



Home Office

The National PPO evaluation – research to inform and guide practice

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Home Office Online Report 09/07

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Executive Summary

Previous research indicates that a small number of offenders are responsible for a disproportionate amount of all crime. The Prolific and other Priority Offender (PPO) programme, implemented from 6 September 2004, directs resources to this group of individuals. This report summarises the findings from a wider Home Office evaluation of the PPO programme and is based on interviews with PPO practitioners and offenders in ten areas across England and Wales. The report primarily focuses on the implementation of the PPO programme, and also provides a number of practical recommendations aimed at improving practice.

Recommendations for practitioners

There were several points of good practice identified by practitioners that could be taken up more widely.

- All appropriate agencies should be involved and be encouraged to review the procedures for selection and deselection of PPOs to ensure that they are targeting the most problematic offenders in a transparent, defensible and robust manner.
- Co-location of key staff was seen by practitioners to add considerably to working relations and managing PPOs. Schemes should be encouraged to explore fully the possibility of co-locating key PPO staff and where possible to implement this.
- Schemes should identify all costs associated in delivering the scheme and seek out opportunities for additional funding, so as to enable the cost effective delivery of the programme.
- PPO staff should provide adequate levels of information about the PPO scheme and motivational support to PPOs.

Findings from the research

The PPO scheme itself, bringing together practitioners from a range of organisations, also brought with it additional benefits.

- The introduction of the PPO programme has brought clear benefits in the data sharing and partnership work between agencies involved in the PPO programme. However, blockages in effective communication and data sharing should be identified and attempts made to address them.
- Staff working within the PPO schemes felt that they obtained a much more rounded view of the offender which allowed better management of the PPOs.
- PPOs appear to have specific needs in terms of accommodation, drugs misuse and education, training and employability problems compared to other offenders. As such, it is beneficial that a multi-agency approach is taken, and it is crucial that the appropriate services are involved (for example, housing and drug treatment).

1. Introduction

Research to date indicates that a small number of offenders are responsible for a disproportionately large amount of crime (Home Office, 2001). The Prolific and Other Priority Offenders programme was designed to direct resources to this group of offenders through three strands.

1. **Prevent and Deter.** This strand is aimed at young offenders who are most at risk of becoming the next generation of prolific offenders, by reducing the opportunities for re-offending, so that those who are already criminally active do not graduate into prolific-offending lifestyles, and more generally reducing the numbers of young people who become involved in crime in the first place.
2. **Catch and Convict.** The goal of this strand is to prevent PPOs from offending through speedy apprehension and conviction for PPOs continuing to offend.
3. **Rehabilitate and Resettle.** This strand aims to rehabilitate PPOs through closer working between all relevant agencies and continued support for offenders on the programme.

The PPO programme was introduced nationally on 6 September 2004 and has been implemented by Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs)/Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) in all areas across England and Wales. This report draws on in-depth qualitative semi-structured interviews with both PPO practitioners and offenders in ten areas in England and Wales (further information on the methodology is provided in the Appendix). In addition, the qualitative analysis was supplemented with a national survey of CDRPs and an analysis of Offender Assessment System (OASys) data on PPOs and non-PPO offenders.

The report describes how the programme operated in practice from the perspective of both PPO practitioners and offenders. In particular, the report examines their overall view of the PPO programme in terms of its benefits and what has changed compared to previous working practices and experiences. The report also draws out some key learning points from the early implementation of the scheme and makes a number of practical recommendations with the aim of contributing to an emerging knowledge base on PPO good practice. In addition, some specific aspects of the PPO scheme identified during the course of the research as important issues are also explored in greater detail. These include the process of selecting and de-selecting PPOs, the most appropriate management and team structures, how PPO schemes were resourced and the importance of data sharing as an important facilitator to effective partnership working. Finally, two further issues are identified – accommodation needs and substance misuse using the results of the analysis of the OASys data – the responses to which require further development at both the national and local level. These are addressed in the following sections.

2. Results

Overall views of the PPO programme

The majority of the staff interviewed were positive about the PPO programme; indeed, this was one of the strongest themes to emerge from the interview analysis. Staff in at least five of the ten PPO schemes interviewed were able to describe a number of unexpected benefits for staff as a result of implementing the scheme. Specifically, according to the views of staff, working on the PPO scheme aided their professional development.

