Implementing What Works in the community - the challenge of research on probation policy and practice

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Evidence-based policy and practice

- What Works
- aerosol word - liberally sprayed onto all statements of practice for authentication
- relatively modern phenomenon -

1970s - an era of Nothing Works

- the lack of authentication did not equate to the lack of intuitive and reflective practice
- openness to innovate, experiment and work alongside 'clients'
- probation officers were community-based

1980s/1990s - Bottom up policy changes

- early what works in the UK developed in practice
- sharing across the globe? myopic look to North America only
- discovering the underpinning of research through systemic reviews

2000s - 'Institutionalised' What Works develops

EBP refers to approaches and interventions that have been scientifically tested in controlled studies and proven effective. EBP implies that there is a definable outcome(s); it is measurable; and it is defined according to practical realities (recidivism, victim satisfaction, etc.).

- Policy makers with selected research paradigms took over the implementation in a heavily managed form
  - Implementation of accredited programmes in NPS 2002
  - The benefits were squeezed by ill-considered implementation
- Politially inconvenient research was quietly ignored

Case Example - 19th September 2013

a memorable day?

- The timing of release was no coincidence
- foreword makes this clear
  - *'using evidence to inform service delivery is not necessarily a straightforward matter, and is certainly not a simple case of selecting from a menu of options.....this should not hold us back from trying to improve the quality of our services'*
- Two other documents were released as the day progressed
  - Notice to Trusts of the intention to spilt probation into two parts - rump of a new National Probation Service and the rest into a holding company known as CRCs (Community Rehabilitation Companies)
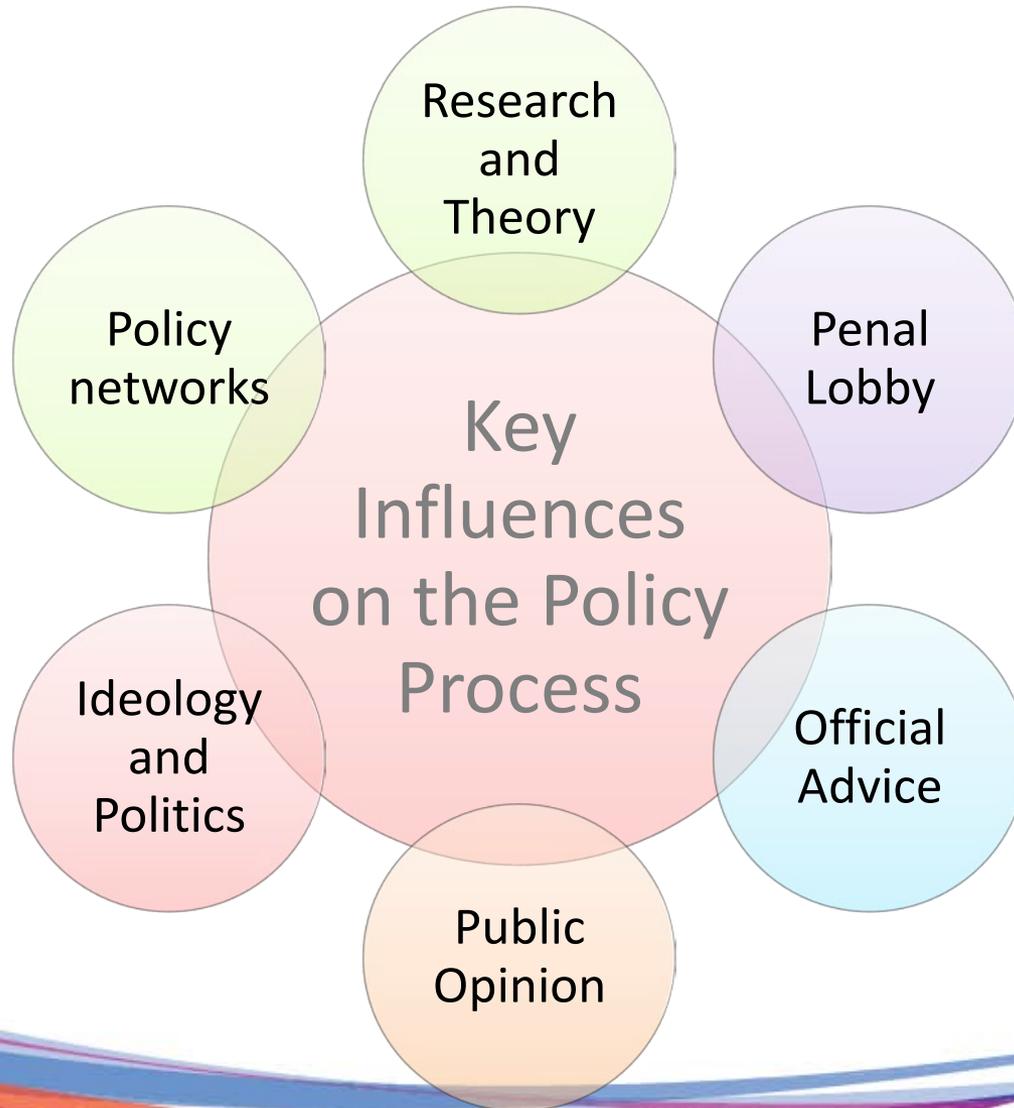 - announcement of the start of the competition to provide probation in the non-public sector

