An introduction to the Guernsey Probation Service

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https://doi.org/10.54006/VUSA5498
Guernsey is part of the British Isles, a self-governing British Crown dependency, just a forty-minute flight away from London. Despite its geographical and political proximity to England and Wales it has a distinct probation service model. In this article we outline the main features of the Guernsey Probation Service and reflect on its similarities and differences to probation in England and Wales. The Guernsey Probation Service operates across the Bailiwick of Guernsey. This includes the islands of Guernsey, Herm, Alderney, and Sark (which despite having its own set of laws and parliament, uses Criminal Justice services provided by Guernsey).

The island of Guernsey forms part of the Bailiwick and is a 27 square mile island off the coast of France forming part of the Channel Islands. The island has a population of 63,000. Here in Guernsey, the Probation Service prides itself in ensuring its staff have a good work life balance. The office closes at 5pm, allowing staff the opportunity to enjoy one of Guernsey’s many beautiful beaches and scenic views after work. During our annual away day - which we attempt to hold in the idyllic island of Herm - we engage in team building activities to focus on our vision:

*We will contribute to making the Bailiwick of Guernsey a safe and secure place to live through the effective rehabilitation of those who offend. We will address the causes and consequences of offending and enable those who have offended to make a positive contribution to the community.*
Although a relatively small team (see figure above), the Guernsey Probation Service currently supervises 239 adults, who are either managed under a Community Service Order, Suspended Sentence Supervision Order, Probation Order, Parole, post custodial sentence Order, or in custody.

As Probation Officers in Guernsey, a typical week includes being based in Court to advise the court on options available for sentencing, writing Social Enquiry Reports, offender management in the community delivering one-to-one and group interventions, Prison visits, completing Parole reports, home visits, attending all agency meetings, managing breaches and revocation of Licences, and acting as Victim Liaison Officers. We aim to operate using the end-to-end Offender Management model and this feels much more realistic given the size of the island. This approach ensures practitioners remain skilled in all areas of probation work.

We have access to clinical supervision and ongoing training with a Clinical Forensic Psychologist, who provides consultancy for the Island’s Probation Service. This complements the supervision we have with our line managers and team practice development meetings, to ensure that practitioners are using current research to work towards best practice.

**Local legislation**

Guernsey Probation Service has its own unique jurisdiction, Criminal Justice System, and legislation. Whilst many of these are similar to others within the British Isles, there are distinct differences and nuances that need to be considered. Having watched how legislation has developed in the UK and Jersey, Guernsey has been able to review what works well and what was missing.
Two examples of this are when developing the revised Probation Law (2018) and Sexual Offences Prevention Order (SOPO). When Guernsey introduced SOPO legislation, we made the decision that Orders can be managed jointly by the Probation Service and with the Police, allowing the Order to include conditions which both prohibit activities and those that direct engagement to address offending behaviour.

With the Probation Law, a Probation Order allows the Court to add any conditions that are necessary and proportionate to manage risk. For example, not to consume alcohol, exclusion zones, non-contact, and phone checks. This allows for bespoke conditions that are responsive to each case and for the Courts to impose two sentences for one conviction: for example, a punitive element of Community Service alongside a rehabilitative element via a Probation Order.

The Prevention of Discrimination (Guernsey) Ordinance 2022 comes into force in October 2023. There is no current Discrimination Law in Guernsey, and we currently work under ‘best practice’. The new legislation will give us greater accountability to ensure our work is equitable and better meet the needs of our clients and staff members.

**Interventions in Guernsey**

Due to the size of the population, offending behaviour work is often delivered one-to-one usually with the allocated Probation Officer both in the community and custody. We use a range of structured non-accredited materials to address identified needs. We are currently piloting a computer-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy suite of interventions (Intervention Hub) for low to medium risk clients. We work closely with a clinical forensic psychologist to assess, formulate, and provide one-to-one treatment for people convicted of sexual offences using the NOTA sexual offending treatment programme.

There are some group programmes delivered and this includes Sarnia, a strengths-based intervention, which is delivered as a combination of group sessions and one to one modules, to address domestic abuse and violence. This programme is available for male and female perpetrators, and people without a conviction who are working with other services as a preventative approach. The Domestic Abuse Strategy is very much aligned with the Probation Service. We currently have two full-time posts that are dedicated to delivering the Sarnia Programme.

We have links with a local charity, In-Dependence who provide the Criminal Justice Substance Service to better support those with problematic substance use. They use the SMART (Self-Management and Recovery Training) treatment as their focus for intervention, which looks at addressing both recovery and maintenance from alcohol and substance use.

**How we assess risk**

We don’t use OASys or anything that could be considered similar in Guernsey. Initial risk assessments are completed pre-sentence with a Social Enquiry Report. We are trained in a range of specialised risk assessment tools.
We apply LS/CMI as our static risk assessment tool for likelihood of general re-offending. For violent offences, we have the option of using HCR20. For domestic abuse and inter-personal violence, we apply SARAv3. For sexual offending we have the option to use RSVPv2 alongside Stable and Acute, C-PORT and RM2000. For serious violent and sexual offenders, we aim to use fourth generation risk assessment processes which include static, dynamic and case management/ scenario identification. Therefore, alongside the risk assessments, we provide a level of clinical judgement to support our assessment and management of risk.

**Similarities and Differences**

Whilst there are lots of differences from the UK there are also lots of similarities working in Guernsey and we face the same challenges, risks and rewards as our Probation Officer friends across the water. We have adapted and integrated best practice principles for managing risk of serious harm and public protection. MAPPA legislation was introduced in 2015 and forms an integral part of our multi-agency approach, especially with law enforcement agencies. The luxury of a small island is that we are one team, and this really helps build positive working relationships with agencies across the Bailiwick of Guernsey. Due to the proximity of all agencies, meetings are usually face-to-face, relatively easy to arrange and facilitate. We have the usual difficulties of silo working, but also lack the third sector infrastructure which limits our ability to refer and always meet the individual needs of our service users.

**Community Service**

The Community Service Scheme is managed by the Probation Service and can be imposed as a direct alternative to custody or as a stand-alone sentence. Three group parties are held each week and we are fortunate to have good links with charities who provide individual placements for those clients who need additional support or risk management.

**Drug treatment**

Interestingly Guernsey’s substance misuse culture is very different to the mainland with fewer class A drugs, such as heroin and cocaine being available. This has a knock-on effect on the crime profile, with importation of illicit substances being prominent. Offending behaviour therefore tends to highlight the supply, possession and acquisition of prescribed substances, and cultivation/supply of Cannabis. Whilst there is a subculture of criminal behaviour that is driven by substance use and the need to fund this, overall, Guernsey feels comparatively safe due to the differences in crime profile and close community living.

**Future of Guernsey’s Probation Service**

One of the positive things about working in Guernsey is the flexibility of instigating change. As Probation practitioners, we can directly influence change in our team and service with fewer procedural layers and processes. Recently this has included improving our responsivity to neurodiversity and introducing a service user forum.

The Senior Management Team have adapted the recruitment process by introducing the PQUIP scheme to Guernsey. This will ensure new team members are trained in Probation Practice and bring this knowledge to Guernsey which is an exciting new era. This will complement our existing staff profile, who include both Social Work qualified and UK trained Probation Officers. Previously, Probation Officers were initially trained as Social Workers, or we would recruit off-Island.

Working for the Probation Service in Guernsey is a unique, interesting, and rewarding role.