I think the benefits are that you get fantastically rounded members of staff as individuals because instead of working as just a police officer with police officers or a probation officer with probation officers you're getting to work in a complex and multi-disciplinary world. (Probation representative)

Staff also viewed the PPO programme as a more positive and proactive approach towards offenders compared to their previous work.

It's allowed us to evolve that a bit better ... allows our officers to target the right individuals, as opposed to reacting ... It's just a little bit more proactive in that respect. (Police representative)

The offenders interviewed were largely positive about the scheme. In particular, offenders favourably compared the frequency of interventions received on the PPO scheme to their previous experiences of the criminal justice system. Specifically, drug treatment and testing was highlighted by the majority of offenders as being beneficial to them. However, it is fair to state that a number of offenders were not always aware which of the interventions they received were as a result of the PPO scheme and which were not.

There was no support in the past – you had to go once a week to see a probation officer for 2 minutes – it was like clocking in once a week. All that did was keep you out of prison for a certain amount of time until you got nicked again. Now you get all the help that you can. (PPO)

They said I'd finished and if I need the help just ring them ... come back if I need anything – they've already said that ... even my Drugs Worker said – any time you need help just ring me. (PPO)

A number of offenders stated that the scheme was far more stringent than any of their previous criminal justice system involvement. Perhaps not surprisingly, some offenders complained about the level of enhanced supervision and tracking they have experienced from the police as part of the scheme.

When I got out of jail I had the police at my door every week – people kept calling me a grass because they kept seeing the police at my door. They were driving past me every night and stopping me when they saw me. Like I was being singled out – I didn't like it. (PPO)

Selection and deselection of PPOs

The basic procedure for the selection of PPOs was outlined in a previous research report on the PPO programme (Home Office, 2005). The staff interviews indicated that the basic selection/matrix template provided in the original guidance (Home Office, 2004) was viewed by many staff as only a starting point. As a result, there was a wide range of factors incorporated into the selection matrices. Given the importance of ensuring that the 'right' offenders are targeted by the programme, the issue of selection is particularly important. Research illustrated that selection criteria varied between PPO schemes and as such it is important that the criteria should be transparent and defensible.

In the views of PPO staff, the criteria for deselection would appear to have received less attention when compared to the selection of PPOs onto the scheme. This may have contributed to some confusion on what procedures to follow for this stage of the process. For instance, one interviewee reported that the police had deselected Rehabilitate and Resettle offenders without the involvement of probation practitioners. It is vital that deselection be given as much consideration as selection. Multi-agency involvement and the need to make joint decisions about selection and deselection are vital to the PPO scheme.

Practice recommendation

All appropriate agencies should be involved and be encouraged to review the procedures for selection and deselection of PPOs to ensure that they are targeting the most problematic offenders in a transparent, defensible and robust manner.

Conveying the right information to keep offenders motivated

From the 60 offender interviews conducted, the amount of information that PPOs were provided with on various aspects of the programme (selection, deselection, general aims of the programme) differed between individuals and between PPO schemes. Indeed, the offenders themselves had little understanding of the selection or deselection processes: many had received no information at all, whereas others thought that PPO status was only until the end of their licence. This suggests the need to communicate in greater detail the background to selection and deselection to PPOs on entry to the scheme.

I was shocked I was even on it ... for some reason someone's come off the list and I've been put on it. I don't know really why I'm on it. I don't think I'm very high risk, only low. (PPO)

A guy told me that I was going to be on the PPO scheme ... and I've had to sign my licence when I got out but didn't actually have a copy of what the PPO scheme would be about – he just told me verbally. (PPO)

Roughly half of PPOs interviewed thought that they had enough information regarding the scheme. However, those offenders who perceived that they did not have enough information prior to starting the scheme tended to be less positive about the programme in general. On a related topic, half the interviewees mentioned self-motivation as being important in obtaining a positive outcome from the scheme. This raises the issue that providing adequate information and potential motivational support and working to challenge negative attitudes may benefit the scheme as a whole.

I might have actually asked to go on it myself, but because of the way I ended up on it, not knowing, then just getting told, it made me like rebel against it in a way. (PPO)

I'd say that it is an excellent scheme for offenders that want to change, want to try and better themselves. (PPO)

Key point

PPO staff should provide adequate levels of information about the PPO scheme and motivational support to PPOs.

