

Institution: University of Sheffield
Unit of Assessment: 20 - Law
Title of case study: Changing Practitioner and Policy Approaches to the Supervision of Offenders in the Community
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Of the 200,000 offenders supervised in the community by Probation Area Trusts (PATs) in England and Wales, around half are reconvicted of another offence within two years. University of Sheffield research into why people stop offending ('desistance'), funded by the ESRC and the Leverhulme Trust, has provided evidence to senior staff in PATs, government departments, and the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) enabling the development of initiatives aimed at supporting service users in their efforts to desist. The research has increased awareness and understanding on the part of professionals of the factors associated with desistance. Through the medium of a film about how people desist, the research has helped both to reinvigorate probation services' professional practice and to develop training programmes with an emphasis on helping people to stop offending in place of the hitherto dominant focus on enforcement.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p><i>Tracking the path away from crime</i></p> <p>The research was funded by: (i) an ESRC network grant, 'Network for the Study of the Social Contexts of Pathways in Crime' (Shapland and Bottoms, L330253002, £417k), of which the 'Young Adult Desistance Study' based at the University of Sheffield was a major part; (ii) a further ESRC grant for the 'Desistance Knowledge Exchange Project' (Farrall, R189250258, £105k); and (iii) a Leverhulme Trust grant, 'Tracking Progress On (and After) Probation: Long-term Patterns of Desistance and Reform' (Farrall and Sharpe, F/00118/BS, £191k). This funding enabled the conduct of two longitudinal research projects:</p> <p>1) The 'Young Adult Desistance Study' was funded by an ESRC network grant between 2002 and 2008, and by a subsequent Leverhulme Emeritus Fellowship for Professor Bottoms. Researchers involved were Professor Joanna Shapland and Professor A.E. Bottoms (co-directors, 2002-), Dr Andrew Costello (2002-), Dr Deidre Healy (2006-8), Deborah Holmes (2004-6), Dr Grant Muir (2002-8) and Dr Angela Sorsby (2008-). The research involved repeat interviews with 113 men living in South Yorkshire over a four year period, as well as analysing official conviction data and probation records. It investigated the early stages of desistance from crime, resulting in an increased evidence base in relation to pathways in and out of crime, highlighting the interactions between individuals, their immediate social surroundings and wider social and economic contexts [R1]. This research has assisted in the development of probation practice and improved public policies aimed at reducing criminality and enhancing individuals' life chances. The ESRC evaluation of the study and of the network stated: 'The longitudinal research projects [including the Young Adult Desistance Study] were the major focus of the network and were overwhelmingly successful. They were unique in the scope and quality of data collected (childhood, adolescence, young adulthood), the methodological sophistication shown, and their strong theoretical underpinnings.'</p> <p>2) 'Tracking Progress on Probation' began in 1997 when Professor Stephen Farrall (PI) worked at Oxford University (1996-2000), continuing on his re-location to Keele (2000-2007) and to Sheffield in 2007. Others working on the project were Dr Gilly Sharpe (2010-) and Dr Ben Hunter (2010-12). The research has charted the impact of probation supervision on the lives and criminal careers of 199 men and women. The fourth and fifth sweeps of interviews (in 2003-04 and 2010-12 respectively, funded by the Leverhulme Trust) traced and re-interviewed 116 sample members [R2]. The bulk of the fieldwork was conducted after 2007 when Farrall moved to Sheffield. This study is unique globally in following so intensively, and for such a long period, a group of people who have been sentenced to probation. The main finding is that probation supervision can aid</p>

desistance, but that this result is only achieved after a period of several years.

Both studies found major areas where improvements in probation supervision could be made [R1] [R2]. This included, for example, focusing on probationers' strengths rather than their deficiencies. The main policy message was that probation supervision needed to become 'desistance-focused', rather than 'offending-related' [R3]. This message has been developed by those working in practice in several ways ([S1], [S2], [S4], [S6] and [S7] below), but particularly since an ESRC-funded Knowledge Exchange Grant in 2011-12.

Engaging practitioners

The ESRC Knowledge Exchange Grant (awarded to **Farrall**, Professor Fergus McNeill (PI, University of Glasgow) and Professor Shadd Maruna (Queen's University Belfast: RES 189250258) led to the making of a film [R4] about why people stop offending, and what can be done to assist these efforts. The film is supported by a web page [R5] which allows interested parties from practice, the academy and the interface between the two (such as those training probation staff) to discuss relevant matters and access briefing documents, such as [R6].

