



2022

Managerial Role Review

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

STRATEGY, DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE REVIEW TEAM
PROBATION WORKFORCE PROGRAMME

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Acronomyn	Full Translation
ABC	Activity Based Costing
ALP	Aspiring Leaders Programme
BM	Business Managers
CBF	Comptency Based Pay Framework
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CQMF	Core Quality Management Framework
CRC	Community Rehabilitation Company
EDM	Exceptional Delivery Model
FLM	First Line Manager Training
FTE	Full Time Equivalant
HQ	Headquarters
H&S	Health and Saftey
HMIP	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation
HMPPS	Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service
HR	Human Resources
JES	Job Evaluation Scheme
L&D	Learning and Development
MRR	Managerial Role Review
MCH	Management Coordination Hubs
MO	Management Oversight
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
NQO	Newly Qualified Officer
OH	Occupational Health
OASys	Offender Assessment System
OMiC	Offender Management in Custody
ORCA	Operational Resource and Change Activity
P&Q	Performance and Quality
PDU	Probation Delivery Unit
PO	Probation Officer
PWP	Probation Workforce Programme
PRP	Probation Reform Programme
PS	Probation Service
PSO	Probation Service Officer
PTA	Practice Tutor Assessor
PQiP	Professional Qualification in Probation
PAROM	Parole Assessment Report Offender Manager
POD	Probation Operational Delivery
QA	Quality Assurance
QDO	Quality Development Officer
QDTs	Quality Development Tools
R&R	Recruitment and Retention
RPSS	Reflective Practice Supervision Standards

RPD	Regional Probation Director
SAO	Senior Administrative Officer
SPO	Senior Probation Officer
SFOs	Serious Further Offence
SM	Sentence Management
SDAT	Strategy, Design and Arcitecture Team
SOP	Single Operating Platform
SOC	Spans of Control
SEEDS	Skills for Effective Engagement Development and Supervision
SITT	System Improvement and Testing Team
TOM	Target Operating Model
ToR	Terms of Reference
TPM	Touchpoints Model
TU	Trade Unions
WLMT	Workload Management Tool

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- The SPOs and PDU Heads who contributed to the focus groups and Activity Based Costing workshops.
- The SPO Working Group who helped identify the activity of the SPO role and were consulted on the recommendations.
- The Managerial Role Review Working Group with key stakeholders across the business who contributed to the review and its project management.
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I would also like to acknowledge the significant amount of work completed by Sarah Chand and her team on the Senior Probation Officer Review 2020 on which this review was built.

1. Executive Summary

The purpose of the Managerial Role Review is to review the managerial elements of probation practitioner roles to inform workforce planning, role design and identify optimum spans of control. The review was commissioned in response to commitments from the Pay Agreement (2018) to support the roll out of the Competency Based Pay Framework for Pay Progression (CBF) and the Probation Service's Recruitment and Retention Strategy (2021-2024) to provide manageable workloads. This Review will contribute to the delivery of this objective with a focus on Senior Probation Officer (SPO) roles, initially within Sentence Management and Courts.

Activity Based Costing (ABC) workshops enabled us to obtain non-operational data and refine and refresh figures from the SPO Review (2020) to reflect the unification with Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC). Qualitative focus groups with SPOs provided greater insights into current workloads and areas of positive practice which have shaped recommendations in this review.

The findings in this review highlight the extent of workload pressures within the SPO role and recommend several changes which aim to deliver improvement. This review contains a series of recommendations which have been explored with stakeholders to ensure suitability and avoid duplication of work which may be underway elsewhere in the Probation Service. To build awareness and ensure that the review aligns with holistic strategic priorities, the recommendations have been themed to address the issues identified through the findings from the review. Some of the recommendations, which the team arrived at independently, mirror changes which are either already planned or are in the process of being embedded and evaluated elsewhere in the Probation Service (PS). However, we have retained them in our set of recommendations as they contribute to the objective of ameliorating the workloads of SPOs. Key recommendations to be implemented by the Probation Workforce Programme include:

- Providing administrative support for SPOs
- Recruiting shortfall for SPOs in Sentence Management and Courts and then utilising data from this review to adjust target staffing for SPOs from 2023/24
- Completing Job Evaluation of the role to ensure clarity of scope
- Completing aligned reviews of support/linked roles with the SPO Grade
- Moving to an ABC methodology for long-term resource modelling which would align with the ABC strategy and provide time for the additional recommendations to be embedded.

2. Introduction

The nature and volume of tasks undertaken by SPOs within the Probation Service (PS) has been questioned by SPOs, Trade Unions and senior leaders. It has also been raised in reports published by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP), including their 2021 Annual Report¹. Concerns focus on the span of control of staff managed, and the increase in HR related tasks and non-line management activities. These concerns were exacerbated by high numbers of inexperienced staff requiring additional support from SPOs and the impact of implementing the Target Operating Model (TOM). The Managerial Role Review has focussed initially on the priority cohort of SPO staff, building on the recommendations of the SPO Review led by Sarah Chand, completed in 2020.

Before making recommendations that aim to improve the workloads of SPOs in Sentence Management and Courts, the current position needs to be established to ensure recommendations address the relevant issues. This report sets out the methodology used to identify the current position, including:

¹ 2022. HMIP Annual Report 2021 (online) Available at [2021 Annual Report: \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmip/) [Accessed 10th March 2022]

- Scope of operation of the role, including responsibilities and activities undertaken and how they align with the job description.
- Factors impacting the role of SPOs, including workload and operational effectiveness.
- Timings of SPO non-operational activities to identify the most resource intensive part of the role.
- Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data obtained through SPO workshops, focus groups and interviews.

The data collated as part of the Review enables examination of current activity being completed by SPOs to assess and establish spans of control (currently set at 1:10 for Sentence Management and 1:12 for Courts). The Review aims to offer some evaluation of the recommendations from the SPO Review that are being implemented at this time and will also identify areas for continuous improvement.

Consideration will then be given to changes underway elsewhere within the organisation which could impact the role of SPOs. This report outlines the key findings from the MRR data with detailed analysis of how it relates to the role. Recommendations have been developed with the intention of addressing the issues identified from the quantitative and qualitative data. The rationale for each recommendation is also provided together with the intended benefit. We also set out how the implementation of agreed recommendations could be governed and measured to ensure the benefits of each recommendation are realised and there is appropriate accountability for actions.

3. Background

In 2017 the workloads of frontline probation staff were of increasing concern to SPOs, Trade Unions and senior leaders. The commitment to increase recruitment of probation staff for both the National Probation Service (NPS) and the Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) reflected this concern. Heavy workloads were deemed to be adversely impacting retention, staff wellbeing and service delivery. The SPO Review conducted staff engagement events with 40 SPOs across three locations to create timings for the tasks being conducted; 85 SPOs contributed to the time and motion exercise to further inform modelling. The pandemic meant there were limitations within the report as data was not available to refresh the model in the 2019 – 2020 financial year due to the implementation of the COVID 19 Exceptional Delivery Model. As a result, 2017 – 2018 data was utilised. The key recommendations from the SPO Review were:

SPO Review 2020 Key Recommendations

- OASys digital solutions and practice changes
- Approach to increase (Quality Development Officers (QDOs) and Practice Tutor Assessors (PTA) to reduce pressure of new staff development
- SPO Model is moved to the Probation Workforce Programme to update and maintain
- Smarter working practice
- Management Coordination Hubs
- Communities of Practice Framework

The global pandemic and reunification have delayed the implementation of SPO Review recommendations. Management Coordination Hubs (MCH) and the OASys Countersigning Framework have now been rolled out nationally, although have yet to be fully embedded and so the intended benefits are not yet realised. Reunification has contributed to the rate of change with staff needing to adapt to blended caseloads whilst balancing the need to embed new processes and continue to deliver a service with the resources available. Reunification has also highlighted additional learning and development needs whilst trying to ensure best practice from CRCs and the NPS was adopted in the unified model. Ways of working have changed and developed with the pandemic including the way we use technology.

High levels of Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) recruitment has increased pressures for the SPO role. High and increasing levels of PQiP staff require additional oversight and support to ensure they continue to progress through the training and undertake the relevant experience required. Recent PQiP recruitment campaigns have targeted 1500 additional staff which all require support from their line manager.

As a result, the Managerial Role Review was commissioned to build on the recommendations of the earlier SPO Review with the objective to inform workforce planning, role design and identify optimum spans of control. The MRR aims to ultimately review all managerial roles although the initial scope covers SPOs within Sentence Management and Courts, which is the focus of this report.

The terms of reference (TOR) developed for this review ([Annex A](#)) were agreed by key stakeholders and trade unions and endorsed by the Operational Resource and Change Activity Leadership Board on the 20th September 2021.

