

Chief Probation Officers: a brief outline of the study

The probation service is once more at the centre of a ferment of activity: the demands of legislation have to be met, effective work with offenders is under careful scrutiny, and major structural changes to the organisation of the service are proposed. Where do Chief Probation Officers (CPOs) stand in relation to all of this ? The answer is that we do not know. Despite long-standing sociological concerns, relatively little attention has been paid to criminal justice elites. Both Robert Reiner and David Wall have recently carried out research into Chief Constables, both commenting on the absence of Chief Constables in the literature on policing. If this is so, then what might be said about CPOs ? And yet CPOs manage a significant criminal justice agency. They are powerful local figures and have been subjected to considerable government pressure for more than a decade. As is the case in other public services, managerialism has also taken on a high profile among CPOs.

A major study of CPOs is especially timely, therefore, because of the general absence of previous work on criminal justice elites because of the peculiar pressures currently facing the probation service, and because of the enormous emphasis now placed on managerialism/management.

The aim of the research is to carry out the first study of CPOs in England and Wales, with a view to describing and analysing their role in the criminal justice system. Specifically, the objectives are to:

1. investigate the social and educational background and career histories of CPOs
2. explore their perceptions of community penalties in general, the probation service in particular, developments in these which have taken place in the course of their career, and potential changes in the future
3. examine the role of CPOs as managers of local probation services, and their relationships with central government, local criminal justice (and other) agencies, and their probation committees
4. locate the study both within the broader sociological study of elite groups as well as the more particular context of criminal justice elites
5. contextualise the preceding objectives by providing an account of the introduction and development of the CPO role and that of ACOP

To achieve these objectives it is proposed to interview all CPOs, as well as a handful of recently retired Chiefs. Interviews will be taped, carried out face-to-face and are expected to last between 2-3 hours. In the analysis and reporting of the study no views will be attributed to individual CPOs. The interview schedule will be structured but - as far as possible - be constructed to encourage discussion. The questionnaire will cover work history, the purpose(s) of the probation service and of community penalties, key developments in the past 20 years, the 'What Works' debate, managing a probation service, the future, social perspectives, and personal background. All interviews will be transcribed and analysed either statistically or using qualitative data-analysis software. Some time will also be spent at ACOP headquarters in Wakefield searching the archives for historical material relating to the development of the role of CPO and of ACOP as an organisation.

Report Executive Summary

While Chief Constables are highly visible public figures, Chief Probation Officers (CPOs) are not. Yet both groups manage key criminal justice agencies which, as a result of the increasing politicisation of law and order, are under considerable pressure to have an impact upon crime. Reiner (1991) has provided a graphic portrait of the views and attitudes of Chief Constables, and the study reported on here does the same for CPOs at a time of radical change in the organisation of probation.

A total of 47 CPOs (out of a possible 54) were interviewed between 1 November 2000 and 30 June 2002 using a loosely structured questionnaire. Interviews lasted an average of 120 minutes.

The average age of respondents was 52 and just over one-quarter were female. Female Chiefs tended to take two years longer to reach the top than males, but this included maternity leave for some. 20 respondents were leaving the probation service on 31 March 2001 as a result of reorganisation and those leaving were a cadre of highly experienced Chiefs: those leaving had an average of just over ten years at Chief level, while those staying on had an average of just over five years.

Three out of four Chiefs had joined the probation service in the 1970s and had therefore worked through a time of unprecedented change for probation. They tended to see the purpose of probation as the protection of the public and reducing offending, and while this might well have been a departure for many probation officers, Chiefs claimed that they had always felt this was the business of probation, and that the service was much more focused now than it had ever been.

Minds did seem to have changed, however, about the use of electronic monitoring. During the 1990s, CPOs viewed 'tagging' with some suspicion and complained about technological problems and the invasion of civil liberties (although a handful argued they had never been opposed to 'tagging' in principle). At the beginning of the 21st century, with increasing use of electronic monitoring, Chiefs now seemed to be reconciled to its use – and indeed saw it as a positively helpful tool in a probation officer's armoury.