Collectively, these projects have placed the interest in desistance from crime firmly on research and policy agendas, and started to provide new policy initiatives within criminal justice ([R1]–[R3] and [R5]–[R6] below).

3. References to the research

- R1. **Bottoms, A. E.** and **Shapland, J.**, 'Steps Towards Desistance Among Male Young Adult Recidivists', in S. Farrall, et al (eds) *Escape Routes: Contemporary Perspectives on Life after Punishment* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 43-80. Based on their ESRC-funded project, this gives the main findings from this study.
- R2. **Farrall, S., Sharpe, G.,** Hunter, B. and Calverley, C., 'Theorising Structural and Individual-Level Processes in Desistance and Persistence: Outlining an Integrated Perspective' (2011) 44(2) *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 218-34.
- R3. **Farrall, S.**, *Rethinking What Works With Offenders*, (Willan Publishing: Cullompton, 2002). With a Foreword by Christine Knott, [former] Chief Probation Officer, Greater Manchester Probation Area. This was one of the first monographs on why people stop offending following probation supervision. It is the first of three books on this cohort, the other two being published by Open University Press (2005) and Oxford University Press (forthcoming, 2014).
- R4. **Farrall, S.** (co-scripted with F. McNeill, S. Maruna and C. Lightowler), *The Road from Crime*; 48min film produced by Lagan Media Productions, 2012. This film was made with a media company and was used in numerous screenings (both public and invitation-only) in the UK and further afield.
- R5. McNeill, F., Maruna, S., and **Farrall, S.**, web page for the ESRC Desistance Knowledge Exchange Research Project, available since 2011 at: <http://blogs.iriss.org.uk/discoveringdesistance> The web site contains numerous links for practitioners and keeps those interested in the project abreast of developments.
- R6. McNeill, F., **Farrall, S.**, Lightowler, C. and Maruna, S., *How and Why People Stop Offending: Discovering Desistance*, (IRISS Insight No. 15, Glasgow, 2012) <<http://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/how-and-why-people-stop-offending-discovering-desistance>>

4. Details of the impact

This research has had an impact via two main pathways:

(1) Influence on probation – professional practice and development of training programmes

The lead reviewer of the ESRC evaluation of the Young Adult Desistance Study provided an early indication of the influence of the research on professional practice, stating that: 'The Sheffield study has made radical and far-reaching recommendations (e.g. that probation needed to embrace

insights from research into desistance) for the probation service on the basis of its findings to date'. Dissemination of the study's findings led to invitations to discuss its implications with the Number 10 Policy Unit (July 2010, leading to its circulation within government), and with the (then) Commissioning and Commercial Director for the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) (March, August 2009). The research has influenced the development of NOMS' understanding of correctional practice and, in so doing, directly affected the content of the Offender Engagement Programme of NOMS, particularly within the Skills for Effective Engagement and Development (SEED) year-long training programme for current probation staff, which was rolled out nationally in 2012 [S1]. SEED is currently being evaluated by the University of Sheffield, with funding by NOMS, under the direction of Professor Shapland. The SEED programme is now a major workpackage in an EU grant (coordinated by NOMS) to explore implementation and evaluation in other European countries, in this instance, Romania (grant JUST/2011/JPEN/AG/2892, 2012-2014). In contributing to increased understanding of how and why people stop offending, the research has helped NOMS re-orientate its thinking about how its frontline practice needs to be commissioned and delivered [S1].

The research has played a key role in shaping the training of probation staff [S2, S6, S7]. During this period there were three providers of training for future probation staff (Portsmouth, De Montfort and Sheffield Hallam Universities). All were required by NOMS to teach trainee staff about the research on desistance from crime as part of their studies, and to encourage staff to remain aware of the main messages of this research during their time as probation workers. Key messages drawn from the desistance research undertaken at Sheffield University were taught to trainee probation staff by these consortia [S7]. For example, the Sheffield Hallam module "Positive Probation Practice" (part of the Probation Qualifying Framework: Level 6) drew heavily on the material produced by members of staff at Sheffield University [S7]. Both de Montfort and Sheffield Hallam universities have web links to the University of Sheffield's 'Discovering Desistance' blog [S7].

