



## “We’ll always go back for more”? Probation, precariousness, and professional identity

Matt Tidmarsh

**To cite this article:** Matt Tidmarsh (11 Feb 2025): “We’ll always go back for more”? Probation, precariousness, and professional identity, International Journal of the Legal Profession, DOI: [10.1080/09695958.2025.2455986](https://doi.org/10.1080/09695958.2025.2455986)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/09695958.2025.2455986>



© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 11 Feb 2025.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 13



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# “We’ll always go back for more”? Probation, precariousness, and professional identity

Matt Tidmarsh

Criminal Justice, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

## ABSTRACT

Over the last few decades, the environment in which the Probation Service in England and Wales operates has become both more punitive and managerial, dominated by the logic of risk. A challenge to the tenets on which probation’s professional project was founded, such as its (social work) knowledge base and autonomy to work with individuals under supervision, has accompanied this changed landscape. Indeed, probation’s relative powerlessness to mobilise against governmental impositions has resulted in four top-down organisational restructurings since the turn of the millennium. This paper, therefore, considers the impact of such change on professional identity in probation. Against the backdrop of the most recent organisational reform – the “unification” of services, in June 2021 which brought to an end a failed seven-year experiment in part-privatisation – it explores how punitive, managerial, and marketising reforms have contributed to a crisis of identity that has been decades in the making. The paper argues that, while an appeal to an ideology of service centred on *helping* clients remains significant among staff, the nature and extent of the challenges probation faces has rendered professional identity more precarious.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 11 December 2024

Accepted 16 January 2025

## Introduction

Change, it seems, has been the only constant for the Probation Service in England and Wales in recent decades. Probation is *a* legal profession rather than *the* legal profession, but the two have historically had strong links – notably, through co-location in the courts (Jarvis 1972). Like criminal justice defence lawyering, probation professionals have typically acted as an “ally” for those processed through the criminal justice system (Newman and Ugwu-dike 2014). In recent years, however, probation – again, like criminal justice

**CONTACT** Matt Tidmarsh  [m.j.tidmarsh@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:m.j.tidmarsh@leeds.ac.uk)

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

lawyering (Mant *et al.*, [this volume](#)) – has experienced considerable challenges (see HMI Probation [2019](#), [2023](#)). As an “invisible” (Robinson [2016](#)) profession – one that exists in the shadow of the prison, working with involuntary, (mostly) low status clients – probation has proved especially vulnerable to interference from successive governments (Tidmarsh [2021a](#)). Part of a broader neoliberal effort to align public service delivery with private sector techniques (Hood [1995](#)), the foundations on which the service’s “professional project” (Larson [1977](#), p. 67) was built have been disturbed by the forces of managerialism and marketisation. From the 1980s onwards, practitioner autonomy has been partially surrendered to performance targets and audit; social work training requirements for practice have been abolished; and the service’s foundational mission, summarised in the words “advise, assist, befriend”, has been abandoned within official documents (Tidmarsh [2021b](#)).

This challenge to probation’s knowledge, methods, and values extends to the service’s governance structure. There have been four top-down restructurings of probation since the turn of the millennium. In 2001, the New Labour Government concentrated 55 “constitutionally separate” (Burke and Collett [2015](#), p. 42) Probation Areas within 42 Probation Boards, overseen by a new National Probation Service (NPS). These were further reduced to 35 Probation Trusts in 2007, as the search for greater efficiency and effectiveness saw the “ogre of contestability” (Robinson and Burnett [2007](#), p. 328) rear its head in the form of attempts to outsource core practices to private (and voluntary) providers. This (part-)privatising ambition was not realised until 2014, when the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government’s *Transforming Rehabilitation* (TR) reforms split services between the publicly-owned NPS and 21 privately-managed Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs). However, TR was a “policy disaster” (Annison [2019](#)) and probation was subsequently “unified” (in essence, re-nationalised): on 26 June 2021, seven NPS Divisions and 21 CRCs were realigned into 12 Probation Regions and housed within the Civil Service.

These changes to probation governance and practice can be seen in expectations for professional identity (re)formation. There is no accepted definition of “professional identity”, but Obling’s ([2022](#)) review of the literature identifies three ways in which it is understood. The first sees identity as constructed through a process of *professional socialisation*. This refers to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, qualifications, and values as crucial to shaping how to differentiate between professionals and non-professionals. Second, professional identity is not fixed or immutable. Hence, *work role transitions* concern internal transformations of professional identity, which can be prompted by new training programmes, workplace structures, or career development. Third, *identities in context* relates to how “environmental change” (Obling [2022](#), p. 472) brought about by socio-economic and political changes can exert significant influence over professional identity formation. Taken together, Obling ([2022](#)) argues, a

recognition of how macro- and meso-level forces interact and are enmeshed can produce more comprehensive understandings of how professional identity is (re)constructed.

Thus, with a particular emphasis on the unification of services, this paper analyses professional identity in probation. It maps the strands of the literature identified by Obling (2022) onto the service, tracing how the “extra-organizational forces” (Chreim *et al.* 2007, p. 1516) which influence probation governance and practice have contributed to a succession of organisational restructurings, with detrimental implications for professional identity. The paper contends that the nature and extent of the challenges probation faces have reshaped the service into which professionals are socialised. While an ideology of service predicated on helping clients remains a significant source of meaning for staff, recent reforms have contributed to a crisis of identity that has been decades in the making. The result is an increasingly “precarious” professionalism (Moorhead 2014). As such, the paper’s contributions are twofold. First, it provides an ongoing commentary on the impact of the unification of probation services, from the perspectives of staff. Second, following Obling (2022), adopting an approach which bridges macro-, meso-, and micro-level changes can enhance understandings of professional identity in probation and comparable (low status) professions.

The paper begins with an overview of the power (and precarity) of professions. Thereafter, following a brief outline of the study’s methodology, Obling’s (2022) understandings of professional identity give structure to the data analysis. *Identities in context* explores how the service’s relative powerlessness renders it an easy target for political intervention. *Work role transitions* reports on staff experiences of recent organisational reform – namely, TR and the unification of services. Finally, *professional socialisation* scrutinises the service into which new staff enter, arguing that professional identity in probation is increasingly precarious.

### **Professions, power, and precariousness**

The legitimacy of professions depends, in part, upon the extent to which they can demonstrate “commitment to the public good” (Moorhead 2014, p. 450). Professions able to successfully present themselves as in service to broader societal benefit can acquire social, economic, and political power, and thereby guard against external interventions from the state or market competition (Freidson 2001). This claim as to public interest underpinned functionalist views of the reasons that professions should be considered different from other occupations (Carr-Saunders and Wilson 1933; Parsons 1952). Would-be professions sought to acquire ideal-typical “professional” traits that marked them as distinct, such as a *mastery of abstract knowledge*, learned through *prolonged education and training*; capture of a particular

activity, or activities, within the division of labour; and the ability to exercise considerable *autonomy* over how everyday tasks are undertaken. Ultimately, though, the most important trait was a client-centred *ideology of service* which not only communicated a profession's altruistic social function, but also kept the potentially self-serving interests of members in check.