4. Methodology and Approach

To obtain robust insights into the factors affecting the SPO workload the following methodologies were adopted:

- **Quantitative research:** workshops to establish activity-based timings for SPO managerial activities.
- **Qualitative research:** structured interviews and focus groups to gain staff -centred perspectives and suggestions for improvement.
- **Secondary research:** review of relevant documents and data to identify opportunities, trends and anomalies which may inform recommendations.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** sharing findings and recommendations with stakeholders to gain their input and assess potential impact.

Limitations - As with any evidence-based approach there are some limitations in the methodology we adopted. These are summarised in [Annex B](#).

4.1 Quantitative Methodology

SPO non-operational activities were taken from the SPO Review 2020 with the intent that this data should be refreshed and updated. These activities were reviewed, updated and agreed upon by the SPO Working Group and Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) business leads. The review was dependent on the Activity Based Costing (ABC) workstream for operational activity timings. This work has now moved into a longer-term strategic objective which can be found in the recommendations section of this report.

Five quantitative data workshops were conducted to refresh the list of SPO non-operational activities with current timings and frequencies.

SPOs from all Regions were invited to the workshops to gain a representative assessment of national timings for 76 non-operational tasks which fell into five categories:



1. Planning

Planning means determining the organization's future position and situation and deciding how best to bring about that situation.



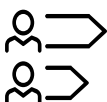
2. Organising

Organising decides where decisions will be made, who will do what jobs and tasks, who will work for whom, and how resources will assemble.



3. Leading

Leading is influencing or prompting the organization member to work together with the interest of the organization.



4. Monitoring

Monitoring consists of activities like measuring the performance, comparing with the existing standard and finding the deviations, and correcting the deviations.



5. Ad-hoc

Tasks that do not directly contribute towards to management of practitioners:

These tasks were identified and timed to inform recommendations but will not be included in any modelling. They will instead be identified as task and time that should be removed from the remit of SPOs.

During the workshops, SPOs provided the typical timings and frequencies for each activity. Volume drivers (recorded number of instances) and the proportion of staff who undertake the specific activity were also captured to calculate the time involved, expressed as Full Time Equivalent (FTE). This was done using the following method:

1. Activity timing (t) is multiplied by frequency (f). This was then multiplied by volume driver (v) times proportion (p). This figure was then divided by 60 to give output in hours.
2. The output in hours was divided by 1491, the number of effective working hours per annum for this grade.
3. Tasks that could be undertaken by Management Coordination Hubs or alternative roles will have a reduction applied to them as those specific tasks will not always be undertaken by an SPO. The reduction is to 0.20, meaning the task will be transferred to the MCH (or alternative role) 80% of the time. We acknowledge that this is not currently the situation although is reflective of the intended use of MCHs.

4.2 Qualitative Methodology

A series of structured interviews and focus groups were conducted to identify:

- What motivates SPOs in their role
- How their role has changed over time
- Drivers of workload including non-core activities
- Suggestions to improve the 'do-ability' of the SPO role and their operating environment

Five structured interviews were carried out with SPOs to test the method and questions to be used. Six qualitative focus groups were then undertaken, four sessions with SPOs from Sentence Management (SM), one from Courts and another with Heads of Probation Delivery Units (PDUs). A total of thirty-nine SPO's participated in the focus groups; twenty-nine from Sentence Management and ten from Court. Eight PDU Heads participated in a separate focus group. SPO's from all regions were invited to obtain a representative reflection of the current situation. A summary is shown below:

	Focus groups	Structured interviews	Total
SPO – SM	29	3	32
SPO - Court	10	1	11
PDU Head	8	0	8

The interviews and focus groups were recorded although all data remained anonymous. The transcripts were analysed and content was themed. Full details of methodology, interview guides and participation are provided in [Annex C](#).

4.3 Document and Data Analysis

In addition to the qualitative and quantitative research, secondary data sources relevant to the MRR, primarily the relevant strategy and policy documents and workforce data, were analysed. The purpose was to identify trends, anomalies and opportunities which could inform recommendations. The documents reviewed are listed in [Annex D](#).

This review included job descriptions for various roles within the PDUs, learning and development available for probation practitioners and evaluation reports for processes that have recently been implemented. This ensured that changes that potentially impact the SPO role were accounted for while providing context for the qualitative workshops when participants talked about positive or negative aspects of their role.

The review of job descriptions enabled comparison between the intended and actual activities undertaken by both SPOs and other roles within the PDU, which varied from location to location.

A series of hypothesis about potential drivers of SPO workload were tested through the analysis of statistics and data provided by the Corporate Data and Statistics Team. The hypotheses and data sets reviewed to analyse these, together with a summary of the resulting findings, are outlined in [Annex E](#).

Data analysed include trends relating to workforce headcount and FTE, turnover, sickness rates and current spans of control.

4.4 Stakeholder Engagement

Data analysis enabled the identification of key 'pain' points and opportunities to improve workload. An initial set of recommendations were developed to address these, which were tested with stakeholders to assess suitability and potential impact on SPO workload.

Stakeholder conversations, as well as the document review, enabled us to identify which of the initial MRR recommendations are either within the planned scope of other PS workstreams or are in the process of being implemented. This has enabled the MRR Review to focus on material recommendations that are not already in scope.

Key stakeholders consulted include:

- Trade Union representatives
- SPO working group
- MRR working group with representation from business leads
- PDU Head Working Group
- Regional Probation Directors
- Probation Workforce Programme
- Probation Reform Programme
- Relevant Business Leads in HMPPS; including SOP, HR, MoJ Digital, Leadership, Talent and Capability Team

5. Key Findings from Research

5.1 Key Findings from the Quantitative Data

The quantitative data has been used to inform the analysis and supporting recommendations below, and within the recommendations table. Further work is planned to obtain activity timings for operational work to inform resource modelling. All non-operational FTE timings captured can be found in [Annex F](#). The following were identified as key findings resulting from the quantitative data captured:

- **The impact of COVID and Reunification** have been seen to have an impact, increasing timings for activities such as reading policy documents, sickness and absence management
- **Increase in PQiPs and new staff** has led to an increase in the volume of Quality Assurance (QA) activity. (This had already been identified as an issue in the SPO Review 2020 prior to the increased intake of PQiPs).
- **There has been scope creep within the SPO Role** - QA activity and oversight has also increased as a result of 'scope creep' and the introduction of additional new policy frameworks which require oversight steps from SPOs.
- **SPOs complete ad hoc activity not included in their role** - We discovered that SPOs are completing ad hoc work outside their job description. We completed a general exercise to time this which came to 86.5 FTE SPO annually.

The top ten non-operational activities that SPOs spend their time completing are:

Non-Operational Activity	National FTE Calculation
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Dealing with non-offender management related emails	65.25
Case allocation/workload management	51.63
PDU Manager Meetings	43.80
Reflective Practice Supervision (RPSS)	27.29
Team Meetings/briefings	19.34
Supervision outside of RPSS - PQiP	17.40
Pastoral Care	14.31
Arranging sickness cover	12.84
Annual leave sign off	11.78
Preparing for internal meetings	9.10

From these top ten activities assumptions can be made about the impact of the pandemic, Exceptional Delivery Models (EDMs) and reunification.

- Dealing with non-offender management emails is one of the biggest jobs SPOs talk about. There were areas of really good practice where Smarter Working had been fully embedded and was seen to be having a positive impact on reducing email traffic. However overall, technology was not being used to its potential and in some cases it was reported that Microsoft Teams was adding and duplicating communications.
- The time taken for case allocation has increased with new processes since reunification.
- PDU Managers Meetings were high as they often last for a day and had increased in frequency due to the amount of information emanating from the centre (HMPPS Head Quarters) which needed to be discussed.
- This was also reflected in the amount of team meetings required.
- We would expect to see Reflective Practice Supervision as one of the highest activities recorded.
- The increase in supervision for PQiPs is expected with the significant increase in recruitment of this grade.
- Pastoral care and sickness cover can also be expected to increase with the global pandemic over the last few years.
- Annual leave sign off was unexpectedly high but will prompt a process review to see how it can be improved or supported by administrative staff.

5.2 Key Findings of Qualitative Data

[Annex G](#) contains an analysis of the evidence from the focus groups, themed into business categories. All qualitative data was presented to stakeholders during the consultation phase of the Review. Areas of good practice were also identified and used to inform recommendations.

Below are the main themes from the qualitative work which impacted on SPO workloads and well-being. They align with the themes from the quantitative data. Quotes have been taken from the Dossier of Qualitative Research which collates significant quotes taken from staff

relating to key areas of the business, which can be found in [Annex H](#) and represents the strong voice of the SPO stakeholders who contributed to this Review.

5.3.1 SPO Motivations

SPOs are passionate about their work, and despite the challenges they face on a daily basis, they love developing individuals and teams and motivating them to provide high levels of service delivery. This is the reason they have chosen to become SPOs and do not want this part of the role to change, be taken from them or to become a separate role. SPOs reflect that their motivation for applying for the role is similar to why they chose a career in the Probation Service, which is working with people to develop change and improve and reducing risk to the public. However, many said that being a good Probation Officer (PO) does not require the same skills it takes to be a good SPO. POs are looking at the SPO Role and what it has become and are not as motivated to apply for these roles.