Co-location of PPO staff

Results from the PPO survey conducted indicated that co-location was apparent in over half of all PPO schemes. Co-location varied from individually seconded staff to whole centrally-located dedicated PPO teams. Where evident, co-location was viewed by PPO staff as valuable in delivering the programme effectively. One of the key aspects of the PPO programme is increased partnership work and multi-disciplinary team working, and as such, co-location can play a crucial part in this.

The co-location of police and probation, it's been pivotal to the success. It's presenting a united front to the offender, that we're all working in the justice system, and our ultimate aim is to reduce offending behaviour and protect the victims of crime. However we want to help people rehabilitate and resettle, but equally, if they fail to comply, we're looking at very stringent and very swift enforcement. And the police and probation actually share that ethos now. (Probation representative)

Particular benefits identified by staff from co-location were improved communication, data sharing/liason and partnership work. Staff without co-location said that they would welcome it. However, there were challenges in implementing co-location, such as in schemes comprised of several CDRPs or in rural areas. In such cases it may be important to identify

the main barriers to co-location and explore other techniques to improve agency working such as virtual meetings.

Practice recommendation

To improve multi-agency working schemes should be encouraged to explore fully the possibility of co-locating key PPO staff and where possible to implement this.

Funding of the PPO programme

The PPO programme was introduced without additional dedicated funding, meaning that central government made no additional resources available to set up and run the programme. However, the majority of staff interviewed encountered funding needs as part of their PPO work. Reported costs ranged from extra stationery through to allocation of necessary staff to the scheme. This raises the issue of opportunity costs.

Many staff described the disadvantages of managing or running the PPO scheme with no extra resources and felt strongly that additional resources would improve PPO work. This issue can be viewed as the reallocation of local resources and it is not clear from the research what, if any, effect this had on other programmes. It was clear that staff interviewees felt that such resources could help, for example, to make more interventions available to PPOs, more exclusive PPO staff and to allow for dedicated administrative support.

My budget hasn't been increased because I've got a PPO scheme. It's very much about directing resources within a team. When you've only got a finite number of resources, it's difficult ... I've got enough to protect the dedicated staff I've got. But beyond that, it's going to be hit or miss. (Probation representative)

Staff in six of the ten sites interviewed had acquired additional funds to support the PPO scheme and, as a consequence, managed largely to overcome the lack of dedicated funding. This funding came from various sources including the CDRP, from resources within the Government Office and from the Drug Interventions Programme (DIP). DIP involvement is appropriate for a number of reasons, both at the practical and policy levels as essentially both schemes are working towards the same aim with often similar groups of people.

Through DIP funding we've got a G Grade nurse based in the team, who is able to comprehensively assess offenders with substance misuse problems. (Probation representative)

Similarly, a number of staff said that they had publicised their PPO programme in order to generate interest and therefore secure additional funding. Given the scarcity of resources for implementing and managing the PPO programme, the effective cost management of the scheme would appear to be essential to the effective running of the scheme.

Practice recommendation

Schemes should identify all costs associated in delivering the scheme and seek out opportunities for additional funding, so as to enable the cost effective delivery of the programme

Data sharing and partnership working

Staff in all but one of the ten schemes interviewed had active information-sharing protocols. The one site without an active protocol was in the process of developing one but was still waiting for agreement from the appropriate agencies. The actual process of data sharing took

many different guises, such as exchanging information through phone calls, visits to different agencies and data-sharing meetings between agencies.

We're on the phone all the time ... We hold a panel meeting every month but between the last panel meeting and this panel meeting, we'll be actively working with the PPO if they so wish ... so there's a lot of discussion that goes on outside of the formal meetings. (CDRP representative)

Staff interviewees in each of the case study sites were able to describe how data sharing and partnership working had improved as a result of the PPO scheme. Indeed, the need for and the benefits of data sharing was one of the strongest themes to emerge from the interviews across all case study sites. Benefits of data sharing included: enhanced partnership working; better communication between agencies; better decision making; and a better holistic knowledge of the offender. These benefits were also discussed in terms of enhancing data sharing and partnership work for non-PPO offenders.

