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Caseloads, workloads and staffing levels in probation services

HM Inspectorate of Probation

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HM Inspectorate of Probation is committed to reviewing, developing and promoting the evidence-base for high-quality probation and youth offending services. Our *Research & Analysis Bulletins* are aimed at all those with an interest in the quality of these services, presenting key findings to assist with informed debate and help drive improvement where it is required. The findings are used within the Inspectorate to develop our inspection programmes, guidance and position statements.

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Executive summary

Context

Within our standards framework for inspecting probation services, our organisational-level standard on staffing (standard 1.2) emphasises the need for: (i) sufficient staff levels to meet workload and caseload demand; and (ii) the active management of practitioners by managers who themselves have a manageable workload.
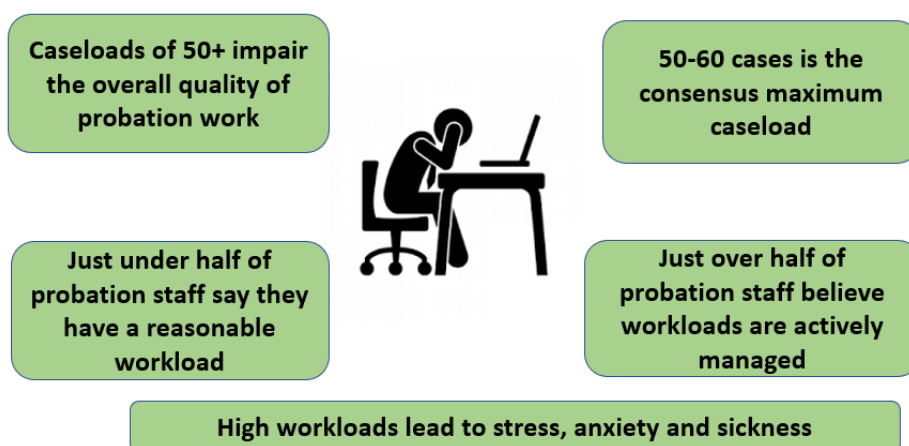
This bulletin examines the extent to which probation services have been meeting these expectations, as well as exploring the consequences and the prospects moving forward.

Approach

The findings in this report are based on the following five sources of evidence:

(i)   Relevant official Ministry of Justice (MoJ) statistics.
(ii) Data collected from our probation inspections conducted between June 2018 and June 2019, including aggregated data from over 3,000 case inspections, and qualitative analysis of about 2,000 interviews with frontline probation staff.
(iii) A reanalysis of qualitative data obtained from a survey of senior probation officers conducted for our 2019 inspection of National Probation Service (NPS) central functions.
(iv) A commissioned Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) of the UK and international evidence about caseloads and workloads in probation services and other related policy spheres.
(v)   Interviews with senior officials and leaders on their experiences of workload and caseload management in probation services.

Key findings and implications

Caseloads of 50+ impair the overall quality of probation work

50-60 cases is the consensus maximum caseload

Just under half of probation staff say they have a reasonable workload

Just over half of probation staff believe workloads are actively managed

High workloads lead to stress, anxiety and sickness

- Our key finding is that when probation practitioners hold a caseload of fifty or more, they are less likely to deliver high-quality work meeting the aims of rehabilitation and public protection. A precise target number for caseload cannot be set as there are too many inter-connected variables in relation to case complexity, the available administrative support, and the interventions and services that can be accessed.

However, there was a consensus among staff and senior managers that between 50 and 60 cases is the maximum number that can be managed well.

- Less than half (46 per cent) of probation practitioners believed they had a manageable workload, while just over half (54 per cent) considered that team workloads were actively managed. Probation officers were less positive about their workload than probation services officers, and those working in Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) were less positive than their NPS counterparts.

- Senior managers in both the CRCs and the NPS agreed that workloads were unbalanced and resulted in stress and anxiety for many staff. Probation practitioners told us that high workloads were exacting a high personal toll upon them in the form of stress, sleeplessness, and fear of making serious mistakes through overwork.

- Moving forward, in addition to the plans to recruit more staff, there are other promising developments for reducing workload pressures for the probation frontline:

  o The creation of administrative service hubs, which, if implemented well, can relieve practitioners of many support functions and thus free up time for one-to-one work.
  o Improved ICT and management information, facilitating faster access to case information, improving partnership working, and avoiding duplication of administrative efforts.
  o Improved access to accredited programmes and structured interventions, preventing the need for probation frontline workers to make up for gaps in provision with time-consuming and sometimes less effective one-to-one work.
  o Improved access to wider services, particularly through co-location and the creation of community hubs which put individual service users at the centre of service provision.
  o Employing support workers with lived experience, helping to engage service users.
  o Evaluating the potential value of remote supervision and new digital interventions.

1. Introduction

This bulletin aims to contribute to understanding how well caseloads and workloads in probation have been managed in recent years, and how they could be managed in the new probation delivery model.

1.1 Context

1.1.1 Concerns over rising caseload and workload levels

We expressed concern about workloads and staffing levels in our 2020 submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2020a), stating: 'probation staff are struggling to manage high numbers of offenders – 86 per cent of staff in CRCs and 33 per cent in NPS divisions are responsible for more than 40 cases. In our opinion, it is difficult for even experienced practitioners to deal with 60, 70, 80 or more cases properly. Financial pressures have also led to some CRC providers replacing qualified probation officers with less experienced staff who are still training towards a qualification.' The human price of high workloads was also emphasised by our Chief inspector in a recent speech as he noted that "*the impact of this on some of the staff we spoke to was clear. Some were in tears as we spoke to them. Others spoke of being burnt out and of having to work evenings and weekends to keep their head above water*" (Russell, 2020).