While later, neo-Weberian views of the professions took issue with the altruism that pervades functionalist understandings, there was nonetheless consensus on how occupations that are able to successfully lay claim to professional status cultivate a space *between* the state and the market (Freidson 2001). Scholars writing from this perspective asserted that professions utilise the *jurisdiction* (Abbott 1988) granted by the state to manipulate the market to realise higher social and economic gains relative to laypeople. Hence, the claim central to neo-Weberian interpretations is that professional power is leveraged for self-interest: professions compete with others adjacent to their jurisdiction to preserve, maintain, and ultimately capitalise on their legitimacy (Abbott 1988), often at the expense of their clients (Freidson 1970; Larson 1977). The more social, economic, and political resources a profession can command, the better it can resist extraneous interference (Portwood and Fielding 1981).

And yet, not all professions benefit from such power and privilege. The extent to which a group can profit from claims to professional status depends upon its relationships with its “audiences”, such as the state, clients, and the public (Moorhead 2014). Here, Johnson's (1972) distinction between “collegiate” and “mediative” control over work can be used to show how professions can flourish under different modes of organisation. A collegiate model refers to how members of some professions are able to organise *themselves*. The medical profession in the US has typically provided an archetype of “collegiate” organisation (see Freidson 1970): the state grants licence to practise; members are then able to restrict entry into the profession, while providing a service to fee-paying clients. By contrast, mediative professions thrived under Keynesian political economy. This model emphasises state intervention in the professional-client relationship: services are funded by the state; and clients, who are often involuntary, cannot typically withdraw their purchasing power (Johnson 1972). These professions, like social work and nursing, are often located in the public sector, staffed predominantly by women, and underpinned by an ethic of care (Hugman 1991); they are generally “multichance” (Abbott 1988), for a certain degree of “failure” must be tolerated. This means that trust, both public and political, in a profession's knowledge and methods is more difficult to establish than, say, in the case of surgeons, whose credibility is directly linked to their ability to prevent (somatic) failure. This dependency upon the state renders mediative professions' legitimacy more precarious, and thus less able to resist external interventions.

The Probation Service in England and Wales, Tidmarsh (2021b, 2024a) argues, is one such mediative, “multichance” profession. From its origins in

the Church of England Temperance Society, it established exclusive *jurisdiction* over the supervision of offenders in the community in the first half of the twentieth century. As such, probation underwent a process of professionalisation (McWilliams 1985): practitioners were *trained in social work knowledge* and entrusted by the state to *work autonomously* in diagnosing individuals' problems and proposing solutions. Staff, in other words, were socialised into a service defined by a "medical" (McWilliams 1985) casework model and underpinned by the words "advise, assist, befriend", which constituted probation's (rehabilitative) *ideology of service*. While probation has always been plagued by accusations that it is "soft on crime" relative to institutions like the prison, its knowledge, methods, and values were largely shielded from public scrutiny for most of the twentieth century. What was viewed as being in the best interests of people on probation – namely, rehabilitation – was also considered to be in the best interests of taxpayers. This state-sanctioned confidence in the service enabled it to grow in the postwar period: between 1951 and 1981, the number of full-time, qualified officers increased from 1,000 to 5,500 while its caseload tripled from 55,000 to 157,000 (McWilliams 1987).

However, against the backdrop of sustained increases in the crime rate, which quadrupled between 1955 and 1974 (Garland 2001; Reiner 2007), probation's social and economic utility began to be questioned. This challenge can be seen as part of a wider shift in the 1970s, in which neo-Weberian criticisms of professional power (see Larson 1977) became overlaid with critiques of the paternalistic role of the Keynesian state (Dean 2010). Mediative professions were criticised on the grounds that their methods were ineffective. Cohen (1985), for example, alleged that for professions like probation, a failure to reduce the size of the criminal justice system in the postwar period served as a justification for their continued expansion. Thus, the legitimacy of the postwar penal welfare compromise, of which probation was a fundamental part, was challenged by the New Left and a politically ascendant New Right (Garland 2001). For the former, penal welfarism was coercive and hierarchical, unreceptive to the needs of particular individuals and communities (Cohen 1985; Young 1988; Dean 2010). For the latter, the costs of administering criminal justice services premised on rehabilitation and perceived to be ineffective during a decade defined by fiscal crises was detrimental to the taxpayer (Dean 2010). Despite their ideological differences, at the heart of both perspectives was a distrust of the state and professionals, and the contention that "their power must be checked" (Tidmarsh 2021b, p. 28). This highlights probation's precariousness as a profession – a point that is developed below with regard to the decades-long challenge to the service's knowledge, methods, values, and governance structure.

## Methodology

The data presented in this paper were generated as part of a broader project on probation staff in the aftermath of the unification of services in England and Wales. The negativity that resulted from the *TR* reforms meant that the overarching aim of the research was to provide a strengths-led account of probation staff understandings of professional identity and practice. Accordingly, it utilised Appreciative Inquiry (AI) – a methodology which foregrounds best practices, peak moments, and accomplishments (Liebling *et al.* 1999) – to consider what was working and how it could be sustained and enhanced after yet more reform. Elliott (1999) identifies four phases of AI: “discovery”, “dreaming”, “design”, and “destiny”. “Discovery” brings out the best of past and present practice; “dreaming” extends into how practice can be improved; “design” focuses on the actions required to deliver the “dream”; and “destiny” concentrates on solidifying this ideal by beginning the process of organisational change. This research concentrated, in particular, on “discovery”. As it relates to the findings in this paper, the interviews sought to draw out the importance placed by informants upon the factors that contribute to professional identity, such as training, socialisation, and ideologies of service (Obling 2022).

Data were generated via semi-structured interviews with 38 members of staff from across the probation estate. The small-scale nature of the study means the findings are not generalisable. That the sample was self-selecting means it could be skewed towards those who wanted to discuss professional identity, culture, and practice. Thus, to achieve the desired balance of job role, gender identity, and legacy employment, informants were selected through purposive sampling. Informants consisted of 12 probation service officers (PSOs), nine probation officers (POs), three practice tutor assessors (PTAs), seven managers (Ms), three senior managers (SMs), and four regional probation directors (RPDs; see Table 1). Twenty members of staff were formerly employed by privately-owned CRCs and 15 worked for the publicly-owned NPS; two had held split roles and one joined after unification. Ten men and 28 women were interviewed – a gender split which reflects the “feminisation” of the service (Mawby and Worrall 2013). Nine regions agreed to participate in the research; however, these will not be revealed to preserve the anonymity of staff. This is especially important for RPDs, who are small in number relative to the size of the probation workforce but overrepresented in this study. As such, their legacy employment has been excluded to ensure anonymity.