It's about recognising that no one agency has the ability to be able to stop prolific offenders offending, if we try and do it through one we're just going to fail...our plans need to be multi-agency. (Probation representative)

Practice recommendation

The introduction of the PPO programme has brought clear benefits in the data sharing and partnership work between agencies involved in the PPO programme.

Data sharing was not without problems, and staff interviewees in each of the sites were able to describe difficulties in both the implementation and process of data sharing. The two most frequent challenges were said to be accessing confidential health data and communicating with the prison service regarding PPO release. In the views of staff, resolving such issues is vital in delivering the PPO programme effectively. These issues can otherwise result in frustrations.

They're [prison] still releasing people on a Friday afternoon when we think they're coming out on a Monday, we're still getting people coming out that we didn't know were coming out, all those issues. I know there are frustrations with our operational staff who feel they have to go through bureaucratic processes to negotiate with prisons about information exchange and talking to people, so liaison with the prisons is the one area of work that still needs an awful lot done. (Police representative)

Various methods were undertaken by staff to attempt to overcome such challenges. These included having an identified PPO link in each prison, visiting prisons in person, developing letters for the offender to sign providing informed consent and holding team-building events.

Practice recommendation

All blockages in effective communication and data sharing should be identified and attempts made to address them.

Further challenges for PPOs: addressing accommodation problems, substance misuse and education, training and employability.

Previous research from the PPO evaluation indicated that PPOs had higher levels of most criminogenic needs as measured by OASys and that certain agencies such as accommodation services were not as involved in the PPO schemes as much as they could have been, especially given the increased accommodation needs of PPOs (Home Office, 2005).

To explore this issue in greater depth, information on offender assessments held on the OASys system were analysed comparing a sample of PPOs with a sample of offenders who were not in the programme. An OASys assessment consists of various judgements about offenders which are made by professional staff who are working closely with those offenders. The assessment consists of various modules, including one which explores the accommodation needs of offenders and others which explore their drug and alcohol use (see Appendix for more detail of the OASys data).

The evidence suggested that the accommodation needs of PPOs were judged by OASys assessors to be more strongly linked to their offending behaviour than was the case for other offenders. The data from these OASys assessments indicated that PPOs were:

- less likely than other offenders to be in suitable accommodation;
- less likely to be in permanent accommodation; and
- less likely to be in accommodation that is in a suitable location.

The analysis of the OASys data also indicated that PPOs were more likely to misuse drugs than a comparison group of non-PPO offenders. However, their alcohol misuse is typical of the wider offending population. Specifically, PPOs were:

- more likely to misuse hard drugs;
- more likely to misuse a variety of drug types;
- more likely to be fully occupied by the pursuit and misuse of drugs; and
- their offending was more likely to be judged as being linked to their drug misuse.

To address substance misuse amongst PPOs, there appears to be a need for interventions that are specifically targeted at drugs misuse. It was also important to note that a sizeable proportion of the PPO population (38%) did not have a problem either with drugs or alcohol.

Finally, data from the OASys assessments indicated that PPOs were likely to have larger education, training and employability (ETE) needs than the comparison group. Importantly, the data suggested that these needs were more likely to be judged as being linked to their offending behaviour than was the case for the comparison group. Specifically, the analysis indicated that PPOs were:

- more likely to have significant problems with school attendance, learning difficulties and attitude to education;
- more likely to have significant problems with work skills, employment history and attitude to employment;
- less likely to be in full or part time employment; and
- their offending was more likely to be judged as being linked to their ETE needs.

There seems to be a need to address the employment needs of PPOs in order to help reduce their offending behaviour. At the same time, it is important to ensure that interventions address the need for a foundation of work-related skills.

Practice recommendation

PPO offenders appear to have specific needs in terms of accommodation, drugs misuse and education, training and employability problems when compared to other offenders. As such, it is beneficial that a multi-agency approach is taken – although it is crucial that the appropriate services are involved (for example housing and drug treatment) where necessary.

3. Conclusions

In general, the evidence from the staff and offender interviews along with the national survey of CDRPs indicate that the roll-out and implementation of the PPO programme have largely been successful. The report demonstrates that practitioners see real value in the programme, are supportive of its aims and the approach, and that the programme has delivered tangible benefits in partnership working and data sharing.