There was a good deal of agreement that the most important change for probation during respondents' time in the service was to do with becoming more business-like, more accountable and a fully-fledged criminal justice agency; shedding its image of a social welfare service for offenders and becoming outcome-driven. The emphasis on effectiveness ('What Works') was seen by all as a highly significant development. Chiefs recognised that in the past questions of effectiveness had – to a considerable extent – been marginalised, and agreed that such a situation could not continue. While 'What Works' was seen as vital for the future of the National Probation Service (NPS) it was also seen as a high-risk strategy as it was being introduced at a remarkably fast pace with a limited evidence-base (despite the claims that the strategy was evidence-driven).

Another major change for Chiefs was the fact that the probation service was now managed, rather than individuals being left (almost) to their own devices. This, however, did not mean that staff were more difficult to deal with, rather that

management was now something that Chiefs had to do. In a sense, staff had become easier to deal with because – even though they had boundaries – these were now much clearer than they had been in the past. Chiefs themselves acknowledged that their own power and scope for initiative would be constrained with the advent of a National Probation Service. Precisely how this increased accountability would impact upon their work was still unclear, but would be a significant issue in the next few years. The major advantage of being part of a national service was that the Director would represent the probation service at the highest levels of government – something that had not happened previously.

Interestingly, the traditional links between prison and probation were not seen as positively as might have been expected; respondents questioned what the NPS got out of probation officers working in prisons and complained of having to deal with frequent changes of policy as governors moved on. The old probation-police distrust, however was no more – and this is a highly significant development. CPOs saw police-probation relations as being excellent, and this was almost solely down to both agencies having to work together with high-risk offenders and the introduction of Multi-Agency Public Protection Panels. The police, it was felt, now appreciated the skills and abilities of probation officers.

In general, respondents were optimistic about the future of the probation service. While they recognised the realities of the politics of law and order with its frequent demands for new initiatives and its ever-present emphasis on effectiveness, they were aware that probation had been given an opportunity to demonstrate its ability to play a key role in the criminal justice system. The next five years (which will take us to the 100th anniversary of the Probation of Offenders Act 1907) will be crucial for the National Probation Service and for Chief Officers.

Full Report of Research Activities and Results

Background

The Chief Probation Officers (CPOs) who formed the topic of this study no longer exist. On 1 April 2001 when the National Probation Service came into being, CPOs became Chief Officers, they lost the authority they had previously had in their probation area, they became more accountable, and many left their posts – partly as a result of an enticing redundancy package and partly as a result of the amalgamation of services (54 services became 42). Since the early 1980s probation has been caught up in a ferment of change and CPOs have had to manage their services with fewer resources, and ever-increasing demands from government. The study reported on here examined the views and attitudes of CPOs during a time of transition for the probation service when its future might well be decided.

Objectives

The aim of the research was to carry out the first study of CPOs in England and Wales with a view to assessing their views and attitudes about probation, and describing and analysing their role in the criminal justice process. More specifically, the objectives were:

- i. to investigate the social and educational backgrounds and career histories of CPOs;
- ii. to explore their perceptions of community penalties in general, the probation service in particular, developments in these which have taken place in the course of their careers and potential changes in the future;
- iii. to examine the role of CPOs as managers of a local probation service, and their relationships with central government, local criminal justice (and other) agencies, and their probation committees;
- iv. to locate the study both within the broader sociological study of elite groups as well as the more particular context of criminal justice elites; and
- v. to contextualise these objectives by providing an account of the introduction and development of the CPO role and that of the Association of Chief Officers of Probation (ACOP).