“Staff supervision. That's what I see my purpose as sitting with staff and talking to them, going through their cases, checking on their development and their well being. To me, that's the core of the SPO role”

“To me, the practice side, operations comes first every time. People need to be safe with their case work and that's my primary role, really. That's where I think my time is most needed.”

“For me it's the interaction with the staff that I manage on a day to day basis. It's having those case discussions, it's seeing them kind of develop, grow confidence, grow skills. I think that's a part of the job. The reason why I think I applied to be an SPO in the first place, was to be able to have that kind of interaction with staff.”

5.3.2 Lack of Clarity in the SPO Role – “The Junk Drawer”

A reoccurring theme was SPOs feel like they are “the junk drawer you have in the kitchen where you put everything that has no other place to go”. We discovered that a significant amount of ad hoc activity SPOs pick up is not included in their job role and the considerable number of processes which seem to require everything to go through an SPO. There is a culture of SPOs picking up tasks where there is otherwise no apparent owner or clarity which contributes to their unmanageable workload.

Additional tasks have been layered on top of existing SPO roles and responsibilities with no option to delegate tasks due to the workload pressures for Probation Practitioners. SPOs have been absorbing tasks that were previously not within the SPO remit with the expectation to deliver these tasks to a high standard.

There is a lack of consistency across the regions and across PDUs in what SPOs are asked to do. This is often dependent on PDU structure and resources. We have not made it clear as a business what their function is. There is a pervading view that the focus of SPOs should be on Reflective Practice Supervision Standards (RPSS), local stakeholder engagement and the development of their teams through QA and Performance and Quality (P&Q).

Court SPOs feel they are a 'bolt on' to Sentence Management rather than having their own defined role, resulting in ongoing pressures to keep informed about Sentence Management affairs and offer staffing support when required without it being reciprocated.

The uncertainties of the pandemic created additional responsibilities within the Exceptional Delivery Model (EDM) and the changes resulting from reunification have contributed to SPO and practitioner pressures which has hindered implementation of positive changes.

"I think we have developed a culture [...] that if somebody doesn't have the capacity it falls to Offender Management to pick up. As if there is an infinite amount of capacity amongst these individuals"

"SAOs and business managers, there's lots of things they should be doing, but our staff shortages go right across. So if your SAO is as brilliant as mine is, but is managing God knows how many staff across two offices that are quite a long way apart and is absolutely on her knees, the last thing I'm going to do is say, 'oh, actually, this is your job.' It just doesn't work like that."

"It's just a lot of pressure, constant emails saying 'you need to do your COVID risk assessment. You need to do your general risk assessment. Your safe working practice' and I think if I worked in a bigger office, [...] there's a business manager there, I bet they do it. I'm sure their SPOs don't have to do it."

5.3.3 Resources and Staff Shortages

The staff shortages in other roles such as PO, PSO, Administration and Quality Development Officers puts additional pressure on SPOs, as highlighted above, as these shortages result in many tasks falling to SPOs due to their lines of accountability for their staff and team.

For SPOs the high workload of their staff impact on their own workload (Management Oversight (MO) and team management of work). SPOs found that allocating and reallocating work during staff absences was becoming a significant issue causing stress and taking up their time. SPOs commonly reported picking up Offender Manager and Court Officer work from their team when resources were low.

"We've just got too many people telling us what to do and not enough people doing it."

"The amount that has then been put onto an SPO to be able to do on top of everything else has been unmanageable, quite frankly. When you've got an entire team that are operating at 130 or 140, 168%, what does that say about your own workload in it?"

5.3.4 Inexperienced Staff

The level of inexperienced and poorly trained staff adds more pressure to the SPO role due to the need to return more countersigning and undertake more ad hoc supervision. The current policy and processes in the organisation support a culture of infantilisation of staff who have become less enabled due to the high level of SPO oversight required.

Concerns were raised about the current training offered and the increased input that SPOs feel that they need to provide to ensure staff capability. Much of the training offered is via e-learning so there is an increased responsibility for SPOs to ensure understanding and that the learning is embedded so it is not a tick box exercise. There was a common view that staff coming out of the PQiP training were less experienced and skilled than where they would have expected them to be and therefore continue to require high levels of input and supervision to bridge the gap in learning.

It was felt we need to provide training and to develop a culture which enables our staff to be professionals and removes the need for the high level of scrutiny that we currently have.

"[Most] people I'm managing [have] been in the service for 18 months or less. That is a huge burden of queries and questions and inexperience to be dealing with."

"I'll do anything to support anyone to learn and get them the opportunities and the shadowing opportunities, but with the best will in the world, I don't have time to sit with someone and train them."

"It feels like we've gone back to micromanaging staff, and I wonder if that's because what we're not investing is the time and effort to the team to develop their ability, their knowledge, their confidence. [...] As an ex PDA myself, you invest that time, so that your staff can hit the floor running eventually, you put that effort in the beginning to get the payoff in the longer term, and I don't feel we get that in the same way anymore"

"Although we do have training, it's e-learning - some people can't learn through e-learning. So it's about discussing, it's about that one to one, it's about making sure people understand what you're doing."

5.3.5 Responsibility and Culture

SPOs feel responsible for everything from the well-being of staff during a global pandemic to locking up the office. Every risk and tier level requires SPO input for decision making and scope creep has meant that SPO oversight is required in too many processes. SPO responsibility for everything appears to be an embedded cultural belief and relies on the

goodwill and commitment of SPOs, although we did find evidence of strong leaders who were able to resist pressure and delegate.

SPOs do not feel supported by the organisation and that the “buck stops with them”. Although many did feel supported by their PDU Heads it was reported that RPSS are not regularly being completed with SPOs by their own line managers.

SPOs fear Serious Further Offences (SFOs) as they do not have the time to carry out their responsibilities to the best of their ability and worry about missing things. The Touchpoints Model and requirements for Management Oversight recording has exacerbated this feeling in an overwhelming number of staff (although in a few has provided reassurance as it was designed).

There was a strong view that the organisation needs to take full responsibility for what is possible, and any demand management needs to be clear or SPOs feel as if they are being exposed. Resolutions need to sit with the business and not left with the SPOs to make the decisions. Above all there needs to be honesty and openness about the position we are in so that real conversations can be had, and real solutions found.

“But there is always this organizational expectation that actually, the buck stops in case management, and as an SPO therefore, you are accountable for that in your team, for what they have done.”

“You do feel quite exposed and concerned that some of this is going to come on you, because they do say absolutely ‘if that touchpoint model isn't in there and that was our responsibility, and there's an SFO, you will be challenged about that.’ There's no ifs or buts.”

“The language used, especially from the senior management team in emails, and the messages that are brought down are sort of invoking that fear culture, that worry of the SFO. It might be because of you know that big SFO, [...] where the probation officer and the SPO actually got sacked as a result of it and it's like, well, what happened to the head? ...The accountability, we feel like the buck stops with us. [That] seems to have just really increased in the last two years.”

“You are left feeling like you're just doing a pretty rubbish job of everything”

5.3.6 New Processes and Pace of Change

The impact of change and new processes on the SPO role accelerated with COVID and reunification. Problems were highlighted with the focus and channel of change with SPOs juggling everything filtering down from both national and regional teams. SPOs have reported the number of new processes, procedures and changes in practice as being unmanageable, requiring a new way of working in addition to demanding workloads. HMPPS Head Quarters was referred to as the “bringers of red tape” and it was felt that, although well meaning, some of the processes often added more time rather than improving things.

There were significant concerns raised about the level of quality assurance processes which have now been added into the role. This has resulted in most processes requiring checking and running past an SPO, resulting in processes which are more time consuming and disempower staff. SPOs consider that they do not have time to complete the structured quality assurance of their staff's work and that many of them are not currently completing this activity.

"What I have coming through to me is this idea of 'Oh well, you know, we're a bit scared about this inspection report or this SFO, so we've put a process in place so that that doesn't happen again.' But actually the process [...] isn't about investing in staff and making sure that we avoid the need for that process by just doing our jobs well. It's just loads of tick box stuff that adds additional layers of responsibility to our level."

"In principle I think lots of things are quite potentially useful. What they haven't done is apply the logic of the current context and about how is that doable when staff have this and when managers have this. And I think that's where it falls apart."

"...[T]hey are often a sledgehammer to crack a nut."

"Absolutely I can see some benefits and the reasons why it might have been introduced, [...] but all of a sudden, we're told, 'right, you need to do that'. Well, OK, but how are you creating the space to make that possible, in any way."