All probation research in England and Wales must be approved by HM Prison and Probation Service’s (HMPPS) National Research Committee, but access to staff in the regions is ultimately at the discretion of RPDs. Nine regions agreed to participate in the research; however, these will not be revealed to preserve the anonymity of staff. This is especially important for RPDs, who



**Table 1.**

Identifier	Job Title	Gender	Legacy
PSO1	Court Duty Officer	M	NPS
PSO2	Probation Service Officer	W	CRC
PSO3	Probation Service Officer – Integrated Offender Management	W	NPS
PSO4	Probation Service Officer	M	CRC
PSO5	Probation Service Officer	W	CRC
PSO6	Court Duty Officer	W	N/A
PSO7	Probation Service Officer	W	CRC
PSO8	Probation Service Officer	W	NPS
PSO9	Probation Service Officer	W	CRC
PSO10	Probation Service Officer – Programmes	W	CRC
PSO11	Probation Service Officer	W	CRC
PSO12	Probation Service Officer – Approved Premises	W	NPS
PO1	Probation Officer	M	CRC
PO2	Probation Officer – Integrated Offender Management	M	CRC
PO3	Probation Officer	W	NPS
PO4	Probation Officer	M	CRC
PO5	Probation Officer	M	NPS
PO6	Probation Officer – Court Team	W	CRC
PO7	Probation Officer – Custody	M	NPS
PO8	Probation Officer	W	NPS
PO9	Probation Officer – Court Team	W	NPS
PTA1	Practice Tutor Assessor	W	NPS
PTA2	Practice Tutor Assessor	M	NPS
PTA3	Practice Tutor Assessor	W	Split Role
M1	Deputy Head of Probation Delivery Unit	W	CRC
M2	Unpaid Work Operations Manager	W	CRC
M3	Senior Probation Officer	W	CRC
M4	Senior Probation Officer	W	NPS
M5	Senior Probation Officer	W	CRC
M6	Complaints and Serious Further Offences Lead	W	CRC
M7	Programme Manager	W	CRC
SM1	Transition and Mobilisation Lead	W	NPS
SM2	Head of Operations	W	CRC
SM3	Head of Probation Delivery Unit	M	Split Role
RPD1	Regional Probation Director	W	
RPD2	Regional Probation Director	W	
RPD3	Regional Probation Director	M	
RPD4	Regional Probation Director	W	

are small in number relative to the size of the probation workforce but overrepresented in this study. As such, their legacy employment has been excluded to ensure anonymity. A call for participants was shared through internal communications in the regions that agreed to participate, and potential informants were asked to email me if they wished to partake. Interviews were conducted on Microsoft Teams before being transcribed verbatim and uploaded to NVivo 12, which was used to sort, code, and analyse the data.

The nature and extent of challenges regarding working conditions in shaping the daily realities of staff means that this paper explores more negatives than is perhaps associated with AI research. Interviews were conducted less than a year after unification, between May and June 2022. The complexities of restructuring 21 CRCs into 12 Probation Regions within an ambitious nine-month time-scale potentially explain why keeping staff focused on the positives associated with AI methodology proved challenging. In addition, the “change fatigue” (Robinson and Burnett 2007) that has accompanied successive organisational



restructurings may have influenced the findings. Length of service among informants ranged from three months to 45 years, with a mean of 26 and a median of 17. HMPPS (2024) *Workforce Statistics* only provide data on length of service for POs, which means that an average calculation for *all* probation staff is not possible. For most informants ( $n = 24$ ) in this study, though, unification was their third experience of a top-down restructuring, with some ( $n = 10$ ) having experienced four. As such, to pursue a “pure” approach to AI research and exclude the negative views of many staff interviewed as part of this study would be to do a disservice to the lived realities of informants.

### ***Identities in context: probation and extra-organisational change***

With regard to the legitimacy of professions, Moorhead (2014, p. 452) asks, “[d]oes there come a point at which professions can no longer satisfy their audiences that they meet their needs?” This question is relevant to the Probation Service following the collapse of the Keynesian postwar state. The election to government of Margeret Thatcher’s Conservative Party, in 1979, marked the key turning point. Her political project was predicated on neoliberal ideology, or the belief that individual freedoms are directly linked to free and unregulated markets (Dean 2010). Amidst a wave of privatisations in the 1980s, public services which were not transferred to the market were instead subjected to the principles of New Public Management – specifically, a prioritisation of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in service delivery (Hood 1995). Thus, where a profession’s worth historically rested upon its ability to demonstrate superior competence and ethicality (Moorhead 2014), for professionals working in the public sector, the neoliberal reorganisation of the state accentuated economic criteria of legitimacy (Fournier 1999).

Political economic shifts have also prompted questions of the audience(s) to whom probation must demonstrate its legitimacy, with significant implications for its professional project. Here, “the public” are typically expressed as taxpayers and as potential victims (Tidmarsh 2022). Both are captured in Robinson *et al.*’s (2012) analysis of the penal “adaptations” which have informed probation policy and practice since the 1980s. For example, a *managerial* adaptation witnessed the pursuit of greater accountability via new rules and regulatory frameworks (Burke and Collett 2015). Part of a wider neoliberal agenda which sought to curb professional autonomy, targets were introduced in probation in 1988, with performance monitored via an expanded culture of audit (Power 1997; Phillips 2011). This was followed, in 1995, by the severance of probation from social work training requirements for practice, a “repudiation [that] was much more about connotation and political tone than substance” (Dominey and Canton 2022: 418).

Managerial practices have been accompanied by a *punitive* “adaptation” (Robinson *et al.* 2012) which promised “tough on crime” approaches,

particularly after the 1990s. This can be seen in the language used around probation policy. For example, the words “advise, assist, befriend” were removed from official probation documents from 1992 onwards (Deering 2010). Espousing greater punitiveness was key to the election of the (New) Labour Party to Government in 1997 (Bell 2011), and Canton (2024) notes how a 1998 House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee “deplored” the use of terms like “client” and “probationer”. Indeed, in 2008, Jack Straw, then Secretary of State in the newly established Ministry of Justice, bragged that “Probation officers now routinely talk of the criminals they are dealing with as “offenders”, which is what they are, and not the euphemistic nonsense of “clients”, when the client is the victim and the tax-paying public” (c.f. Canton 2024, p. 4). His comments highlight the confluence of punitive and managerial adaptations in how, and to whom, the state expects probation to demonstrate its legitimacy. They also illustrate the contempt with which the service is sometimes discussed in political discourses, rendering it an easy target for intervention. Probation is largely “invisible” (Robinson 2016); it enters the public eye not for its successes, but for its failures – namely, serious further offences (Phillips 2014). The presentation of these tragic, often fatal incidents, and thus of the service, is accentuated by the so-called “undeserving” (Garland 2001; Newman and Ugwudike 2014) nature of its clientele:

In the health service, you get doctors who do the wrong thing, but you don’t get the health minister playing the blame game. In health, in the police, they feel less blamed. I think that’s because we do the work nobody else does. We work with the so-called undeserving, somebody who has done wrong, and therefore we’re under a higher level of scrutiny. (RPD4)

The increased “scrutiny” under which probation operates has coincided with two significant demographic changes in probation. First, the abolition of social work training requirements prompted a significant increase in lesser qualified PSOs, who constituted the majority of frontline practitioners by 2012 (Mair 2016). Second, having historically been dominated by men, probation has experienced “feminisation” (Annison 2007). A “gender switchover” (Annison 2007, p. 148) – the moment at which women outnumbered men – occurred in 2006, and women now comprise 76.4% of probation staff (HMPPS 2024). Tidmarsh (2023, p. 6) has recently linked these demographic changes to “cultural dynamics of feminisation” in which an influx of women into a profession is typically accompanied by worsening pay and working conditions (see Davies 1995; Healy 2009; Glinsner *et al.* 2018). This is not to present a causal link between women and a diminished professional project, but rather, to emphasise their overrepresentation in professions like social work (Healy 2009) and nursing (Davies 1995). That these professions, like probation (Dominey and Canton 2022), are predicated on *care for* (see Hugman 1991) non-fee-paying

clients means their virtues are dissonant with market-like mechanisms through which the success of neoliberal public services is demonstrated.

The consequences of macro-level, “extra-organizational forces” (Chreim *et al.* 2007, p. 1516) can be further seen in changing professional identity in probation. Mawby and Worrall’s (2013, p. 141) typology of occupational narratives identified three ideal-typical profiles of probation staff. *Lifers*, they argue, were social work trained and most likely to view their job as a vocation. *Second careerists* entered into the service after a considerable period of employment in another, often unrelated occupation; some were social work trained, but others joined after its abolition as a requirement for practice. Finally, *offender managers* joined after the election of the New Labour Government in 1997. There was little resonance amongst this group with social work culture; they were, instead, “security-conscious” (Mawby and Worrall 2013, p. 151) and generally comfortable with the technologies and practices of risk assessment compared to *lifers* and *second careerists*. Indeed, the logic of risk now dominates practice; it is both “a language through which probation could frame its work with offenders and a knowledge base on which staff could draw to evidence decision-making” (Tidmarsh 2021b, p. 37). And yet, despite these differences, Mawby and Worrall (2013) conclude that these groups are united by a shared value set based on commitment to the client and a desire to engender change amongst the less fortunate. This claim is supported by research on the “durability” of a client-centred *ideology of service* (Grant 2016). Studies of probation training, for example, have emphasised that while staff express frustrations with the managerial nature of probation work, there is consensus of why people enter the service – namely, because of a desire to work in a *people-oriented* profession (Annison *et al.* 2008; Deering 2010). This highlights the importance of an ideology of service to professional identity in probation, particularly as a buffer against efforts to reshape its organisational culture.

As such, it is possible to identify several major environmental changes that have impacted probation’s professional project since the 1980s. Public ignorance about probation, largely unfavourable media representation, and the political capital made from its “undeserving” client base has rendered, and continues to render, the service vulnerable to state interference. This powerlessness has manifested in the turbulence that has marked the recent history of probation:

I think a big challenge is the complexity of our working environment – which I think, genuinely, we overcomplicate sometimes. Trying to navigate those pressures – the financial, the political, the operational – is difficult. (RPD1)

Where, previously, ideal-typical professional tenets like social work training, practitioner autonomy, and an ideology of service were crucial to legitimacy and identity in probation (Tidmarsh 2022), the service is now predicated on a regimen of risk management and managerial regulation. Indeed, countering this shift towards managerialism was at the heart of the Coalition Government’s

implementation of *TR*. Part of the wider adoption of austerity measures which followed a reconfiguration of the 2007/08 financial crisis as one of government overspending (Clarke and Newman 2012), these reforms accelerated the decades-long challenge to professional subjectivities in probation. The impact of *TR* and the subsequent unification of services on staff is explored in more depth below.

### ***Identities in transition? Probation and organisational reform***

The financial, political, and operational challenges described by RPD1, above, have driven and been exacerbated by *work role transitions* (Obling 2022). The most destabilising of these restructurings was *Transforming Rehabilitation (TR)*, which split services between a publicly-owned NPS and 21 privately-owned CRCs, in 2014. The reforms were initiated, in part, to “unlock ... professionalism” (MoJ 2010, p. 9; 2013) in probation. Part of a wider critique of public sector efficiency (Mant *et al.*, [this volume](#)), the Coalition Government argued that state-run services were excessively bureaucratic, dominated by a regime of targets and audit that stifled effective performance. The innovations only market provision could generate, by contrast, would empower probation professionals with the discretion to reduce reoffending and the costs of criminal justice.

A comprehensive autopsy of the failures of *TR* is beyond the scope of this paper (see, instead, HMI Probation 2019; Tidmarsh 2021b), but suffice to say that interlinked cultural and structural issues became insurmountable. On culture, studies of the transition to the private sector provide found overwhelming opposition to *TR* (Deering and Feilzer 2015; Burke *et al.* 2017; Tidmarsh 2021b), as staff identified resolutely with a *public sector ethos* (Robinson *et al.* 2016). This suggests that attempts to promote entrepreneurial “narratives of self” (Ibarra and Barbulescu 2010, p. 36) through organisational reform were successfully resisted, a point further evidenced in this current study. Such cultural resistance to *TR* was exacerbated by structural failings in how the contracts were set up (NAO 2019). Contrary to how the Coalition Government presented the market as a means to activate professionalism, the reforms merely entrenched the importance of meeting performance targets. As PO2 put it:

The main thing is, the CRCs had to hit targets to get paid. [...] There was a massive difference, a separation, between quality assessments and performance; the two didn't meet.

This focus on metrics was further heightened by lower than anticipated case-loads. Fewer individuals allocated to the CRCs by the courts resulted in a combined £1.4bn shortfall against the initial £3.7bn promised to private providers (HMI Probation 2019, 2023). Many CRCs responded with redundancy

programmes, which not only increased individual caseloads for those who remained but also intensified target-driven, “box-ticking” practice (HMI Probation 2019; Tidmarsh 2021a). Accordingly, HMI Probation’s (2019, p. 3) conclusion that *TR* contributed to “deplorable diminution of the probation profession” was echoed by PSO11, whose summary of the impact of the reforms can be taken as evidence of an increasingly precarious professional identity:

Prior to the privatisation, we were very proud of the fact that we were a public sector organisation that delivered a very specific and significant, very specialist service. I think the roots of where the Probation Service came from were still visible and were still quite obvious to any member of staff and especially new staff coming in. [...] I’m afraid that my opinion is that it’s all been eroded because of what happened through the privatisation.