Objective v was not, in the end, addressed. It had been intended to commence the research on 1 June 2000, ten months before the National Probation Service (NPS) began operating, in order to allow adequate time to carry out interviews with all existing CPOs and to spend time studying ACOP archives located in Wakefield. While ESRC agreed funding for the project in good time, they could not sanction a start date until 1 November 2000 which left five months until the NPS came into existence. CPOs were under extreme pressure, some were leaving when they found they would not have a job under the new arrangements, the Hatfield train crash meant that rail travel was exceptionally difficult for many months, and flooding also made travel arrangements problematic. As a result, it took considerably longer than anticipated to arrange interviews with CPOs. During conversation prior to an interview in February 2001, one respondent mentioned in passing that ACOP's offices

were closing and its papers were being moved elsewhere. I immediately contacted the Wakefield office and visited it the following week to find a few boxes sealed up and to be told that a lot of material had been shredded and the remainder of the papers had already gone to the Home Office or the Probation Boards' Association (PBA) – my respondent was unsure of their exact destination. Subsequently, I inquired at the PBA about the whereabouts of the ACOP archives, but again no-one seemed certain of their destination (the Public Records Office at Kew was suggested as a possible location).

I also attempted to contact Sir Graham Smith, the then Chief Inspector of Probation, and Eithne Wallis, then the Director-Designate of the NPS to arrange interviews to discuss respectively the history of how CPOs were selected (as Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation played a significant role for some time), and future plans for Chief Officers. In neither case, despite several attempts, did I receive a response.

Methods

The intention was to carry out interviews with as many CPOs as possible who were in post prior to 1 April 2001 (54 in total), as well as with a handful of recently retired Chiefs. As a result of the problems mentioned above, recently retired CPOs were not approached. While ACOP alerted all CPOs to the existence of the research and received no comments objecting to it, as noted above it was much more difficult than anticipated to set up interviews with CPOs. Eventually, 47 interviews were carried out, although just over one-third (18) of these were done after 1 April 2001 and eight of these respondents were no longer Chiefs. While the intention of the research was to complete interviews prior to the NPD's birth, there were no significant differences between responses to interviews carried out before and after that date – apart from the fact that (as might be expected), those interviews carried out post 1 April 2001 tended to have rather clearer ideas about the impact of the NPD upon the work of a CPO.

Nine CPOs were not interviewed for the following reasons:

- one felt it inappropriate as she had only been a CPO for a short time and would not have a Chief's job after 1 April
- one had left his post on extended leave as soon as he had found out that he had failed to secure a Chief Officer's post
- two refused as a result of being 'too busy'
- one simply refused, giving no reason
- despite repeated attempts by telephone and letter, four CPOs did not respond

The interview schedule was piloted using a Deputy Chief Probation Officer and an Assistant Chief from Merseyside, and some minor amendments were made. Interviews lasted on average 120 minutes; the shortest took 73 minutes while the longest took 159 minutes. They were recorded using mini-disc and transcribed by a professional transcription service. Topics covered during the interview were the career history of CPOs, the work of the probation service, management of staff, relations with other organisations, and socio-demographic information. For one interview, the first half was wiped out by inadvertently using the same disc the following day due to mislabelling; the CPO in question was contacted and asked to

respond again to the missing part in writing but, as might have been expected due to pressure of work, declined to do so.

N6 was used to analyse the interview data.

Results

Personal background

Of the 47 CPOs interviewed, 34 were male and 13 female. Relative to other criminal justice agencies, this is a high proportion of females in top management posts but it should be remembered that at least half of maingrade probation officers are female. The average age of respondents was 52, with females a little younger than males (49 v 53). It had taken CPOs an average of 19.5 years to reach the top (ignoring one respondent who had entered as a Chief from outside the service, the shortest time was 13 years and the longest was 28 years); female Chiefs had taken 21 years on average, although this included periods of maternity leave for some, while for male Chiefs it had taken 18.9 years. CPOs had been in post for 7.2 years on average, although females were less experienced than males (the former had been in post for 4.2 years compared to 8.3 years for males). 20 (three females) out of 47 respondents were leaving the probation service on 31 March 2002, with 16 of these accepting what were agreed to be substantial redundancy packages. Of the remaining four, one decided to leave while the other three failed to secure Chief Officer jobs. Those leaving had an average of 10.25 years as CPOs, while those staying on had an average of 5.2 years; of the 14 Chiefs with 10 or more years in post, 11 chose to take the redundancy package. In other words, a considerable amount of experience and knowledge was departing from the probation service at a time when considerable change was underway – and some departing CPOs questioned the wisdom of this.