5.3.7 HR Support, Administrative Support and Management Coordination Hubs

SPOs expressed lack of confidence when completing what they see as HR work such as handling cases of sickness and disciplinaries. There is a lack of learning and development (L&D) for critical aspects of the role such as HR processes and lack of awareness of available development programmes. Furthermore, they have no protected time to undertake specific learning.

The Management Coordination Hubs are still being embedded and SPOs lacked confidence in them. A common comment was 'It's easier to do it myself'.

SPOs are the only operational band who do not have their own directly assigned administrative support.

"We have to do [admin] ourselves. I'm guessing some stuff I guess would be sensitive, but other stuff, like updating the annual leave thing, stuff like that, it's time consuming."

"I've been landed with a basically a disciplinary investigation to do, which is a serious allegation, that could end up with someone being dismissed. So I've got no help for that, it's literally 'here's the policy, you familiarize yourself with that, arrange a meeting, do the report on this template and it all needs to be done by this date'. But if I get that wrong, that is serious for that person. "

"What I could do with it is a secretary. Or even somebody to like manage your diary for you or prepare stuff. That's what I could do with. And then I'd be fine. "

“The management support hub I think it should be called the ‘Just do it yourself hub’, I don’t see the point of it at all. It is useless”

“We need proper trained HR professionals, [...] not some bloke who was a probation officer and is now an SPO”

6 Spans of Control

Spans of control has been a significant issue raised by stakeholders including SPOs, Trade Unions, PDU Heads and Regional Probation Directors. There is a widely shared view that the current spans of control for SPOs in Sentence Management and Courts is too high. This has been supported through our qualitative and quantitative research.

6.1 Qualitative

In the focus groups SPOs shared concerns that spans of control were calculated on FTE rather than Headcount. The quantitative work we conducted showed that this was having a big impact on their workload. Many SPOs reported that they are managing between 13-16 members of staff (headcount). Feedback from SPOs was that they consider their spans of control to be too big to manage with the expectations of what was required for each member of staff. This sentiment was also echoed in the PDU Heads focus group when asked the ‘magic question’ of what could solve the workload issue the response was to “reduce spans of control”.

“With everything that we do and are expected to do as part of this role, once you get in to double figures it’s nigh on impossible to do – to do to the level of quality that’s expected”

“My solution is really simple, and it’s just a smaller span of control. [...] 100% needs to be looked at and reduced if they want people, us, to have any chance of doing all the tasks.”

6.2 - Organisational Spans of Control

It is difficult to compare the Probation Service to other organisations as nothing else is quite like it. Research states that there is no one single number for spans of control that applies to all organisations and that chasing this number can even reduce effectiveness. Research evidences that the following managerial complexities should help determine the appropriate span of control:

- **Time allocation** – how much time is spent on their own work in comparison to managing others.
- **Process standardisation** – How standard and formally structured is the work process.
- **Work variety** of the individual direct reports.
- **Team skills required** – How much experience and training to team members require.

McKinsey & Company ² identify five managerial archetypes (outlined below) with spans of control varying from three to fifteen plus. Whilst elements of a practitioner role are standardised, there are still large elements of fluidity given the varied nature of working with people. The current workforce likely requires additional oversight whilst building experience which would contribute to the time taken per direct report. When considering McKinsey & Company's archetypes an SPO would fall into the category of 'Supervisor', with a span of control of 1:8-10 although the self-sufficiency of direct reports would reflect the 'Coach' archetype as being more appropriate given the time taken for direct reports to become self-sufficient.

When considering the current relationship between SPO and practitioner it could be challenged that staff are not being enabled to become self-sufficient due to the considerable input and oversight required by SPOs and this would also support an argument to further reduced spans of control.

Archetype	Span of control	Time taken for direct reports to become self-sufficient
Player Coach	1:3-5	Several years
Coach	1:6-7	12 months
Supervisor	1:8-10	6 months
Facilitator	1:11-15	2 months
Coordinator	1:15 plus	2 weeks

6.3 - Data on Current Spans of Control

This data does provide us with an idea of the current situation with spans of control. However, we must recognise that there are *limitations* with the data as some SPOs are working across functions. In addition, some PQiP SPOs included in this data who have an agreed span of control of 1:15 and it is also likely that there are some recording inaccuracies. Currently there is a workstream to improve the data on SOP post-reunification to enable us to start build a more accurate picture of 'one version of the truth' (see recommendations). This data also only represents a snapshot in time with changes being made to staffing on a regular basis.

Current workforce modelling applies an agreed span of control of **1:12 for Courts and 1:10 for Sentence Management**. The current national averages are showing 11.71 for Courts and 11.61 for Sentence Management. There is therefore a priority to recruit into the current vacancies to reduce existing spans of control.

² McKinsey & Company 'How to identify the right spans of control for your organization'. Acharya, Lieber, Seem, and Welchman (2017) <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/how-to-identify-the-right-spans-of-control-for-your-organization> [Accessed 23 November 2021]

Region	Current SM Span of Control based on FTE (model 1:10)	Current Court Span of Control based on FTE (model 1:12)
East Midlands	11.12	10.9
East of England	12.21	12.42
Greater Manchester	12.44	10.52
Kent, Surrey and Sussex	15.69	14.52
London	12.21	9.44
North East	15.44	12.36
North West	10.22	13.72
South Central	10.53	12.54
South West	12.19	10.80
Wales	11.90	20.95
West Midlands	10.14	10.22
Yorkshire & Humberside	10.38	13.81
National Average	11.61	11.71

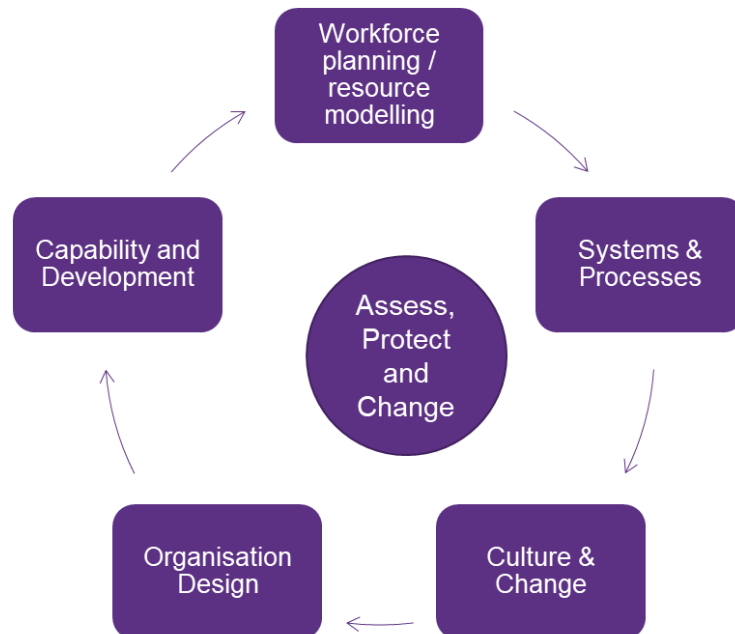
6.4 Reducing Spans of Control for SPOs.

To reduce the spans of control of SPOs in Sentence Management to 1:9 by 22/23 would require a total of 785.87 SPOs and based on target staffing this would be an additional 73.6. These will need to be recruited from PO resource pool in addition of a current shortfall of 114.9 so will require 188.5 new SPOs to be recruited into post. To reduce spans of control for SPOs in Court to 1:11 by 22/23 would require a total of 113.65 and based on target staffing this would be an additional 8.31 SPOs. The current shortfall is 11.3 so we would need to recruit 19.61. The impact of this recruitment on total practitioner workload would be an increase nationally by 4.4%. Onboarding of PQiP over the coming months will have a positive impact on workload and could mitigate this impact.

Reducing spans of control is something that the business and senior leaders are supportive of and recognise needs to be reflected in target staffing, but the initial position needs to be to recruit SPOs to fill the current 126.2 vacancies being held nationally to bring us to the current 1:10 and 1:12 ratio. Once the business has achieved this position then further assessment can be made and informed by the ABC workforce resource modelling to position funding to review spans of control and reflect this in target staffing figures.

7 Analysis and Recommendations

The MRR findings and recommendations have been divided into the following five categories. Findings and relevant recommendations are detailed below and a more detailed breakdown of how recommendations link into MRR findings can be found in [Annex I](#):



1. **Organisation design** - recommendations to ensure operating model, organisational structures, job design and role accountabilities are fit for purpose and operating effectively.
2. **Workforce planning / resource modelling** - recommendations designed to enable capacity planning and resource modelling to undertake workforce planning to meet demands of PS.
3. **Change implementation and culture** - recommendations to improve work environment relating to ways of working and organisational stress.
4. **Capability and development** - recommendations to enhance capability of practitioners through selection, retention, development and continuous professional development (CPD). Includes any diversity considerations.
5. **Systems and process improvement** - recommendations to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of processes and practices through enhanced use of technology, automation, migration of best practice, policy/process improvement etc.