The report highlights a number of practice findings and questions that local schemes should reflect upon in order to improve the PPO service. In particular, questions relating to the selection and deselection of offenders, overcoming data sharing challenges, cost-effective management of the PPO programme, the amount of information provided to the offenders and the prioritisation of accommodation, education, training and employability and drug interventions for PPOs. These are essential questions that should be incorporated into PPO practice.

The challenges that schemes had faced seemed to be broadly similar in nature: for example, sharing confidential information, being notified of prison releases and the lack of funding and resources. The numerous techniques that have been implemented to overcome such challenges are a credit to PPO schemes. It is reasonable to assume that the problems identified herein are also reflected throughout the wider PPO scheme population and that while Home Office guidance has helped to address some of these issues, schemes themselves will have also have worked on local solutions. As such, one area that would be beneficial for PPO schemes would be the inception of good practice networks to act as a mechanism for PPO staff to share good practice with one another.

This report is one aspect of a much larger research project evaluating the PPO programme. Ideally, this should be viewed in conjunction with the early findings report (Home Office, 2005) and the final impact report which specifically addresses the impact that the PPO programme has had on the criminal behaviour of the PPO cohort (Home Office, 2007).

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Further information is available at:

<http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/ppo/ppominisite01.htm> (last accessed on 25.01.07)

5. Appendix: Method

Interviews with PPO staff

One PPO scheme in each of the ten Government Office regions in England and Wales was selected to conduct staff interviews. Schemes were selected to ensure a mixture of urban/rural and DIP intensive/non-intensive areas. Staff from each of the core PPO agencies (the CDRP, the police and probation services) were invited for interview. In total, 52 interviews were held. Out of these, 45 were transcribed. Seven of the interviews were hampered by equipment failure and interviewer notes were fed into the subsequent analysis.

A semi-structured interview schedule was designed to meet research objectives, with interviews conducted face to face. Interview schedules were designed to capture key aspects of the PPO programme: set-up and implementation of the PPO schemes (scheme structure, difficulties in the set-up); value of data sharing and partnership work; selection and de-selection of PPO offenders; operating catch and convict; operating rehabilitate and resettle; costs and demands of the PPO scheme; and other general issues (i.e. PPO practitioners' general views, the link between the two strands, Jtrack and good practice).

Interviews with PPOs

A total of 60 interviews were undertaken from PPOs from PPO schemes in each of the ten Government Office regions. Forty-eight PPOs were currently on the scheme at the time of the interviews, whilst 12 had been deselected. Eleven of the 60 PPOs were interviewed in prison. The schemes were selected to ensure a mixture of urban/rural and DIP intensive/non-intensive areas.

Interviews were undertaken with 55 males and five females. The most common age category was from 26 to 30 (23 per cent, n=14), followed by 21 to 25 (20 per cent, n=12) and 31 to 35 (17 per cent, n=10). Three interviews were undertaken with PPOs under the age of 18.

The majority of interviewees described themselves as White British (67 per cent, n=40); two interviewees were White Irish. The remaining 18 PPOs were from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups. With the exception of one, the entire sample of PPOs had used illegal drugs. Heroin and crack cocaine were the problematic substances for the majority of users and ex-users; amphetamines had also been a significant problem in the past for a small number of offenders. Thirty-four offenders out of the sixty interviewed were on a daily methadone script and a number of others mentioned that they were using subutex or other prescribed medication. Three quarters of PPOs stated that their main reason for committing crime was to fund a drug addiction.

PPO survey

In late 2005, a survey of all 259 CDRPs and CSPs was also undertaken. The survey examined a range of set-up and implementation issues such as the selection of PPOs, co-location, deselection, funding and other similar issues. A 92 per cent response rate was achieved.

OASys data

To explore the OASys profile of PPOs, the most recent OASys assessments for the 4,067 PPOs (about 40% of the entire PPO population) who had an OASys assessment recorded between January and September 2005 were obtained. To provide a comparator group, the most recent assessments of a random selection of 3,412 other offenders who had an assessment recorded during the same period were also obtained.

Only community assessments were used in the current analysis. It is worth highlighting the caveats in using OASys data, for example that: the data cover just one point in time (January to September 2005), and it is possible that the differences are no longer there, or no longer as great. Also, OASys data were available for approximately 40 per cent of the total PPO population. Therefore, some caution should be taken in making firm conclusions on this evidence.

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