Almost all Chiefs were married (only four were not), and 40 had children. Families were usually made up of two children in their twenties or late teens. 30 CPOs came from middle-class backgrounds with fathers who worked in white-collar occupations (in this they were very different from Reiner's Chief Constables who came from working-class backgrounds). Almost all had a degree, with sociology (9) and history (8) being most common, although one had a degree in theology, one in German, one in engineering, and two in philosophy. Those without a first degree had been awarded a Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (except for one Chief who had joined the service as a CPO straight from a distinguished career in the Royal Navy, and he pointed out that initially he was viewed with considerable suspicion by his colleagues due to his non-social work background). Again their educational background marks CPOs out from Reiner's Chief Constables, although as Reiner pointed out a decade ago 'The chief constables of tomorrow are not only likely to be graduates, but to an increasing extent likely to have entered the force as graduates' (Reiner 1991: 60).

Chiefs were invariably satisfied with their career in probation; they had wanted to help people and had achieved this even though the recent pace of change and demands from central government had made their lives more fraught. Most said they would

rejoin the NPS even although it was a very different animal from the probation service they had originally joined.

Career history

Most respondents (three out of four) joined the probation service in the 1970s – a time of expansion for the service. They had been attracted to probation for a variety of reasons, but the idea of helping people was firmly part of the picture. For the great majority of respondents probation was their first job, but for the rest it was a decisive change of career. A typical career in the service began with a generic post as a maingrade probation officer working with juvenile and adult offenders under supervision, with prisoners on licence, writing reports, carrying out divorce court work. This was followed by a move into a more specialised post and then promotion to Senior Probation Officer. Reasons for applying for promotion had little to do with driving ambition; for the most part respondents talked of becoming bored in their post, wanting a new challenge, watching their immediate superiors and realising that they were not especially effective and that they (the respondents) could do better. Having become a manager, similar reasons lay behind further applications for promoted posts, although there was also a realisation that they enjoyed managing and could do it fairly well. Only a handful of respondents claimed they ever thought they would end up as a CPO; their progress through the service had been careful, opportunistic, one-step-at-a-time, with a dose of luck. Those who were leaving noted just how tempting the redundancy package was, how they had been in post for some time and relished the chance to do something different before retirement. Those staying on, saw themselves in post for a few more years and then moving on – either to leave the service if there was another round of redundancies, or to look for another post.

Very few Chiefs had ever considered seriously leaving the probation service; on the few occasions this had occurred it tended to be early in their career when money was tight and children were being born and a probation officer's salary was not high. Promotion was one way of increasing one's salary level and this kept respondents in the service.

The probation service

The probation service has moved on from its early days when 'advise, assist and befriend' was its *raison d'être*. Respondents felt comfortable with the idea that probation was about protecting the public and reducing reoffending; for most this was not a major change in attitude, they had felt for some time that probation's purpose was along such lines and were happy that it was much more focused now than it had been. There was no clear agreement that the three main community penalties – then the probation order, the community service order and the combination order (now the community rehabilitation order, the community punishment order and the community punishment and rehabilitation order respectively) – were necessary. Some felt that the combination order had never worked effectively – its two parts had never been properly integrated and there was uncertainty about where it should be targeted. Some – no doubt bearing in mind the work and the recent publication of the Home Office review 'Making Punishments Work' (Halliday 2001) argued that it would be

sensible to have only one community penalty with various conditions possible. Others saw a place for all three penalties.

While the probation service has had a place in prisons for many years, it was somewhat surprising that most CPOs – while recognising the work of probation officers in prisons as significant – were somewhat sceptical about it. They questioned what the probation service got out of it, they noted the administrative difficulties that could occur, and they pointed out that others could do such work as well as probation officers. Having said that, however, the ‘civilising’ aspect of probation officers’ working in prisons was seen as important for prisons.