7.1 Organisation Design

A significant finding from the SPO focus groups is a lack of consistency in how roles and responsibilities are carried out in Probation Delivery Units (PDUs).

Both the MRR qualitative and quantitative research highlighted that SPOs are undertaking a significant number of diverse tasks which fall outside of their role and are explicitly the

responsibility of other roles within the PDU, particularly Business Managers and Senior Administration Officers (SAO). Examples include:

- Health and Safety (H&S): undertaking health and safety risk assessments, ensuring availability of First Aid boxes, conducting H&S and fire evacuation drills, emptying face mask bins, delivering equipment to support reasonable adjustment for disabled staff
- Facilities management: attending relevant meetings, workplace inspections, arranging waste collection, arranging repairs e.g. leaking taps, broken door
- Human resources (HR): setting up new joiners, ID badges, ordering of equipment
- Ad hoc: managing car park rotas, checking CCTV, reception attendance for difficult cases, open and lock building at start and end of the day.
- Many HMPPS processes are designed with a step that work is run through an SPO and there are numerous activities which require management oversight which contributes to excessive workload and micromanagement of staff.
- Practitioners do not currently have a culture of reflective practice by themselves or with peers and this leads to more informal supervision with SPOs.
- Whilst the influx of PQIPs, NQOs and PSOs is welcomed by SPOs it has created additional workload pressures due to the need for greater supervision, management oversight and developmental discussions. High workloads likely contribute to staff leaving which limits the return on investment provided to develop staff.

Activity-based timing workshops established that:

- SPOs spend an average of four (4) hours per week (approximately 11% of their working week) undertaking ad hoc activity which is not included in their job role. If this finding were to apply to all SPOs in these services, this would equate to 86.5 FTEs. However, the operating model varies from area to areas so the FTE impact will be less in certain areas.
- The national time spent on increased supervision for PQiP staff in addition to the mandatory supervision sessions equates to 17.4 FTE.
- SPOs' core workload is exacerbated by taking on additional tasks that fall outside their established role. Furthermore, these tasks could potentially be done more efficiently by appropriately qualified people. E.g. Health and Safety (H&S) practitioners or facilities managers.
- Approved job descriptions explicitly state that many of the above tasks should fall to the Business Manager (BM) and Senior Administration Officers (SAOs) at PDU level, but are often carried out by SPOs due to lack of BM/SAO resource and clarity on the specific activities they are accountable for.
- In practice PDU structure, roles and support vary across areas. Some areas, for example, have Business Managers who are carrying out H&S activities as intended from the job descriptions whereas others do not. The reason for this inconsistency is unknown but it may be in relation to capacity, capability or motivations of the job holders and/or a sense of responsibility on the part of SPOs who feel they need to pick up these tasks as they may not otherwise get done.

Aside from directly adding to SPO workload, it is likely that these tasks will have an impact on SPO effectiveness and engagement when undertaking operational tasks. Being pulled

away from the core role to pick up ad hoc tactical work is likely to affect concentration and focus as well as their emotional engagement, motivation and wellbeing at work.

Organisation Design Recommendations:

The following recommendations are linked to structure, job roles, decision-making accountabilities and would address the findings linked to organisational design.

- **Review of the Business Manager Role** through reviewing the PDU structure and assigning tasks appropriately, including the reallocation of non-core activities and assessing the resource adjustments necessary to enable this to occur.
- **Clarify job description (Job Evaluation Scheme)** to ensure that SPO tasks are clearly defined, additions of annexes for the generic SPO role would provide clarity for specialised roles. This would enable SPOs to focus on key operational and management tasks whilst ensuring a consistent approach across regions. We recommend one core job description with supporting annexes to account for the differences in roles across different parts of the PS. This should be undertaken alongside the activity to utilise ABC methodology for resource modelling so an accurate resource model can be developed.
- **PODs to be implemented as part of Target Operating Model** which would enable more peer to peer discussion. PODs would need to have an appropriate mix of staff and flexibility to ensure they are not disbanded once experienced practitioners change role.
- **Review the Learner Support Model** to explore the relationship between Practice Tutor Assessors (PTA), Quality Development Officers (QDO), SPO PQIP and SPO SM roles as they sit together in learner support roles. This will provide clarity, national consistency and clear role boundaries about what needs to be done and who is best placed to do it.
- **Review Management Coordination Hubs (MCH)** once fully embedded to ensure the benefits are fully realised and enable consideration of additional tasks that could be included within the remit of the MCH.
- **Pay Band 5 to be reviewed in line with Probation Pay Reform** Pay has been highlighted as a key component to retain SPO staff. Improving retention rates will contribute to a more experienced workforce.

7.2 Workforce Planning and Resource Modelling

The lack of role clarity and addition of ad hoc activities has contributed to an already high workload. The primary request from all SPOs was for additional support to be provided to increase productivity and ensure time and resource is spent dealing with grade relevant tasks. SPOs would benefit from additional support which was raised during the MRR focus groups:

- Areas where BMs, SAOs and Admin Officer roles are adequately resourced has had a positive impact on SPO workload, although this is not consistent across all regions and BMs/SAOs were “equally overworked”.

- Administration support is the most common request from SPOs. Understaffed administration teams result in SPOs picking up administration tasks which compounds the fact they are already lacking specific administration support for SPO duties, which is afforded for other management grades. SPO's are the only operational grade who do not have their own allocated administrative support.
- SPOs would welcome the recruitment of additional SPOs although recognise the issues with recruiting from an already depleted pool of staff. The addition of PQIP SPOs has had a positive impact on workload due to the time taken to support PQIP learners.
- Qualitative focus groups identified that spans of control for SPOs were found to be both unmanageable and inconsistent, with Sentence management SPOs and PDU Heads being in agreement that smaller numbers of staff per SPO were required.
- Understaffed teams and increased workloads were aggravating factors within most issues raised and there is an expectation to absorb vacancies and absences within the team as if there is an "infinite amount of time". This occurs both at an SPO and Probation Practitioner grade.
- Management Coordination Hubs have had a positive impact where resourced and evaluated (Midlands) although MRR data has demonstrated that this is not consistent across all regions.
- Data to support workforce modelling from SOP has been unreliable.

SPOs were asked to consider how much of their time is spent undertaking managerial tasks and operational tasks. On average SPOs stated that they spend 52% of their time on managerial tasks and 48% on operational. However, it is not possible to compare this with FTE timings because the attributable tasks have not yet been timed. Activity Based timings workshops established that the non-operational activities which SPOs spend the most time on were as follows:

- The national time spent on emails that are unrelated to Sentence Management equates to 65.25 FTE. This is a significant increase from the 2020 SPO Review (previously 15.54 FTE), likely due to reunification having resulted in a greater number of SPOs and email traffic. It is the non-attributable tasks that SPOs spend the most time undertaking.
- The national time spent on case allocation equates to 51.63 FTE. Aspects of the case allocation are largely administration related which could be undertaken by a more cost-effective role.
- The national time spent on signing off annual leave equates to 11.78 FTE. Similar to case allocation, there are aspects of this activity which could be undertaken by administrative staff which would enable SPOs to focus more of their time on operational activities.
- The national time spent arranging sickness cover equates to 12.84 FTE. This does not include time spent undertaking practitioner tasks with a looming deadline (induction, Parole Assessment Report by Offender Manager (PAROM) etc) and is specifically for arranging sickness cover. From 2019 to 20/09/2021 the average working days lost due to sickness has ranged from 10 to 12.2 for Probation Officers

and 9.1 to 11.8 for Probation Service Officers. In addition to covering the work required, the amount of time taken recording the absences and undertaking formal absence management related meetings would contribute to SPO workload.

- The underlying leaving rate of Senior Probation Officers (SPOs) increased steadily from 2017 to 2019, reaching 5.2% in March 2020. Despite a drop over the course of the pandemic, the rate is slowly increasing again, reaching 4.3% in September 2021. Although this rate is lower when compared to pay band 3 and 4 staff, the loss of SPO expertise comes at a greater cost to the service.

Workforce Planning and Resource modelling Recommendations:

The following recommendations would enable more accurate workforce planning and make positive steps towards making workloads more sustainable.