One of the most consistent findings within probation research in recent decades is the persistence of a client-centred ideology of service. Staff, as argued above, have successfully mobilised such values as a way to “grasp the nettle” (Robinson and Burnett 2007, p. 331), to make sense of practice with reference to the *profession* rather the *organisation* (Tidmarsh 2022). The period of *TR* was no exception: despite considerable opposition to the reforms, most staff could be described as *guardians* (Burke *et al.* 2017) of probation identity (Deering and Feilzer 2015; Tidmarsh 2020, 2021b). This view was summarised by PO3:

If we didn’t have the passion for the job, it would be easy for us to walk out and double our salaries in the private sector. *We’ll always go back for more*; it’s the way we’re built. The one thing we have in common is that we believe in the work. (my emphasis)

What could be interpreted in positive terms, as an ideology of service that willingly places the care of individuals above all else could equally represent the normalisation of overworking in probation. This raises questions about the impact of yet another *work role transition* (Obling 2022) on professional identity (re)construction.

Since the “unification” of services in June 2021, PO3’s contention that staff will “always go back for more” has been undermined by the confluence of challenges which continue to besiege the service. Staff feel “overworked, understaffed, [and] underpaid” (PSO2) – claims that are borne out in the national data. For example, while caseloads vary by Probation Region, a survey of 1,534 probation staff conducted by HMI Probation (2022, p. 15) found that 51% thought their workloads were “not so manageable”. The challenge presented by high caseloads is compounded by staffing levels. The extent of frontline practitioner vacancies did not become known until unification – in large part because commercial confidentiality laws meant CRCs were not required to disclose data on staffing – but the evidence points to a “retention crisis” (Tidmarsh 2023, 2024b). As of June 2024,

2,357 people left the service in the previous 12 months, an increase of 10.6% on the previous year (HMPPS 2024). M2 reflected upon the impact of staffing shortages, which she attributed to the continuance of *managerial* adaptations (Robinson *et al.* 2012):

We've struggled with staffing levels that I've never experienced in any job. Everything was cut to the bone and trying to manage the cases appropriately and still maintain the community links and find the work... it's been really tough. People have got to have the time and the headspace to supervise the teams, do the community liaison, and actually motivate people to attend. It's all been about meeting deadlines, meeting time limits, and just chasing targets that are completely unrealistic.

This contention that staffing “was cut to the bone” could apply to numerous public services during a period defined by the politics of austerity (see Koch 2018; Mant *et al.*, [this volume](#)); however, there is evidence that budgetary pressures have been felt more acutely in probation than in comparable professions. For example, many of the professionals to whom informants compared themselves – such as police officers and NHS staff – have seen pay increases of approximately 15% since 2010 (Napo 2022) – but pay in probation has largely been stagnant, with just a 1% increase in real terms over the same period:

People realise that they can get more stacking shelves for less stress. I think, even now, you know, people haven't had a pay rise again; the unions are trying to argue again, but they never seem to be able to argue what we're worth. If they manage to argue a 3% pay rise, everyone will be like, “great, what does that mean in real terms?” The cost of living is soaring – food, electricity, petrol – so, actually, we're taking a pay cut: it's horrendous. (PSO7)

The comparison to “stacking shelves” resonates with similar research (see Millings *et al.* 2023). It should not be read as an attempt to belittle retail work, but rather, as a way to emphasise that the pay is “not commensurate with the weight of responsibilities upon the shoulders of probation staff” (Tidmarsh 2023, p. 14). This points, then, to a sense of demise among probation staff in this study, of *identity in crisis*. As M6 summarised:

It's sad because I don't see the profession that we had before, I think it's been decimated. I don't want to be depressing, but I really do. I think it's been decimated. It needs to be redone, rebuilt.

Accordingly, recent *work role transitions* in the form of top-down, organisational restructurings have surfaced longstanding concerns, around caseloads and the pervasiveness of managerialism. The findings presented in this section point to a heightened sense of precarity regarding how staff understand their work. This raises questions about the culture of the service into which new staff enter, which are explored in the next section through the lens of *professional socialisation*.

## **Identity and socialisation: the “enculturation” of probation staff**

*Professional socialisation* entails the acquisition of the knowledge, qualifications, values, and practices which differentiate professionals from non-professionals (Obling 2022). It typically occurs through training and exposure to the established working cultures and practices of other professionals, thereby contributing to a collective sense of identity (Freidson 2001). In a probation context, Robinson (2018, p. 322) refers to this process as “enculturation” – that is, how “new members acquire the norms, values, behaviours and other tools of [a] particular culture”. However, these facets of identity formation have been challenged by successive governments and codified within numerous organisational restructurings. Despite claims to the contrary (see MoJ 2010, 2013), recent reforms have served only to bring longstanding problems to the surface, particularly with regard to caseloads and poor retention rates. This raises questions about the nature of the service into which staff are socialised and, by extension, how they construct their professional identity. Hence, this final section explores the enculturation of probation staff, including the roles played by Practice Tutor Assessors (PTAs) and Senior Probation Officers (SPOs) – two groups that are important to the socialisation of frontline practitioners.

As acknowledged above, one of the most consistently observed findings within probation research is the persistence of a value base which foregrounds the importance of non-judgemental approach to those who have offended and a belief in the capacity of individuals to change (Annison *et al.* 2008; Mawby and Worrall 2013; Grant 2016). Staff, in M2’s terms, share an “underlying moral compass”:

If you talk to people in probation, they all have – no matter how they present as characters and personalities – this underlying moral compass of not only wanting to see that justice is done and people are dealt with appropriately but also to make a difference and get those difference and get those people off the paths they’re currently on. [...] I do think that people who work in probation have this desire to care, to change the way the wheel is turning for some people.