When electronic monitoring was first introduced in England and Wales in 1989-90 as a requirement of a curfew condition for bailees, it would be no exaggeration to say that the probation service was opposed to ‘tagging’ (Mair and Nee 1990). With the second set of tagging trials (1995-96) the probation attitude was seen as ‘at best equivocal and at worst obstructive’ (Mair and Mortimer 1996), although as the trials continued the probation response improved. CPOs now seemed to be resigned to the fact that electronic monitoring was here to stay and that it had a role to play in community penalties; many noted that they had changed their minds about tagging and put this down to much-improved technology. Some claimed that they had never been opposed to it in principle, but had questioned where it might be most appropriately used. Certainly, as far as CPOs are concerned, electronic monitoring is now seen as a tool that is there to be used by officers (and this view is in marked contrast to the Chief Probation Officers interviewed in Rutherford 1993). Given the recent pilots in new uses of electronic monitoring as a condition of community penalties and its extension for the early release of prisoners, it is significant that the official line from the top management of probation areas with regard to electronic monitoring is more positive than ever before.

Probation has undergone many changes during the past 25 years (see, e.g. Mair 1996 for some of these). When CPOs were asked about the single most important change that had occurred to probation during their time in the service, a wide variety of topics were mentioned; most of these were of recent vintage, although some went back a number of years, e.g. the introduction of community service in the mid-seventies, the publication of the Statement of National Objectives and Priorities in 1984 (Home Office). What characterised virtually all responses, however, was the belief that probation had become a much more business-like, more accountable and focused, criminal justice agency. Thus, increased accountability, cash limits, National Standards, managerialism, a performance-driven culture, the move from being a social work service to a criminal justice agency, the reorganisation into a national service, a move from the margins to become a more visible service, the emphasis on the enforcement of orders all point to a change from the old image of a wishy-washy, social welfare agency to a hard-nosed part of the criminal justice system that is driven by outcomes and the need to demonstrate effectiveness.

One development recognised by all CPOs as highly significant for the probation service was the drive to take on board the ‘What Works’ or Effective Practice agenda. The single most important figure in spreading the gospel about ‘What Works’ was agreed to be Graham Smith (later Sir Graham), then the Chief Inspector of Probation (see, e.g. Underdown 1998; Chapman and Hough 1998). Interestingly, a number of

CPOs noted that there was a constitutional issue about the Inspectorate advising about policy and practice and then inspecting it. However, it was agreed that there had been a serious question mark about the future of probation in the mid-nineties during Michael Howard's time as Home Secretary and the Chief Inspector's successful selling of 'What Works' to the politicians was perceived as necessary (a necessary evil, for some) to ensure the continuance of probation.

But while many respondents considered 'What Works' to be vital for the future of the service, there was a clear recognition that this was a high risk initiative; there was much talk of putting all your eggs in one basket, or putting all your money on one horse. While Chiefs acknowledged that in the past there had been a reluctance to face up to questions of effectiveness and recognised that such a situation could not continue, they did worry that the research base for 'What Works' was not as full as might be desired and that it was being introduced very quickly into a service undergoing major structural reorganisation. If 'What Works' was seen to fail, some were anxious about how the National Probation Service would survive, although others were more cynical or optimistic about how the evaluations that were underway might be used.

There was general agreement that offenders had not got more difficult to deal with; their problems remained the same as had been the case when Chiefs had begun their careers in probation, but what had changed was the fact that probation staff were dealing with more serious and more high-risk offenders than they had done in the past – the case of sex offenders was often mentioned in this respect. There was also agreement that while there was far more drug-related crime, and there was more awareness of such crimes as domestic violence and paedophilia, and fear of crime had certainly increased markedly, crime itself had not changed significantly during Chiefs time in the probation service.