- **Recruiting to fill the current SPO vacancies to bring spans of control to the intended ratio before *provisionally* repositioning funding in April 2023 to reflect the SPO resource modelling.** The SPO Review 2020 and initial ABC data collected within MRR demonstrates that reducing spans of control and recruiting more SPOs is the direction of travel we need to be working towards. Recruiting the current shortfall will improve staffing by 13.7%, it will provide more manageable workloads for SPOs and reduce current spans of control. The review recognises that SPOs ability to manage workloads will be improved if they have fewer members of staff in their spans of control. This would allow them to focus on the key objectives of the role and complete some of the activities they are unable to do so currently which is causing stress. Spans of control at this time are too high and showing as over what is intended by current target staffing calculations. We would recommend the Probation Service focus on recruiting to fill the current vacancies bringing spans of control in Sentence Management to 1:10 and Courts to 1:12 as an interim measure until we can move to ABC informed workforce modelling. We can then use additional data to review spans of control once this position has been achieved and inform target staffing moving forward. PWP would be able to revisit this in September 2022 with additional data from ABC and following the impact of some of the MRR recommendations to inform this adjustment. This would also allow more time for the on-boarding of PQiPs so that the impact of drawing from the frontline will be staggered. If we were to reduce target staffing on spans of control at this time on top of recruiting to fill the shortfall then the impact on the frontline would be an increase workload of 4.4%. This timing would allow for that impact to be mitigated once more PQiPs have been onboarded.
- **Provide more individual administrative support for SPOs in Sentence Management and Courts:** This would be a more cost-effective way of completing administrative tasks that SPOs currently undertake. It would enable more proactive and focused support than the Management Coordination Hubs currently provide. A ratio of 1 Case Administrator to 5 SPOs and subsequent increase of Senior Administrative Support would cost approximately £5.8 million. This recruitment would not need to pull on the existing workforce on the frontline. This would need to be impact assessed before being added into target staffing for 2023/24.
- **Long term approach to resource modelling using the ABC methodology:** Having timings of activities and processes within the remit of SPO's will enable an

informed decision when considering workforce planning and implementation of new activities. This would provide more accurate cost-benefit analysis of new activities prior to embedding them within the role. It would also overcome the complexities of FTE compared with headcount when calculating spans of control and would be based on activity.

- **ABC to structure an examination of processes** This would identify activities that are resource intensive which would help inform how processes could be streamlined to improve capacity and efficiency. Resource within the Probation Workforce Programme will need to be allocated to allow an examination of each individual process.
- **PQiP recruitment and workforce planning to reduce high workloads for probation practitioners:** Developing holistic workforce planning will ensure that workloads for practitioners become manageable which in turn reduces SPO workload. This would also minimise the risk of SPOs picking up practitioner tasks and workload. The benefits would not be realised in the short term but would support greater benefits in the long-term.
- **Retention of experienced staff through the Recruitment and Retention Strategy:** The Recruitment and Retention Strategy has recently been refreshed and informed by MRR data. It includes development of a national retention toolkit which is being adapted for the Probation Service, following successful application within the Prison Service. The toolkit is based on retention drivers, outlining areas of retention best practice so that HMPPS improve employee engagement and morale and reduce attrition rates. It also includes plans with HR to work with regions to develop local retention plans.
- **Demand Management Strategy;** Prioritising Probation is considering ways to speed up recruitment and increase staff numbers, give regions more flexibility to pause or stop non-essential activity, simplify or stop some processes, improve change management in 2022 and improve management of HQ requests to regions. This may help improve SPO workload by removing non-essential tasks.
- **SOP data quality improvement project:** A SOP data quality improvement project is underway to ensure that the relevant data is available on an ongoing basis; this will support accurate recruitment planning in addition to developing an understanding of attrition rates and the workforce areas that are difficult to recruit for. This, in turn, will benefit SPOs.
- **Maintain the SPO PQiP Role:** PQiP SPOs have had a positive impact upon SPOs within Sentence Management through holding line management responsibility of PQiP learners moving through the process; MRR data highlights that PQiP learners have called heavily on SPOs' time. The majority of PQiP SPO's are temporary having been funded centrally, including this resource within regions will enable a more holistic approach to resource allocation and continue to utilise a resource which has proved beneficial.

7.3 Change Implementation and Culture

The pace of change continues to be high and reunification has contributed to the number of changes to process, procedures and practice. SPOs have spoken of how this has contributed to the change in role and workload over the years and the challenges that disseminating

information and implementing new changes in practice have brought. There is now a need to harmonise processes and ways of working from legacy CRCs and NPS teams as the number of policies seems to grow creating confusion and contradictions. The following was raised throughout the MRR focus groups:

- Email traffic is currently unmanageable and has increased following the pandemic, unification and remote working with some communication being repeated.
- Changes to practice are not consistently embedded as these need to be embedded on top of high workloads which is difficult to achieve.
- SPOs are not clear on how new policies fit into the current way of working due to contradictions and lack of clarity, i.e. how policies and processes are intended to complement each other and work in tandem.
- The Touchpoints Model (TPM) has added to the quantity of management oversight entries whilst hindering the quality. SPOs spoke of making entries as a tick box exercise whilst increasing micromanagement of staff that need to feel and be empowered.
- The TPM and email communication is contributing to a culture of fear and blame with responsibility ultimately falling on SPOs with the TPM seen as enabling “finger pointing” in the event of an investigation.

As previously mentioned, the national time spent on emails that are unrelated to Sentence Management equates to 65.25 FTE. This supports SPO comments that the amount of email traffic is unmanageable. Activity Based timings workshops established that:

- The national time spent reading policies equates to 6.44 FTE. Workshops highlighted that changes are disseminated through various communication channels which contribute to the time spent familiarising staff. Having a consistent process which enables staff to easily understand the required changes would help reduce the time spent on this activity.
- The national time spent preparing for team meetings and briefings equates to 9.10FTE. Additionally, the time spent attending team meetings and briefing equates to 19.34 FTE. Whilst not an activity that can be significantly reduced the amount of changes following reunification would have contributed to the time spent disseminating and embedding changes with staff.

Change implementation and Culture Recommendations

The following recommendations would improve how change is implemented and embedded within the organisation whilst supporting a culture shift to embrace improvements to policies and processes.

- **Improve change implementation:** HMPPS have implemented ‘Change Champions’ who have oversight of rate and consistency of change, regular change forums have been established for leaders working across the regions and programme to share best practice. Furthermore, the National change map has been created to articulate the changes happening across the organisation and persona mapping is underway within the Probation Reform Programme to assess how change might impact various groups.

- **Human Factors Pilot:** Creating a shift away from the culture of fear and blame through consideration of the situation and conditions. Human Factors has successfully been implemented within 14 Prisons and the Youth Custody Service and creates change through implementing checklists and structured communications, with teams having honest conversations about what is achievable.
- **A review of the Touchpoints Model** in line with the ABC methodology will enable a comparison of the benefits and impact upon resources whilst ensuring it reflects the unified service and compliments to implementation of RPSS.
- **Promotion of Reflective Sessions through employee support:** Utilising this support will reduce the time spent providing pastoral support and improve overall wellbeing of staff. This service could also be utilised by SPOs to improve well-being, although protected time would need to be provided to maximise the utilisation.

7.4 Capability and Development

As referred to earlier, the scope of activities included within the SPO role has steadily increased with new activities being layered on top of existing responsibilities. SPOs consider there to be a lack of learning and development (L&D) to support them in the role, with many SPOs speaking of having no support to equip them to transition from PO to SPO, with capabilities being developed over time. This creates inconsistencies in practice and limits productivity and confidence. When learning and development has been available, SPOs are either unaware of the opportunities or have not been provided with protected learning time due to the strained workloads. In addition to L&D for SPOs, additional L&D for Practitioners would provide similar benefits, reducing the amount of informal oversight required from SPOs. The following feedback was provided during the MRR focus groups:

- The lack of L&D for staff has increased the micro-managing of staff, L&D that has been available has been predominately e-learning which led to SPOs having to ensure learning was understood and embedded. Gaps in L&D resource and support then falls to SPOs to be responsible for staff development.
- Specific development needs identified for SPOs included peer to peer support such as mentoring and SPO forums. In some regions bespoke training, development and peer support have been put in place for SPOs and this has been well received.
- SPOs undertake HR related tasks with minimal L&D which adds to anxieties. The nature of some HR meetings such as formal meetings regarding attendance and performance create a crucial need for practice to be precise and failing to do so potentially places the organisation and staff involved in a vulnerable situation.
- Undertaking learning and development is challenging due to the current workloads.
- The key strengths required to be an SPO are not clear due to the diverse workload and expectancies of the grade varying across regions. However, it is clear that when SPOs have clear leadership and organisational skills that they are managing workloads, staff and stress better.

We have seen that the national time spent on increased supervision for PQiP staff in addition to the mandatory supervision sessions equates to 17.4 FTE, some of which would be embed learning and development.

Having time and access to relevant learning and development would increase efficiency for all tasks, as it would take less time to complete whilst increasing confidence. An example of this being:

- The national time spent making HR caseworker referrals equates to 3.68 FTE and the time spent having HR caseworker meetings equates to 8.61 FTE. Developing SPO confidence and capability to deal with HR related issues will help reduce the time spent seeking advice from HR caseworkers.

Capability and Development Recommendations:

The following recommendations are related to learning and development for both SPOs and probation practitioners. Improving both is likely to positively impact SPO workload.

