



# Enabling Responsivity and Inclusion in Probation Interventions Using Digital Strategies

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Jason Morris, Senior Policy Manager in the HMPPS Service Design Team explores some of the ways in which technology can be used to enable responsivity with people on probation.

In our [HMPPS.co.uk](https://hmpps.co.uk) guest blog on Structured Interventions and Probation Practitioner Toolkits, Laura Baverstock and I wrote about designing sentence management and intervention processes to put supervisory relationships closer to the centre of probation work. Structured Interventions provide a set of therapeutic exercises delivered primarily to groups by interventions facilitators in a set sequence. Probation Practitioner Toolkits (referred to below simply as 'toolkits') are comprised of similar exercises delivered one-to-one by Probation Practitioners as part of supervision. Aligning toolkits with Structured Interventions enables Probation Practitioners to use toolkit exercises during supervision sessions to support gains made by participants within interventions.

In the current article, I highlight the potential of Complementary Digital Media (CDM) as a digital strategy to promote consistency across these different therapeutic offers. Digital strategies can help reduce the cognitive load of intervention work (for practitioners and participants); increase responsivity by conveying the diversity of co-creators with lived experience; and strengthen therapeutic alliances by creating a shared focus that supports desistance-focused conversations. Digital tools can also be accessed by people on probation outside of their contacts with probation; increasing their exposure to intervention work in their day-to-day life.

*This article provides an exposition of the views of the author in an emerging area of policy and practice. These views are not intended to pre-empt or prohibit any future changes to the way that digital strategies are used within interventions in HMPPS.*



**Jason Morris**  
Service Design  
Probation Reform Programme

## Digital Learning Strategies and the Benefits of Using Co-Created Digital Media in Probation

Digital media and platforms are now in wide-spread use throughout the education sector and the wider personal development industry. For many years, public-facing platforms and Virtual Learning Environments have provided innovative ways to be responsive to diverse audiences and complement traditional learning strategies. While historically some CJS providers arguably lagged behind in the uptake of technology, the previous edition of Probation Quarterly had no fewer than three articles (by Jason Tizedes, Revolving Doors and Jonathan Hussey) highlighting the potential benefits and threats of using technology to support probation work in the post-pandemic era. I would like to add to these discussions by highlighting the advantages of co-produced digital media in aligning toolkits and Structured Interventions and making them more responsive to people with a wide range of diversity and learning needs.

Recent research<sup>1</sup> supports the idea that digitally-enabled approaches can be a catalyst in supporting the development of therapeutic alliance between probation practitioners and people on probation. For several years, I've been using co-production practices in the development of CDM with the aim of making services more responsive to people in prisons and on probation (including those belonging to marginalised groups).

## Co-Production as a Vehicle for Inclusion

Designing content and services with and for people on probation fulfils the Probation Reform Programme's commitment to:

*culturally competent practice/service design – including the commitment in the HMPPS Equality Strategy that all interventions/services have an explicit focus on equality in their design. All policies, procedures and/or practices will continue to consider their impact on service users from different characteristics groups. This will be evidenced through the Equality Analysis<sup>2</sup> (p. 14)*

The importance of co-production can be seen in its [impact on co-creators](#) and the wider [impact that outputs from co-production](#) can have on services. Reflecting on the impact of CDM has provided insights into its use within probation supervision and interventions. For example, practitioners have described how discussing the relatable scenarios depicted in CDM clips can be a useful starting point for conversations that move on to focus on how participants overcome challenges in their own lives.

## Audio-Visual Strategies to Promote Engagement with Digital Content

Incorporating feedback from co-creators with a diverse range of lived experiences is an important way to make interventions more responsive. In a [blog](#) written about his experience of contributing to one of our co-production projects, Robert Ferguson encouraged interventions developers to focus on engaging people on probation at a more emotional level to “inspire and motivate them more to want to change”.

In keeping with this feedback, I recently led a Home Office funded project to increase the diversity and depth of CDM available to facilitators and Probation Practitioners. In this project, Design102 created visual strategies that aimed to foster greater connection and empathy with people in prison and on probation. They captured the emotional journey of characters via a visual language to communicate their shifts between states such as: “shutdown”, “fight-or-flight” and “social engagement”. Using co-production methods from previous CDM projects, we built these visual strategies on top of co-created scripts and voiceovers delivered by experts by experience (recorded by Prison Radio Association) to develop a large body of new material.

As well enhancing the potential to deliver clinically meaningful messages, the visual language within new CDM clips aims to support participants in articulating their emotional experiences and improving their commitment to developing self-management skills. This visual approach will also be carried through into practitioner handbooks and participant workbooks.

<sup>1</sup> Towards a desistance-focused approach to probation supervision for people who have committed Intimate Partner Violence: A digital toolkit pilot study - Jason Morris, Andreea Antonia Raducu, Melissa Fuller, Sarah Wylie, Steven James Watson, 2021 (sagepub.com)

<sup>2</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/959745/HMPPS - The Target Operating Model for the Future of Probation Services in England Wales - English - 09-02-2021.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/959745/HMPPS_-_The_Target_Operating_Model_for_the_Future_of_Probation_Services_in_England_Wales_-_English_-_09-02-2021.pdf)



I'm going to ask her what the fuck she's doing here? I feel like wiping the smile off his face. They keep laughing and looking over at me. I'm being shown up in front of my family. It's disrespectful.

## Future Opportunities Presented by Digitally-Enabled Interventions

In addition to the creation of engaging clinical content, digital strategies open the potential for us to use data analytics to improve services. For example, analytics indicate that the Skills for Relationships Toolkit generated over 12,000 staff and participant views in the first 6 months of 2021. We can track this usage over time and on a clip-by-clip basis to capture number of plays and average clip completion percentages. Having access to a platform (with the potential for interoperability with other digital systems) would offer enhanced analytics to support the evaluation of digitally-enabled services and inform future content design.

Digital content is already enhancing in-room and remotely delivered therapeutic conversations within Structured Interventions, Accredited

Programmes and Probation Practitioner Toolkits. The breadth and depth of this content has the potential to evolve into an overarching framework that supports clinical consistency between these services. Enabling probation practitioners to be fully conversant with this content can empower them to provide holistic wraparound support before, during and after interventions. In this context, co-produced digital media can be a catalyst by injecting prison and probation interventions with consistent, authentic, desistance-focused messaging aimed at helping people build on their strengths; develop new skills; and, be hopeful for the future. <https://vimeo.com/558018694/384b3b706a>

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