Management

The terms used by CPOs to describe their management style included participative, inclusive, empowering, but respondents also emphasised that they were no longer as likely as they had been in the past to try to secure full agreement about changes with their staff. They were more willing now to make a decision and then inform staff that this had been done and explain why; they were more willing to be decisive in their management role. Managerialism, however, was seen as a pejorative term which emphasised a technocratic approach to management (management by numbers) that focused exclusively on performance indicators and outcomes rather than processes and people. Staff as individuals were not generally perceived to be more difficult to manage, although there were several key qualifications made to this: first, because staff were being *managed* now as opposed to the very much laissez-faire attitude adopted by Chiefs in the past, life as a CPO had become rather more difficult; second, staff were under far more pressure now than in the past and required careful handling; they were also more likely to make formal complaints, but this was due to the emphasis everywhere on rights. There was also a feeling that in one sense staff management had actually got easier because they were aware of the boundaries, which had not been the case in the past (or if they had been aware, the boundaries were much more easily ignored).

While it was too early to state clearly what the impact of being part of a National Service would have on how Chiefs managed, they were certain that they would become more accountable, and that there would be a much greater emphasis upon performance. While this curtailed their previous power (it was acknowledged that this curtailment of CPO power had begun some years earlier), the advantage was that having a National Director should mean that the NPS had more power in government, as the role of the Director was seen as representing the service at the highest levels and arguing its case more coherently than had been possible in the past. Several experienced Chiefs who were staying on noted that they had been around long enough to know how to retain some discretion, although they commented that newly appointed Chiefs would be unlikely to be able to do so.

Relations with other organisations

The Association of Chief Officers of Probation (ACOP), which had ended as the NPS had begun, was not viewed as having provided a strong coherent voice for CPOs. Its structure was such that it could not claim to speak for all Chiefs, and as CPOs had been in the position of ‘mavericks’ or ‘robber barons’ in their areas prior to the introduction of the NPS, ACOP had not been especially effective. Ironically, ACOP tended to be seen as having been more effective in its dealing with government during its final few years, when perhaps the potential threats to the service forced it to become better organised. Some Chiefs saw ACOP as very much an old boys club which they had chosen to stay away from.

Probation Committees were seen as supportive and helpful, but not challenging and several CPOs noted that they had worked at trying to encourage the Committee to make them more accountable. The new Probation Boards would be more challenging and more interested in performance. Some Chiefs were slightly apprehensive about having the Chair of the Board around for half the week, but felt that as long as both recognised their separate roles then it would work out.

Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) had become more interventionist during the past 5-8 years, partly because there had been a vacuum in the Home Office where no-one was representing the probation service in a positive way. While there were questions about whether HMIP should have been acting in such a way (see above in relation to What Works), there was little doubt that there had been advantages for the probation service as the Chief Inspector was a powerful advocate who could be seen to have saved the service. With regard to inspections, these were usually seen as helpful although certain Inspectors were viewed with distaste as being rude and aggressive.

One key change in the service’s relationship with other criminal justice agencies was that the police now tended to be seen as a key partner. In the past probation and police were seen as incompatible - ‘one catches them and one lets them off’ - but CPOs now saw probation/police relations as being excellent – and this was almost entirely as a result of joint working on high-risk offenders and the introduction of Multi-Agency Protection Panels. The police now appreciated what probation officers could do in terms of assessing risk, a skill the police lacked.

While probation staff had been working in prisons for many years, relations with the prison service were more problematic. This tended to be seen as a result of governors constantly changing and introducing changes in policy as a consequence. Individuals, however, were important as a good personal relationship could open up the way to more effective joint working; and a change of Chief Constable or Prison Governor could lead to a different working relationship.

Relations with the courts and the Crown Prosecution Service tended to be adequate, although these agencies were seen to be at more of a remove from the NPS. Relationships with Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) were patchy, partly because YOTs had only recently been established and partly due to the politics of the YOTs and NPS being – to some extent – in competition for offenders (the possibility of YOTs taking responsibility for 18-20 year old offenders was not viewed with equanimity by CPOs)

Much more recently, with the introduction of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, various non-criminal justice agencies had been directed to get involved in multi-agency work with traditional criminal justice agencies. For CPOs, health (especially drug treatment services), education and local authorities had become important players, although building working relations with these organisations could prove difficult and frustrating. The potential for the public to become more involved in local criminal justice policy and practice was seen as a challenge. For most CPOs, the public only became an issue when they did not want a hostel for offenders built nearby; as probation officers dealt more often with high-risk offenders, public awareness of probation work became even more significant and considerable work would be needed to educate the public about probation. Probation Boards were charged with holding their meetings in public, but so far this had not resulted in attendance by members of the public.