- **Development of SPO Continuous Professional Development role packs:** Learning role packs are currently being developed for all grades, mapping out what learning resources are currently available and identifying gaps. This learning will then be collated and developed into Learning role packs which will be accessible from the Probation Hubs so that learning can take place at the point of need. Protected learning time would also need to be provided to ensure SPOs prioritise their own learning and development. Learning role packs will help SPOs develop the knowledge and confidence, increasing their efficiency when carrying out the relevant tasks.
- **Commissioning HR specific Continuous Professional Development:** Creating accessible videos with staff with HR related expertise will provide learning opportunities accessible at the point of need, resulting in a greater confidence and reduced stress when dealing with more challenging situations. This recommendation could also be aligned with other learning and development recommendations such as the Communities of Practice framework and Learning Role Packs.
- **Strengths based profiling and selection:** Basing recruitment and selection decision on the strengths that highly effective SPOs have in common will enable us to selection and develop a highly capable workforce whilst informing learning and development on an ongoing basis. Strength profiling will need to be undertaken to identify the strengths that differentiate our best performers. Strengths that relate to high performance in probation practitioners are not necessarily the same that set great SPOs apart. However, strengths profiling for selection has not been conducted for either SPOs or practitioners. Sequencing this after the review of job descriptions will ensure the strengths align with the applicable responsibilities.
- **SEEDs learning and development to support delivery of Reflective Practice Supervision Sessions (RPSS):** The data from the MRR Review shows that staff believe SEEDs and RPSS will provide numerous benefits including the cultural shift towards building staff capability and empowerment. SPOs are aware that learning and development for SEEDs is due to be implemented although have reservations about their own capacity to undertake the learning and embed it within the team. Ensuring staff have protected time whilst learning at the point of need will improve the success of embedding RPSS.
- **Promotion of First Line Manager (FLM) course and Aspiring Leaders Programme (ALP):** FLM would support staff transitioning to the role of SPO, increasing knowledge of key managerial competencies, including managing performance, delegation and attendance management. ALP was recently piloted for practitioners who want to progress into management. There was a large amount of

interest with 500 applications for only 20 spaces. The ALP provides development opportunities for aspiring SPOs, supporting them to consider how they can work towards managerial roles. Promotion of the ALP would help aid the transition from practitioner to SPO and help support career progression which is one of the identified retention drivers. Both FLM and ALP would build capabilities to deliver key people management activities. This would need to be balanced with appropriate resourcing to ensure completion in a timely manner.

- **Leadership Journey:** A new training initiative designed to help people fulfil their potential with online content and peer-to-peer learning. It is currently being piloted in North East and Yorkshire PDUs with the goal of inspiring staff, improving service delivery, increasing performance and developing a culture change.
- **Communities of Practice framework pilot:** This promotes peer-to-peer learning and support for SPOs through meeting regularly to share experiences, knowledge and reflect on ideas or problems. The SPO Review (2020) identified a clear ask for SPOs to have more regular contact with peers to aid learning which resulted in the development of this framework. However, this has not yet been implemented due to the pandemic and reunification. The framework should support professional development and provide a platform for more experienced SPOs to share their knowledge with staff that are new to the grade. Protected learning time would also need to be provided to ensure SPOs prioritise their own learning and development.
- **Review of Greater Manchester Talent Programme:** This Talent Programme has been developed and implemented within Greater Manchester to enable CPD for SPOs and probation practitioners. The programme spans 12 months and utilises classroom learning and one- to-one mentoring. SPOs on the programme are required to take a lead on a strategic project to develop experience and prepare for future promotion. Learning time is protected. We would recommend that PWP monitor the progress of this programme and receive feedback from Greater Manchester to consider whether it could be implemented in other regions to develop the capability of SPOs and practitioners.
- **Review PQiP training:** Ensuring that frontline staff are competent and capable once qualified will reduce the time required for SPOs to bridge the experience gaps of newly qualified officers. Practitioners should also take responsibility for their own CPD to alleviate the pressures upon SPOs.
- **Professional Registration:** Implementing a professional register and professional standards, will help enable a cultural shift towards staff taking responsibility for their CPD. This recommendation will support an empowerment culture, improving confidence and capabilities of the workforce. SPOs will spend less time undertaking informal discussions and/or supervisions which has been highlighted as an issue within the MRR data.
- **Further promotion of the PSO Pathway:** MRR data has highlighted that staff who progress internally through the PSO pathway require considerably less oversight and support than external PQiPs. Promotion of the Pathway will support career progression of current staff whilst reducing the timings for SPO oversight.

7.5 Systems and Process Improvement

In addition to the layering of additional responsibilities, SPOs highlighted new systems and processes with little evaluation being undertaken to ensure they are effective. Longstanding systems such as SOP and Occupational Health (OH) frustrate practitioners as the process

feels laborious with little improvement over time. Additional systems have not felt user-led with the lack of learning and support being a contributing factor. There are positive pockets of process improvement although they are rarely consistent across regions due to local flexibility to prioritise what is required. The following points were raised during the MRR focus groups:

- HR systems were identified as a significant barrier to effective management of HR tasks. Referrals for OH were repetitive and slow to be actioned. SOP was described as “*ancient*”, “*[not] fit for purpose*”, a “*minefield*”, and SPOs were frustrated with how disjointed it felt.
- SPOs noted that they spent a lot of extra time trying to frame communications with their staff in a positive way, stating that messages coming from senior leaders were not always worded sensitively and felt they had to protect their already-strained teams by filtering, rephrasing and timing communications.
- Digital solutions were highlighted as having been a success, including the use of Microsoft Teams and Whatsapp.
- Heavy workloads have hindered the retention of capable staff whilst vetting was raised as the primary barrier for recruitment, with staff accepting alternative posts whilst waiting for vetting to progress.
- Many SPOs are taking the lead on implementing their own induction process which creates inconsistencies and demands more of their time to adapt and implement.

As previously highlighted, the quantitative workshops provided FTE calculations that demonstrate that the most resource intensive task is emails unrelated to Sentence Management. A large proportion of this time was likely spent on correspondence related to Performance and Quality (P&Q) as SPOs need to filter emails and spreadsheets to find data that relates specifically to their team. Quantitative workshops also highlighted the following:

- The national time spent preparing performance information equates to 8.41 FTE. Having more efficient processes for collating performance data would help reduce the time spent undertaking this activity.

It should be noted that the timings for operational activities, such as countersigning OASys, PAROM and recall reports, in addition to activities related to case transfers were not included within the scope of the initial ABC workshops. However, SPOs have spoken of the time taken to undertake these tasks during the qualitative workshops which our recommendations reflect.

Systems and process improvement recommendations

The following recommendations take into account how systems and processes could be developed to be more user-friendly and support workloads.







- **Improve SSCL processes, forms and provide a feedback loop for ongoing development:** Improvement of SSCL processes and feedback loops will enable a greater level of proficiency. Stakeholder workshops and diagnostic support are currently underway in addition to guides being available within MyHub. Promotion of these positive actions will aid a culture shift towards user-led learning, which would require an element of protected time to complete.
- **Review options for performance and quality (P&Q) dashboards to be embedded nationally:** Having automated dashboards allow for SPOs, PDU heads

and practitioners to access relevant data in one place, removing the need for email correspondence and filtering information to determine its relevance. Court teams have been identified as areas where P&Q support is lacking and nationally embedding these dashboards will ensure their benefit is fully realised. The National Reporting Solution is currently scoping dashboards that can be consistently implemented.

- **Review JitBit to consider further utilisation for Management Coordination Hubs:** JitBit is due to be embedded nationally (April 2022) to provide a consistent approach to how administrative tasks are performed, utilising a ticketing system which has received positive feedback. Once fully embedded, we recommend that consideration is given to how it could be utilised further within Management Coordination Hubs. This will further alleviate administrative workload from SPOs.
- **Improvement of systems and processes:** The Probation Reform Programme Digital Data and Technology Board are completing work on Manager Workforce to improve Case Allocation. Other digital improvement processes are being considered, including a tool to support making recall decisions. It is also working on Assess, Risk and Need, a longer-term project to support the coordination and embedding of all assessment tools into one platform. Digitally enabled processes will help save time, reduce costs, increase productivity and reduce the margin for error.
- **Promote Smarter Working and embed nationally:** The Smarter Working initiative aims to harness flexible working through utilising digital tools and reducing the reliance on estates. Regions, where this is fully embedded, have given positive feedback throughout the MRR workshops. To date, however, this has only been embedded in approximately 50% of regions. Promoting the initiative further will ensure all regions are embedding and benefiting before consideration can be given to how this can be continuously developed.
- **Exit interviews to be recorded centrally:** Exit interview data is held locally and not centrally, so we were unable to access relevant insights into why staff leave. Exit interviews are beneficial when considering the culture of the working environment and creating a holistic view of positive or counterproductive ways of working. A standardised exit interview is currently being embedded which is based on relevant retention drivers. Data will be stored and analysed centrally to help identify root cause of attrition and enable trend reporting. The requirement for exit interviews will need to be promoted as over 60% of leavers since September 2021 have failed to complete an exit interview.
- **National approach to case transfers:** Develop a set of principles and options to support regions to develop a standardised approach to case transfers. Exploring potential digital solutions to case transfers will move aspects of this activity away from SPOs whilst ensuring a standardised approach.
- **The Countersigning Framework:** This recommendation came out of the SPO Review 2020 and was designed to reduce the incidences of countersigning that takes place. This was rolled out nationally in March 2021 but requires evaluation to assess the impact and modify if further changes are required.
- **A Review of Quality Development Tools (QDTs);** The current set of QDTs included in the Core Quality Management Framework (CQMF) are being used inconsistently by regions and with varied success and benefits. A review of the current suite of QDTs will allow consideration of their impact and if any changes are needed to the model which will help SPOs to manage this activity moving forward.