Her allusion to *care-based* practice means probation can be located alongside comparable (low status) professions, such as nursing and social work (Hugman 1991; Davies 1995; Healy 2009; Tidmarsh 2023). Accordingly, this current study supports a substantial body of research on *why* people work in probation. It suggests that an ideology of service underpinned by a desire to work *with* people to motivate change is the most significant factor in professional identity formation, one that cuts across experience and job role:

... to work with offenders to help them improve their lives in effect, in some shape or form. I think that for me is the main common denominator. So, thinking of my colleagues, those who have left, those new ones who have joined, a big one is they want to improve people’s lives. (PSO4)



... it's about social justice, the path we walk, where we find ourselves – just being able to have a temperament to work with people. They've been judged, so there's no point in judging them; I just want to help them. (RPD4)

PSO4's reference to new entrants into the service is particularly important given the challenges of retention identified in the previous section, and the subsequent need to recruit staff. According to the latest HMPPS (2024) *Workforce Statistics Bulletin*, of the 1,047 frontline practitioners that joined the service in the year-end June 2024, the overwhelming majority (95%) entered at PSO grade. Just over half ( $n = 543$ ) of these new staff are enrolled on the Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP), completion of which is prerequisite for qualifying as a PO. The PQiP is comprised of an academic component located in a university and on-the-job learning, which includes managing a (reduced) caseload. Newer staff who had recently completed (PO5) or were enrolled on (PSO2) or the PQiP at the time of interview were generally positive about their experience, but also commented on its intensity:

At some points, it became overwhelming, especially at the end when you have deadlines and you're expected to deal with higher risk cases. But it did give me a theoretical underpinning to the work that I needed to do. For me, it was a good experience overall – I just recognise that there were some really intense periods. (PO5)

It's intense, is one word to describe it. It's just a lot. It is manageable and my SPOs are happy to be flexible with deadlines; but with deadlines for work and deadlines for uni, it's, urgh, a lot. (PSO2)

PSO2's emphasis on “deadlines” highlights the dual pressures under which trainee POs operate, as individuals who manage a caseload alongside undertaking education and training. It suggests how both an ability to demonstrate the acquisition of knowledge via university assessment and to meet performance targets, part the neoliberal demand for accountability which has reconfigured practice in recent decades (Phillips 2011), are crucial to professional socialisation into probation. The latter, in particular, reflects a “narrative of efficiency” (Mant *et al.*, [this volume](#)) by which identity among public sector professionals has been reshaped. This further underscores the shift towards working with “things” over “people”, manifest in greater administrative responsibilities (Tidmarsh 2020). As PTA2 put it:

The biggest difficulty about the job – and they're all graduates, right? None of these kids are stupid and they've gone through a ton of hoops to get into the service – is they arrive into the service and go, “what, I'm not seeing anyone?” [...] I think that individuality of care has been lost to the administration side of things. That's why I think people have completely left the service, because of *the amount of time people spend staring at their screens*. (my emphasis)

PTA2's role entails inducting new staff, observing them as they begin to undertake interviews with clients, and assessing their practice skills. He is, in other words, responsible for socialising new recruits into the culture and practices of the service. Tensions between with the time spent with people relative to time spent behind computers have long defined new starters' experiences (see Annison *et al.* 2008; Deering 2010), but PTA2's above comment suggests that unification has exacerbated the conflict between probation's ideology of service and managerial administration, contributing to problems of retention. This culture, he argued, is dominated by the logic of risk, which prioritises proficient "typists" over "people-people":

I really want more time to be spent between probation officer and client, face-to-face, in the room, and not feeling under any pressure to have to get out of the room to go and write about them. I think, when we get to that point, we'll have people coming into this job who are not administrators, they're not great typists – they're people-people.

As such, PTA2 sees his role as training practitioners in the hope that they will have the time to realise a client-centred ideology of service:

We're training people for the future possible, in the hope that they will go back to seeing clients properly, for an hour at a time, weekly.

The present reality, though, is of a service that is overwhelmed, not just at practitioner level but also at the level of management. Like PTAs, SPOs are crucial to the process of enculturation. The role was integral to the professionalisation of probation in the postwar period: established via the Probation Rules of 1949, SPOs provided a measure of oversight over practitioners whilst ensuring that complex cases were managed by an individual with the appropriate skills and experience (Jarvis 1972). For PTA3 (a former SPO), however, the role has changed markedly in recent decades:

... the SPO role has changed dramatically from when I first qualified, when it was about case supervision. Now, it's about performance management. I think that's what senior probation officers should be doing: they should be working with people on their cases. The HR function, the performance function, should be done by a different role or grade.

This response speaks to both quantitative and qualitative shifts. SPOs should be both the "manager and developer of frontline probation practitioners" (Westaby *et al.* 2023, p. 40). Present workloads, however, mean they are unable to give sufficient support to their staff. Qualitatively, the tasks that fall within SPOs' remit have expanded, as understaffing has meant that "their focus is too often on non-operational tasks" (HMI Probation 2024, p. 4). Quantitatively, then, this increase in the volume of work has reduced the time SPOs are able to spend with their staff (Coley 2020; Westaby *et al.* 2023). Both shifts were emphasised by SM1:

If we had more staff, [SPOs] could do more. We also have quality development officers; but the problem is, because we're so understaffed, they're used elsewhere to plug operational staff. So, it comes down to the SPOs, many of whom have got large teams. They haven't got the capacity to do what they'd like to do.

One of the consequences of these staffing pressures is that practitioners are able to move into management roles more quickly than has previously been possible in probation. Here, there are parallels between the post-unification Probation Service and Healy's (2009) research on children's social workers in Australia. She argued that "low status and poor working conditions" (Healy 2009, p. 413), which stemmed in large part from a societal ambivalence towards caring profession, contribute to high staff turnover and an inexperienced workforce. This inexperience was felt higher up the managerial hierarchy, for newly qualified social workers were quickly promoted into decision-making roles and, once there, discovered that workload pressures impinge upon their ability to develop the structures "to support a largely novice case-work workforce" (Healy 2009, p. 413). Such concerns were articulated by PSO12, who reflected on what she saw as a "new breed" of SPOs who had risen through the ranks too quickly:

I think people are moving up really, really quickly. A woman who was a PSO five years ago in [this region], she's now an SPO. That's quite a new thing. [...] Here, there are two SPOs. One of them was highly thought of by colleagues because she got on with people. She'd come up through the ranks and had been a senior for a long time. Whereas *the other one was more like the newer breed; she didn't have a lot of time for staff, closed door all of the time, works from home*. If you did have supervision, it'd be via Teams. The management isn't as visible now as what it used to be. They don't seem to be as hands on and have enough knowledge of all the processes and policies that are being churned out. (my emphasis)

PSO12 works in a rural office with just two SPOs. Her comparison cannot be extrapolated to the service at large nor, even, to practitioners in this study – most of whom were supportive towards SPOs and acknowledged the pressures they face – but others reported similar experiences. As PO4, who joined the service in 2020, summarised:

It's difficult to allocate the time to spend to maybe reflect on practice, even in supervision. The time is limited. You can always tell when the SPO is clock-watching or thinking about those 50 emails that are in their inbox. [...] You're left to your own devices quite a lot, to be honest. Often, you can feel like you're on your own on a little boat sailing. It can be unsettling, at times, when there's lots going on – people going into crisis, all sorts of risks to manage. [...] A lot of the time, I think a lot of people try to bottle it up and deal with it themselves.

This response highlights how pressures upon SPOs in some regions can manifest in an absence of support. It suggests that, since unification, new staff in some regions are being socialised into an increasing atomised, "unsettling"

probation culture – one that points to an increasingly precarious sense of professionalism and professional identity.