The future

Respondents were generally optimistic (even if ‘only just’ or ‘on balance’) about the future of probation. They wanted the probation service to become a fully recognised player in the criminal justice system, to be effective in protecting the public and in reducing reoffending, and to have a guaranteed and stable future. Although there were many initiatives underway and the reorganisation of the service had not yet settled down, such hopes were seen as realisable. Significantly, there did seem to be confidence in the National Director who was obviously going to be a vital figure in providing leadership for the NPS.

CPOs were by no means an organised elite group working together effectively to influence penal policy; ACOP had exercised little authority or control over its members (who had included Assistant and Deputy Chiefs). CPOs occupied elite positions in local criminal justice systems and while their power and autonomy had diminished with the existence of a National Probation Service, they remained key figures in the local criminal justice scene. Indeed, with the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act and its emphasis on multi-agency working, local probation services may well have become more visible and influential players – even though the basis of the Act makes the police and local authorities responsible for crime and disorder. CPOs *are* part of the local criminal justice elite and the skills and expertise of probation staff are

becoming more widely recognised. Indeed, while Chiefs had become more hard-nosed (to be rather crude they had moved from being probation officers who had taken on a management role, to managers who saw themselves as strategic leaders of criminal justice professionals), their discourse was grounded in liberal, humane terminology and they can still be seen as pursuing 'decency' in criminal justice, to use Rutherford's term (1993).

The politicisation of law and order has made the criminal justice environment much more dangerous and difficult to navigate, but it has also given the probation service the chance to prove itself, and CPOs were fully aware that the next five years were likely to be crucial. Whether or not Chiefs can retain a satisfactory measure of power or whether they will become purely bureaucratic managers will be fascinating to watch.

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16 August 2000

Dear Chief Probation Officer,

I have been awarded a research grant by the Economic and Social Research Council to carry out a study of Chief Probation Officers; Lynn Stephenson notified you that ACOP's Research Advisor had approved the research in a letter of 28 July. The study will follow the same general approach as that taken by Robert Reiner for his work on Chief Constables in the late eighties. I hope to interview all CPOs in England and Wales before 1 April 2001, as well as a handful of recently retired Chiefs. The results of the study will be analysed and reported anonymously; no views will be attributed to individuals in any identifiable way. The major output of the research will be a book on CPOs which, it is hoped, will make an important contribution to probation studies at a particularly critical time for the probation service. ACOP is supportive of the research and the Home Office is aware that it is going on.

I attach a summary of the aims and methods of the research. I propose to contact you during the next six months in order to arrange a convenient date and time for the interview. In the meantime, if you have any questions concerning the research please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

George Mair
Professor of Criminal Justice

CPO INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

CAREER HISTORY

To start, I'd like to build up a picture of your career.

1. When did you join the probation service and which service was it ?
2. Can you recall what it was that attracted you to probation ?
3. Did you have any jobs before you joined the probation service ? Can we run through what these were, starting from the first. What was the job and for how long did you hold it ? Why leave ?
4. Can we now go through your probation career ? What was your first post - what did it involve - and how long did you remain in that job ? Why did you leave/move on ?
Next job.....
5. Did you ever think that you would end up as Chief Probation Officer ?
6. How would you characterise your progress in the probation service ? Deliberately planned/Luck ?
7. Looking back over your time in the probation service, what would you say was the single most important change that had occurred in the service ?
8. Have you ever thought seriously about leaving the probation service ?

IF NO Move to 9.

When was that ? Why ? What happened ?
9. What about your future ? Taking severance ? Why - what are your plans ?
Staying on ? Why ?