All MRR recommendations can be found in the recommendations table in [Annex J](#) and at the end of this report.

It is important to note that the Probation Workforce Programme's (PWP) six priorities to 2025, shown below, are reflected in the recommendations above, showing that the work the programme has planned already considers the commitment to reduce SPO workloads.

<p>Attract 1500 PQIPs each financial year to 2024 and complete CJL procurement to support incoming PQIP staff. This will, over the long-term, support smoothing of caseloads across staff groups and alleviate pressures on Practitioners.</p> 	<p>Deliver a workload management tool and workforce modelling capability to more effectively and efficiently support our workforce to deliver the operation as well as empowering leaders and supporting wellbeing by smoothing caseloads.</p> 	<p>We will implement a Recruitment & Retention Strategy to improve recruitment and retention. Increasing our recruitment of a diverse workforce, finding solutions to fill roles in regions with significant vacancies and increasing capacity to make workloads more manageable and improve wellbeing.</p> 
<p>Take forward our commitment to professionalisation by creating a Professional Register that demonstrates our workforce have the required qualifications / capability for their role, making staff feel valued and recognised as professional practitioners</p> 	<p>We will support and develop our staff by delivering a new, fully resourced L&D Model and will enable an open learning culture through improved Learning Management Systems identifying priority learning products to be overseen by a Design Faculty</p> 	<p>Deliver the 21/22 and 22/23 Pay Award and Competency Based Framework to ensure that our workforce feel valued, we attract and retain talented people and can deliver excellence.</p> 

8. Implementation, Oversight and Governance

A robust plan for implementation of these recommendations is required. Although many of the recommendations are already underway, we know that workstreams can be reprioritised or their progress hindered through risks, issues and dependencies. We have learnt lessons from previous reviews that significant work is conducted, and good recommendations made but that the implementation fails to deliver the intended benefits.

In the Strategy, Design and Architecture Team (SDAT) we believe that overall governance and monitoring of the recommendations is the most effective way of ensuring that their impact is realised on the frontline. In this section we describe the proposed approach to implementation planning and governance for approved MRR recommendations.

8.1 Implementation

The table of recommendations in [Annex J](#) and at the end of this report, if approved by the Board, will become an Implementation Plan with action owners assigned. All recommendations have been aligned to the wider Probation Workforce Strategy as can be seen in [Annex K](#). The SDAT Review team will manage and monitor the implementation plan as a central team. Action owners have been identified within the plan and will have a clear role. They are accountable for having line of sight and reporting to the Improvement team in accordance with the agreed standards and frequency. Commitment owners are not necessarily responsible for implementing the actions but will ensure they set the owner up to report the information needed.

MRR recommendations fall into one of three categories:

- 1) MRR Actions** – There are 10 key recommendations actions that need to be initiated or implemented by the SDAT Review Team and fall under PWP. When these recommendations are approved by the PWP Board then additional resource will be secured within the SDAT Review Team to deliver them. This action plan will be governed by PWP Capacity Board. Four of the recommendations will require commissioning from other areas of the business and will need to be initiated by the SDAT Review Team who will monitor progress and provide oversight.
- 2) PWP Recommendations** – There are 14 recommended actions either underway or planned that sit with workstreams in wider PWP.
- 3) MoJ/HMPPS Wide Recommendations** – There are 16 recommended actions either underway or planned that sit with workstreams that fall outside of the PWP. Many recommendations are already included as actions within other implementation plans in various areas of the business. It is assessed that they will have a positive impact on the capacity and efficiency of SPOs. The Review team will obtain information about their progress against MRR objectives and feedback into PWP Capacity Board.

Probation Regions will be responsible for supporting implementation of these recommendations where appropriate. HMPPS Change Management will take account of how these will impact on the frontline and work with Regional Implementation Leads to support how and when these are rolled out.

8.2 Governance and Oversight

The SDAT Review Team will engage the action owners for the other recommendations to provide quarterly reports to monitor progress, identify and manage risks and assess benefits. MRR will be an early adopter of the new monitoring and governance frameworks and dashboards that PWP Strategy and Improvement will use for the refreshed PWP strategy (2022-2025) to ensure a consistent and integrated approach.

The SDAT Review Team will provide a quarterly update/show case of the implementation progress of the recommendations with a RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rating dashboard to be presented at R-PWP and PWP Workforce Capacity Board. This will provide governance and accountability for the implementation of the recommendations. As part of this process, it will also provide the quarterly updates to the PWP Strategy and Improvement team for consolidation into PWP strategy reporting to ensure overall line of sight of delivery of the strategy.

Both the SDAT Review and PWP Strategy and Improvement functions share the same project management resource. This further facilitates an integrated and joined-up approach to benefits assessment. SPO MRR will be an early adopter of this new approach to governance and assurance to ensure integrated ways of working and efficiencies.

Benefit mapping of the review recommendations overall has identified that we would anticipate an improvement in the ability of SPOs in Sentence Management and Courts to manage workload and in SPO well-being. These are intermediate benefits which feed into the strategic benefits of the Probation Workforce Programme. We would also expect that further benefits from MRR will be identified as the work evolves with the implementation of recommendations made.

It is recommended that follow up focus groups and/or surveys are completed in 12-24 months following implementation to collate data to capture the benefits from implementation of these MRR recommendations. These grass roots insights will bring to the life the positive impact that will be highlighted from the monitoring and impact assessment approach outlined. There is opportunity for the SDAT Review team to work with the Systems Implementation and Testing Team (SITT) to understand the impact and provide assurance in relation to delivery of all recommendations.

The SDAT Review Team will be accountable for:

1. **Implementation of the agreed key recommendations (red).** These are specifically; Case Administration support for SPOs, JES for the SPO role and role review of Business Managers. It will also partner with the ABC Team to scope potential activity-based costing sprints for the managerial responsibilities of other SPO roles [Prisons, Interventions etc.] and provide oversight. As both commitment owners and implementors, they will have a dotted line to the Strategy and Improvement team for reporting.
2. **Oversight of recommended actions underway or planned that sit under PWP strategy:** The SDAT Review team have subject matter knowledge of its recommended actions and established stakeholder relationships with the action owners. It will therefore be the prime point of contact with the action owners and will provide regular progress reporting to the Strategy and Improvement team using a consistent framework.
3. **Oversight of recommended actions underway or planned and sit with workstreams outside PWP strategy:** As for 2) above it is important for the Strategy and Improvement team to have oversight of wider PS initiatives and how they relate to PWP strategy delivery.

9. Summary and Conclusion

In summary the data from this Review reinforces the view that the scope of the SPO role has changed and expanded over the years, and this has not considered their spans of control which are considered to be too high. A number of areas for capacity and efficiency improvement have been identified by the Review Team, that when consulted on with stakeholders in the wider HMPPS and MOJ were already in play and part of wider action plans. It is really encouraging to see that the business are not just aware of these issues but are taking steps to address them, and that all of this work is expected to have a positive impact on the capacity and efficiency of SPOs in the future. There is no single solution to the complex issues we uncovered in the MRR, but it is hoped that the implementation of a combination of the recommendations will amount to a substantial improvement.

The MRR has identified remaining areas of work, which if implemented, are expected to improve the ability of SPOs to manage their workloads and improve well-being. The MRR has outlined an implementation plan that subject to these recommendations being approved by the Probation Workforce Programme Board the business will be in a position to implement them and realise the benefits of the work.

SPOs have demonstrated significant motivation and commitment to continue to support their staff and deliver an effective service during a global pandemic and the challenges of reunifying the Probation Service. However, the service cannot continue to rely on the drive of these staff for the successful delivery of HMPPS objectives without investing in finances to

enable the recruitment of more Senior Probation Officers and support staff to allow a reduction in current workloads.

If you have any comments or questions and want to contact the team about this report then please email us at MRR@justice.gov.uk.

A version of this document can be request in Welsh

There is an AT Compatible version of this document available