(2) The film has increased understanding of desistance among practitioners and policy-makers

The Road from Crime ([R4] above) uses interviews with current and former service users, probation staff and academic experts in the UK and the USA to highlight how the process of desistance unfolds and how the criminal justice system could be moulded to assist these processes [S3]. Film screenings and discussions among practitioners have led to increased understanding on the part of probation staff (at all levels) concerning the supervision and assessment of offenders, and resulted in revised training programmes emphasising the benefits of making assessments of offenders' needs which allow for the identification of the *positive* aspects of an individual's life [S2]. The Project Advisory Group for the film included representatives of the Ministry of Justice, the Scottish Government, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, those training probation staff, and former service users. The film was shown at eight seminars throughout the UK (between April and June 2012) funded by the ESRC, and at numerous events since. These raised awareness and provoked discussions between policy makers, service providers (state, private and voluntary sector), service users, and their families about how current service provisions could be re-orientated to better facilitate desistance [S2 and S7]. The film has also been packaged as a DVD (translated into French, Spanish, German and Finnish) and made freely available via the web [R4], [R5]. A copy of the DVD was given free to every delegate at the Probation Chief's Association (PCA) conference in March 2013, with the PCA funding the 200 DVDs this required.

The film and the web-page have started a wider debate amongst practitioners about how formal institutions can help people to stop offending [S4]. Examples of the use of the film include screenings to people being supervised in the community (to encourage thinking about an individual's past offending), to mentors (to further their understanding of the lives of those with whom they will be working), and to staff in other branches of the criminal justice system, such as the police and magistrates (to make them aware of processes of desistance). The web-page has also become a forum for debate amongst policy makers and practitioners. It has had over 61,788

visits ('hits') by 32,414 unique visitors between 18/08/2011 and 31/7/2013. The film is playing a major role in increasing understanding of desistance by professionals and policy makers, and has helped combat common misperceptions of offending behaviour [S2]. A screening of the film in July 2012 in Glasgow was attended by around 200 people, including the Scottish Justice Secretary (Kenny MacAskill MSP), who praised the film: "This has helped my officials and me in better understanding the reality of desistance from crime, and in considering how public policy can better remove obstacles to desistance" [S5]. Key showings of the film include that to the Scottish Parliament in February 2013. Farrall was invited by the French Minister of Justice (Christiane Taubira) to speak about desistance to a specially convened citizens' jury in February 2013. The film has been added to the Home Affairs Section, House of Commons Library, the Librarian having commented: 'This could be very useful as a source – just the sort of thing that Members [of Parliament] would be interested in seeing'. The film is free to view from the web-page above, and has been played online or downloaded 4,930 times between 18/08/2011 and 31/7/2013. The briefing paper [R6] has been downloaded 1,066 times and read online 5,881 times between 18/08/2011 and 31/7/2013. Because the film is free to view on the web, it is not possible to document all instances when it has been seen. The film has been accessed in Australia, New Zealand, Jamaica, South America and North America. The feedback from the film screenings has been enthusiastic, for example:

"This film is a rallying cry for a paradigm shift; I recently viewed the 'Road From Crime' and have ordered a DVD for myself. I just wanted to pass along that it is outstanding" (anonymous workshop participant).

The research and resulting film have affected the way in which court officials see their role in relation to probation sentencing. For example, during a seminar held at the School of Law, Leeds University (12 November 2012), at which participants included representatives from the Magistrates Association, Wakefield Prison, West Yorkshire Probation Area Trust and former service users, the representative from the Magistrates Association stated that the organisation needed to increase the number of its members who were former service users. The film has been included in training programmes for probation officers [S1] and [S2], and some probation services have created posts to further promote the embedding of desistance approaches into frontline services [S6].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- S1. The Programme and Research Manager of the Offender Engagement Programme at the Ministry of Justice can corroborate these claims.
- S2. The Head of Probation, Derbyshire Probation (former Head of the Midland Training Consortium for probation staff) can provide corroboration.
- S3. 'The Road from Crime', <http://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/the-road-from-crime>
- S4. See for example: <http://blogs.iriss.org.uk/discoveringdesistance/2012/12/06/over-to-you/> or <http://forensicpsychologist.blogspot.com.au/2012/08/prisoner-reentry-paradigm-shift-or.html>
- S5. Letter to ESRC from the Scottish Justice Secretary, which also praised the film as 'powerful and insightful', 5 February 2013.
- S6. The Desistance Development Officer, Avon and Somerset Probation Area Trust, who has been appointed to help encourage and support staff to find new ways of working with those they supervise, can provide corroboration.
- S7. The Director of Probation Studies at Sheffield Hallam University can confirm these claims.