The next section is to do with the probation service and its work

THE PROBATION SERVICE

1. The Home Office has its statement of the purposes of the probation service (confront, challenge, change) - what do you personally see as its purposes ?
2. What would you say was the main priority of the service ?
3. Are the three main community penalties - the probation order, the community service and the combination order necessary ?

4. What about the work of probation staff in prisons ? How important is that ?
5. Does the service try to do too much ?
6. The probation service has - perhaps unfairly - been seen by the general public as on the side of the offender; sentencers see probation officers as part of their set-up; probation staff now have obligations towards the victims of crime. How are these balanced/reconciled in practice ? Any tensions ?
7. Perhaps the most significant threat to the service monopoly of community penalties is the curfew order with electronic monitoring - what are your views about electronic monitoring ? Have they always been the same or have they changed ?

I want to move on to talk about some of the major issues that have had an impact upon the probation service in the last 10 years.

KEY ISSUES

1. If you had to name three key issues that the probation service has had to face up to in the past decade, what would they be ? How have each of these been dealt with ?
2. Have offenders got any more difficult to deal with ?
3. A major policy/practice development has been the drive to take on board the nostrums of the 'What Works' gospel. How significant is this for the probation service ?
4. Where do you see the 'What Works' initiative as having come from ? Who have been the key players in pushing it ?
5. It could be said that the 'What Works' initiative or the Effective Practice initiative is based on very little evidence indeed, that much of this evidence originates from outside the UK, that it could lead to the loss of discretion by probation officers in how to work with offenders, and that is being introduced very quickly. How would you respond to that ?

Moving on now to some questions about management

INTERNAL MANAGEMENT

1. How would you describe your management style ?
2. Has your style of management changed during your time as a CPO ?
3. We've heard a great deal about managerialism in the last decade - what do you understand by this term and has it had any impact upon how you manage ?
4. Has the management of staff become more difficult ?

5. What most frustrates you as a CPO ?
6. What would you say were the key qualities needed to be a good CPO ?
7. Do you think that the existence of a National Probation Service will have any impact on how you manage ?

I want to move on now to your relationships with agencies/organisations that are external to the service.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

1. What would you say was the function of ACOP ?
2. What do you see as being the role of the Probation Committee ?
3. How would you describe your relationship with the Committee ?
4. What about the new Probation Boards - will they make a difference ?
5. The Inspectorate seem to have been taking an increasingly interventionist role. What are your views about this ? Is HMIP a positive influence ?
6. How do you see the National Director fitting into this ? How will she differ from the Home Office - from HMIP - from the Board ?
7. What do you think of the modernisation programme as a whole ? Has it been handled well ?

In the past there was always a sense in which the criminal justice agencies worked in isolation - not just from non c.j. agencies/organisations, but from other c.j. agencies as well. This is no longer the case and I want to discuss some aspects of multi-agency working.

MULTI-AGENCY WORK

1. How do you see your relationships with the police ? Changes ?
2. The prison service - changes ?
3. Would you say these were the key criminal justice agencies you are involved with ?
4. What about non-criminal justice organisations ? Which are the most important ?
5. So overall, how would you describe multi-agency working in your area ?

6. There is a sense in which the public generally is being encouraged to participate in penal policy at a local level (the Crime and Disorder Act). What influence might this have on your work ?

SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES & THE FUTURE

1. There's little doubt that Britain has changed over the last 20 years. What would you see as the major changes ?
2. How have these impacted on the work of the probation service ?
3. Has crime changed ?
4. What are your hopes for the probation service of the future ?
5. How likely are these things to happen ?
6. So would you be optimistic/pessimistic about the future ?

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

1. In what year were you born ?
2. Are you married ?
3. Have you any children ? How many ? Age ? What do they do ?
4. What was the highest educational level you reached ? Degree - subject. When ? Where ?
5. What type of school did you attend ?
6. When did you leave school ?
7. What sort of work did your father (guardian) do when you were 18 ?
Had he been in that kind of job for most of his life ? If not - what were his main jobs ?
8. Overall, are you satisfied with your career in the probation service ?
9. Would you rejoin if you could start your life again ? Do anything differently ?