## Conclusion

This paper has argued that probation staff in England and Wales are being socialised into a culture beset by multiple and interlinked challenges. It adds to a significant body of research on the persistence of a client-centred ideology of service which guides why individuals enter into probation, one that has proved relatively resistant to numerous (and damaging) restructurings. However, the ability to realise these values is being impaired by the confluence of staffing shortages, high workloads, and a regime of performance management, manifest in an increasingly “precarious” (Moorhead 2014) professional identity. The value of the paper, therefore, lies in its focus on professional identity (re)construction – specifically, how macro-level environmental shifts filter into meso-level work role transitions which, in turn, impact micro-level processes of how probation staff understand their work.

No profession has been exempted from the forces of neoliberalism; but the changes to the Probation Service described in this paper demonstrate how it has proved especially vulnerable to extraneous intervention, not least because of the low-status, involuntary nature of its clientele. The politicisation of these concerns from the late-1970s onwards accelerated demands for probation to display its *punitive* credentials. This extra-organisational change prompted the rise of *managerialism*: as caseloads increased, so did pressures on the service and its staff to manage the risks posed by clients – reconstituted as “offenders” – in more efficient and effective ways. Accordingly, while an ideology of service has not disappeared altogether, it has been tempered by the *work role transitions* extant within several organisational restructurings and changes to probation’s knowledge and methods.

The most damaging of the recent organisational reforms to probation was the *TR*, which brought many of the service’s underlying problems to the surface. Here, the emphasis placed by staff on care-based practice provides the clearest articulation of the best of probation work, and thus the findings typically associated with AI research. For the most part, though, staff were pessimistic about the service’s contemporary iteration. Ongoing staffing shortages are felt by practitioners, not only in terms of workloads but also in their socialisation. For new staff, two groups are key to this “enculturation” (Robinson 2018): PTAs and SPOs. The former prioritise educating staff in the knowledge and practices of risk management; the latter, many of whom were relatively inexperienced practitioners before progressing into the SPO role, are preoccupied with a culture of performance management.

The findings presented in this article have several implications for the future of probation. First, organisational reform has not alleviated the challenges

experienced throughout the period of *TR*; indeed, since unification, problems of high caseloads and low morale have worsened. This suggests that further attempts at restructuring should be approached with caution. Second, the client-centred ideology of service espoused by staff in this study is testament to its durability (see Grant 2016), but it is not a sustainable base from which to rebuild the service. The pressures under which practitioners operate, manifest in a “retention crisis” (Tidmarsh 2023, 2024a), hint at an atomised probation culture and an increasingly precarious professional identity. More, then, is needed from Government, both in terms of financial resources and political backing, if the trends towards precarity described in this paper are to be reversed. Third, investment in the service since unification has understandably been put to the recruitment of trainee POs, but other groups should also be prioritised. This article has highlighted the dual roles of SPOs, who are responsible for both performance management and case working elements of staff supervision (see Westaby *et al.* 2023); however, the former dominates over the latter. Rebalancing this asymmetry, or perhaps even splitting the quantitative and qualitative tasks between distinct SPO roles, could not only provide better role clarity but also help new practitioners to feel more confident in their practice.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to Hilary Sommerlad (University of Leeds) for her comments on the first draft of this paper, as well as Libby Smith (University of Leeds) for her help in transcribing some of the interviews as part of this project.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## References

- Abbott, A. (1988) *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago, IL, University of Chicago).
- Annisson, J. (2007) A gendered review of change within the probation service, *The Howard Journal*, 46(2), pp. 145–161.
- Annisson, H. (2019) Transforming rehabilitation as ‘policy disaster’: unbalanced policy-making and probation reform, *Probation Journal*, 66(1), pp. 43–59.
- Annisson, J., Eadie, T. & Knight, C. (2008) People first: probation officer perspectives on probation work, *Probation Journal*, 55(3), pp. 259–271.
- Bell, E. (2011) *Criminal Justice and Neoliberalism* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan).
- Burke, L. & Collett, S. (2015) *Delivering Rehabilitation: The Politics, Governance and Control of Probation* (London, Routledge).
- Burke, L., Millings, M. & Robinson, G. (2017) Probation migration(s): examining occupational culture in a turbulent field, *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 17(2), pp. 192–208.

- Canton, R. (2024) Probation as social work, *Probation Journal*, 71(3), pp. 214–233.
- Carr-Saunders, A. M. & Wilson, P. A. (1933) *The Professions* (Oxford, Oxford University).
- Chreim, S., Williams, B. E. & Hinings, C. R. (2007) Interlevel influences on the reconstruction of professional role identity, *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(6), pp. 1515–1539.
- Clarke, J. & Newman, J. (2012) The alchemy of austerity, *Critical Social Policy*, 32(3), pp. 299–319.
- Cohen, S. (1985) *Visions of Social Control* (Cambridge, Polity).
- Coley, D. (2020) Probation staff supervision: valuing ‘me time’ within congested spaces, *Probation Journal*, 67(3), pp. 228–245.
- Davies, C. (1995) *Gender and the Professional Predicament in Nursing* (Buckingham, Open University).
- Dean, M. (2010) *Governmentality*, 2nd ed. (London, SAGE).
- Deering, J. (2010) Attitudes and beliefs of trainee probation officers: a ‘new breed’?, *Probation Journal*, 57(1), pp. 9–26.
- Deering, J. & Feilzer, M. Y. (2015) *Privatising Probation: Is Transforming Rehabilitation the End of the Probation Ideal?* (Bristol, Policy).
- Dominey, J. & Canton, R. (2022) Probation and the ethics of care, *Probation Journal*, 69(4), pp. 417–433.
- Elliott, C. (1999) *Locating the Energy for Change: An Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry* (Winnipeg, International Institute for Sustainable Development).
- Fournier, V. (1999) The appeal to ‘professionalism’ as a disciplinary mechanism, *Social Review*, 47(2), pp. 280–307.
- Freidson, E. (1970) *Profession of Medicine: A Study of the Sociology of Applied Knowledge* (New York, NY, Dodd, Mead & Company).
- Freidson, E. (2001) *Professionalism: The Third Logic* (Cambridge, Polity).
- Garland, D. (2001) *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).
- Glinsner, B., Sauer, B., Gaitsch, M., et al. (2018) Doing gender in public services: affective labour of employment agents, *Gender, Work & Organization*, 26(7), pp. 983–999.
- Grant, S. (2016) Constructing the durable penal agent: tracing the development of habitus within English probation officers and Scottish criminal justice social workers, *British Journal of Criminology*, 56, pp. 750–768.
- Healy, K. (2009) A case of mistaken identity: the social welfare professions and new public management, *Journal of Sociology*, 45(4), pp. 401–418.
- HMI Probation. (2019) *Report of the Chief Inspector* (Manchester, HM Inspectorate of Probation).
- HMI Probation. (2022) *2021 Annual Report: Inspections of Probation Services* (Manchester, HMI Probation).
- HMI Probation. (2023) *Annual Report 2022/2023* (Manchester, HMI Probation).
- HMI Probation. (2024) *The Role of the Senior Probation Officer and Management Oversight in the Probation Service* (Manchester, HMI Probation).
- HM Prison and Probation Service. (2024) *Workforce Statistics Bulletin* (London, HMSO).
- Hood, C. (1995) The ‘new public management’ in the 1980s: variations on a theme, *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 20(2–3), pp. 93–109.
- Hugman, R. (1991) *Power in Caring Professions* (Basingstoke, Macmillan).
- Ibarra, H. & Barbulescu, R. (2010) Identity as narrative: prevalence, effectiveness, and consequences of narrative identity work in macro work role transitions, *Academy of Management Review*, 35(1), pp. 135–154.
- Jarvis, F. V. (1972) *Advise, Assist, Befriend: A History of the Probation and After-Care Service* (London, National Association of Probation Officers).

