standards are being reviewed, the categories used in the quality checklist to assess supervision plan reviews should be used by local services as a guide to what constitutes a good supervision plan review
- sound and measurable time limited objectives need to be in place if supervision plans are to be reviewed effectively
- HMIP and ACOP need to discuss the mechanism by which the quality of supervision plan reviews will be reassessed to determine if the improvements required have been achieved.

3.18 TOR 6. To assess the degree to which CRAMS will provide an appropriate structure for supervision plans and data transfer between services:

- a number of services commented that the implementation of CRAMS had been more complex and taken longer than anticipated. The position services were in with the roll-out of CRAMS meant that it was not possible to meet the demands set by this inspection objective beyond indicating that the basic supervision plan template will need to be adjusted in the light of any future national supervision plan format, a matter which had been agreed with the CRAMS

development group at the outset of this inspection

- it was not possible to make any judgement whether in those services where CRAMS was operating it had made any significant impact on the quality of supervision plans.

In order to take matters forward, it is important that:

- further discussion is required between the design team for the new supervision plan format and those responsible for CRAMS so that software enhancements can be informed by the work on offender assessment and supervision plans. The supervision plan format will enable relevant information categories to be defined to inform the system requirements, guided by the Home Office information strategy manager
- the supervision plan format should include key elements of national standards which could, via CRAMS, be aggregated as part of service performance information and which would give line managers the ability to assess the progress of a case
- the supervision plan format should include criteria related to the effectiveness of supervision which could, via CRAMS, be aggregated to give service performance information and give line managers accessible information about individual officer performance
- the supervision plans and reviews become a single form within CRAMS so that staff can scroll through the complete record for an individual offender. This would also assist with middle manager oversight and inspection, and improve accessibility for offenders.

This inspection, which dealt with issues central to good probation practice, relied on the contribution and work of many service staff and other individuals. As a first step to helping each service to achieve the required improvements and to enable the findings from this inspection to reach a wider audience, it is recommended that:

HMIP should initiate and coordinate a series of regional seminars to disseminate the findings of this inspection and to consider future action, for those regions who wish to participate in such events.

²⁸ It is acknowledged that the questionnaire designed to assess supervision plan quality was not limited to guidance contained in national standards and that it included questions which reflected some future practice requirements. The heightened supervision plan expectations communicated by the questionnaire is likely to have had an impact on the

overall results.

²⁹ This recommendation is contingent upon progress being made with combined risk/needs assessment tool.

³⁰ See also Talbot's work (1996), and that of Hough and Tilley (1998), as referenced in [A Guide to Effective Practice Evidence Based Practice](#), page 9. See also "the organisational terms" on that page.

³¹ This is due to be completed by the summer of 1999, led by Probation Unit.

³² Members of the Home Office Probation Unit Human Resources Section have been kept informed of developments in relation to this inspection.

³³ This recommendation is contingent upon progress being made with the combined risk/needs assessment tool.

³⁴ In alphabetical order: Cambridgeshire; Durham; Lincolnshire; Teesside; West Glamorgan.

³⁵ The funding formula apportions Home Office current grant between probation services on the basis of a variety of factors including workload and demographic features of the area. An arrangement known as "damping" is applied to ameliorate the effects of a sudden radical funding change, up or down. Where damping results in a service receiving less than it would under the undamped formula, the service may be described as "underfunded". A final adjustment in the process, however, limits the extent of underfunding. In 1999-2000 no service will be underfunded by more than 10 per cent.

³⁶ See also the Community Justice Standards as they relate to managers. It was of interest to note, from other inspection follow-up work, that in one of the poorest performing services staff appraisal arrangements were not being implemented.

³⁷ It is suggested that service representation be sought from those services where supervision planning was the best, and from ACOP.