Ministry of Justice

Transforming Rehabilitation:

Ministry of Justice Analytical Series
2013

Case Example - 19th September 2013
a memorable day continued?

• *key aspects of effective working with offenders, includes:* • The role of skilled, trained practitioners. • Well-sequenced, holistic approaches. • Delivery of services and interventions in a joined-up, integrated manner. • Delivery of high quality services.	• *The proposals free up new providers to innovate*: • risk to professional training and status of employees • services will move between a small national Probation and 21 disparate Contracts • the advances in partnership work builds on pooling resources, cooperation between agencies and shared intelligence • maintaining and protecting the high standards associated with Probation Trusts at risk

Research and Theory

Policy networks

Penal Lobby

Key Influences on the Policy Process

Ideology and Politics

Official Advice

Public Opinion

The crowded policy arena

- The varied foci, complexity and heterogeneity of criminological research and theory makes simplistic solutions problematic
- Research and theory is only one element of the decision making process
- In recent periods in neo-liberal societies in particular public opinion, has had a distinct sway
- The policy cycle (initiation, formulation, implementation and evaluation) occurs in real time
- Each element of the cycle overlaps
- The limitations of policy transfer between differing jurisdictions often underplayed
- Austerity has begun to dictate policy responses

Multi-layers of policy change

'rational decision-making involves the selection of the alternative which will maximise the decision-maker's values, the selection being made following a comprehensive analysis of alternatives and their consequences'

- The 'rational comprehensive' v 'bureau-incrementalist' model
  - lack of correspondence between what is intended and the actual outcome
  - Powerful, sometimes unknown, contradictory and conflicting forces intervene
  - Policy makers inherit a given situation which they change incrementally
  - Policy process is 'serial in nature' - multiple gradual changes
  - Problem 'shifting' rather than 'problem solving'
  - Small-scale institutional adaptations based on pragmatism, accommodation of interests, money
  - Essentially conservative and dedicated to maintaining the status quo

Issues in policy implementation

- Implementation of policy may bring change and policy drift – the impact of the '*street level bureaucrat*' (Lipsky, 1980)
- Discretionary relationships between legislation and regulation
- Policy can be top-down or bottom-up
  – E.g. What Works drive in UK
- Impact of non-decision making
  – "power is … exercised when A devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous" (Bachrach and Baratz, 1963)
- Hierarchy of evidence
  – *'the privileging of particular bodies of 'evidence' and, conversely, the negation of 'inconvenient evidence'* (Goldson, 2010)

Concluding thoughts 1

Tonry (2003) raises the key challenge for policy makers:
'the important question ... is whether policy making gives good-faith consideration to the credible systematic evidence that is available, or whether it disregards it entirely for reasons of ideology or political self-interest'.

Goldson (2010) reviewing youth justice policy in UK sees the relationship in this way:

Knowledge/Evidence–Policy Rupture

Knowledge/Evidence ← → Policy

There is now a huge body of evidence concerning reducing re-offending can it avoid the rupture Goldson attests is happening in youth justice

Concluding thoughts 2

- Evidence should help to shape a more informed policy agenda
- The policy arena is crowded and contested and other players have as much right to be heard as criminologists
- The policy arena is multi-layered – policy drift occurs producing incremental change at different levels/times in the real-life process
- Do not be surprised if the outcomes are contradictory and lead to unintended outcomes (maybe good or not so good!)
- It is arguable to assume we have policy-based evidence rather than evidence-based policy
- But to ignore growing criminological research evidence would be folly you
  - need to make it work for you
  - in a world where public expenditure is driving pragmatic ill-considered policy changes and
  - Don't wait for grand plans - use evidence where it works for particular policy situations