- Johnson, T. J. (1972) *Professions and Power* (London, Macmillan).
- Koch, I. L. (2018) *Personalizing the State: An Anthropology of Law, Politics, and Welfare in Austerity Britain* (Oxford, Oxford University).
- Larson, M. S. (1977) *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley, CA, University of California).
- Liebling, A., Price, D. & Elliott, C. (1999) Appreciative inquiry and relationships in prison, *Punishment & Society*, 1, pp. 71–98.
- Mair, G. (2016) ‘A difficult trip, I think’: the end days of the probation service in England and Wales?, *European Journal of Probation*, 8(1), pp. 3–15.
- Mant, J., Newman, D. & Cooke, E. (this volume) Lived realities of legal aid: austerity, the pandemic and beyond, *International Journal of the Legal Profession*.
- Mawby, R. C. & Worrall, A. (2013) *Doing Probation Work: Identity in a Criminal Justice Occupation* (Abingdon, Routledge).
- McWilliams, W. (1985) The mission transformed: professionalisation of probation between the wars, *The Howard Journal*, 24(4), pp. 257–274.
- McWilliams, W. (1987) Probation, pragmatism and policy, *The Howard Journal*, 26(2), pp. 97–121.
- Millings, M., Burke, L., Annison, H., Carr, N., Robinson, G. & Surridge, E. (2023) A necessary but painful journey: experiences of unification in a probation service region, *Probation Journal*, 70(4), pp. 331–349.
- Ministry of Justice. (2010) *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders* [Cm. 7972] (London, HMSO).
- Ministry of Justice. (2013) *Transforming Rehabilitation: A Strategy for Reform* [Cm. 8619] (London, HMSO).
- Moorhead, R. (2014) Precarious professionalism: some empirical and behavioural perspectives on lawyers, *Current Legal Problems*, 67, pp. 447–481.
- Napo. (2022) *Unions Submit 3 Year Pay Claim for NPS Members* (London, Napo).
- National Audit Office. (2019) *Transforming Rehabilitation: Progress Review* [HC 1986] (London, Home Office).
- Newman, D. C. & Ugwu-dike, P. (2014) Defence lawyers and probation officers: offenders’ allies or adversaries, *International Journal of the Legal Profession*, 20(2), pp. 183–207.
- Obling, A. R. (2022) Professional identity reconstruction: attempts to match people with new role expectations and environmental demands, *Management Learning*, 54(4), pp. 468–488.
- Parsons, T. (1952) *The Social System* (London, Tavistock).
- Phillips, J. (2011) Target, audit and risk assessment cultures in the probation service, *European Journal of Probation*, 3(3), pp. 108–122.
- Phillips, J. (2014) Probation in the news: transforming rehabilitation, *British Journal of Community Justice*, 12(1), pp. 27–48.
- Portwood, D. & Fielding, A. (1981) Privilege and the professions, *Sociological Review*, 29(4), pp. 749–773.
- Power, M. (1997) *The Audit Society: Rituals of Verification* (Oxford, Oxford University).
- Reiner, R. (2007) *Law and Order: An Honest Citizen’s Guide to Crime and Control* (Cambridge, Polity).
- Robinson, G. (2016) The Cinderella complex: punishment, society and community sanctions, *Punishment & Society*, 18(1), pp. 95–112.
- Robinson, G. (2018) Transforming probation services in magistrates’ courts, *Probation Journal*, 65(3), pp. 316–334.



- Robinson, G., Burke, L. & Millings, M. (2016) Criminal justice identities in transition: the case of devolved probation services in England and Wales, *British Journal of Criminology*, 56(1), pp. 191–173.
- Robinson, G. & Burnett, R. (2007) Experiencing modernization: frontline probation perspectives on the transition to a national offender management service, *Probation Journal*, 54(4), pp. 318–337.
- Robinson, G., McNeill, F. & Maruna, S. (2012) Punishment in society: the improbable persistence of probation and other community sanctions and measures, in: J. Simon & R. Sparks (Eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Punishment and Society* (London, SAGE), pp. 321–340.
- Tidmarsh, M. (2020) The right kind of person for the job? Emotional labour and organisational professionalism in probation, *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, 61, pp. 1–9.
- Tidmarsh, M. (2021a) Professionalism, payment by results and the probation service: a qualitative study of the impact of marketisation on professional autonomy, *Work, Employment & Society*, 36(6), pp. 1118–1138.
- Tidmarsh, M. (2021b) *Professionalism in Probation: Making Sense of Marketisation* (Abingdon, Routledge).
- Tidmarsh, M. (2022) Professional legitimacy, identity, and practice: towards a sociology of professionalism in probation, *British Journal of Criminology*, 62, pp. 165–183.
- Tidmarsh, M. (2023) Gender in a ‘caring’ profession: the demographic and cultural dynamics of the feminisation of the probation service in England and Wales, *Probation Journal*, 71(3), pp. 234–254.
- Tidmarsh, M. (2024a) Making, unmaking, remaking: mapping the boundaries of professional legitimacy, identity and practice in probation in England and Wales, *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 24(3), pp. 568–584..
- Tidmarsh, M. (2024b) Legacies of change: probation staff experiences of the unification of services in England and Wales, *British Journal of Criminology*, 64, pp. 468–486.
- Westaby, C., Phillips, J., Ainslie, S. & Fowler, A. (2023) ‘Pushed from above and pushed from below’: emotional labour and dual identities amongst senior probation officers in England and Wales, *European Journal of Probation*, 15(1), pp. 40–59.
- Young, J. (1988) Radical criminology in Britain: the emergence of a competing paradigm, *British Journal of Criminology*, 28(2), pp. 159–183.