1.1.2 Causes of rising caseloads and workloads

Transforming Rehabilitation has been a key driver in relation to changes in caseloads in recent years. In June 2014, 35 public sector probation trusts in England and Wales were replaced by: (i) a new public sector NPS with responsibility for supervising those who present a high or very high risk of serious harm or who are managed under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA); and (ii) 21 private sector led CRCs with responsibility for supervising most other service users presenting a low or medium risk of serious harm. As such, staff were no longer supervising 'mixed' caseloads in terms of risk levels.

Transforming Rehabilitation also introduced (through the *Offender Rehabilitation Act (ORA) 2014*) a new duty on probation services to supervise prisoners released from short prison sentences of less than 12 months. Post-sentence supervision came into effect for those whose offence was committed after 01 February 2015 and who would be over the age of 18 at the point of release. This considerably increased the number of post-release service users managed by probation in the community, climbing from just under 40,000 on 31 March 2015, to 68,863 on 31 March 2020, a rise of 74 per cent. Prior to *Transforming Rehabilitation*, the caseload for the probation trusts had been falling year on year since 2000.

Another driver of caseload change has been the introduction of the suspended sentence order (SSO) in the *Criminal Justice Act* 2003 (with the *Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act* 2012 introducing SSOs without requirements) – these orders have proved popular at the expense of community orders (COs). Those currently supervised under COs have declined by 31 per cent since 2008, whereas SSOs have remained relatively stable (minus two per cent).

The result of the *Transforming Rehabilitation* reforms combined with offending and sentencing trends have left probation services with a caseload of service users who have more complex needs, more entrenched offending attitudes, behaviours and lifestyles, and often higher levels of risk than before the ORA was implemented.

1.1.3 What is an acceptable caseload size?

In providing context for their REA on probation caseloads, Fox et al. (2020) noted that the question of identifying optimum caseloads and workloads for probation staff has always been complex, as governments have consistently sought to reconcile the competing aims of maximum effectiveness and value for public money. Across Europe, different jurisdictions have very different models of probation. The most recent Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics (Council of Europe, 2019) found that the ratio of probationers per individual staff member varied from 4.7 in Norway to 240 in Greece with an average (median) ratio of 33 cases.

Within the UK, there is no legislation or guidance specifying the ideal or maximum caseload size to be held by a probation worker, and there is no definitive research to establish the optimum workload in terms of mix and numbers for effective work with those subject to probation supervision. However, Rule 29 within the European Probation Rules (Council of Europe, 2010a) states as follows: 'Probation staff shall be sufficiently numerous to carry out their work effectively. Individual staff members shall have a caseload which allows them to supervise, guide and assist offenders effectively and humanely and, where appropriate, to work with their families and, where applicable, victims. Where demand is excessive, it is the responsibility of management to seek solutions and to instruct staff about which tasks are to take priority.' Further elaboration is provided in the accompanying commentary:

> *'An adequate staff complement is essential to the agency's effectiveness and efficiency. If staff workloads are too large, then the probation agency will not be able to work as it should. Workloads should be assessed in a holistic way with an assessment made of the demands of individual cases and not simply on the number of cases or offenders under supervision. An overall shortage of resources constrains an organisation's potential and excessive workloads will prevent individual members of staff from achieving their best practice. This Rule appreciates that agencies may not have as many resources as would be ideal. If the workload of an individual staff member becomes excessive, then the importance of setting priorities becomes even more pressing. The Rule states that management has a responsibility to devise strategies to manage demand and to assign a reasonable and equitable workload to members of staff. Where this cannot be achieved because of pressure on resources, managers should be actively involved in advising staff about which tasks must take priority over others.'*

<div align="right">Council of Europe, 2010b</div>

In England and Wales, Webster et al. (2020, unpublished) noted that the changes occasioned by *Transforming Rehabilitation* have led to a number of contentious discussion points among the probation community including the following:

- What is the long-term impact for NPS staff of managing a caseload solely comprising those who have committed offences causing high levels of harm to the public? (Phillips et al., 2016)

- What is an appropriate caseload for responsible officers in CRCs who are operating to very different models and expectations, depending on the approach of their owner?
- Should caseloads be lower for NPS staff supervising those presenting a high risk of serious harm or are the demands of supervising more low/medium risk service users within CRCs actually greater, recognising that a greater proportion may have a high likelihood of reoffending, multiple needs and chaotic lifestyles?

Some of these issues will be superseded by forthcoming reforms to the probation sector, whereby all offender management will move to the NPS in June 2021. However, these issues are still of relevance to the findings in this bulletin.

Key definitions

Caseload: The number of cases handled in a given period by an organisation or an individual.

Workload: The amount of work allocated to an individual or a team.

Workload Measurement Tool (WMT): The NPS online tool to monitor staff capacity; the current version was launched in January 2018.

Tiering: The NPS apply a seven-category tiering framework to their cases both in custody and in the community. The tiering model takes into account MAPPA status, likelihood of reoffending, risk of serious harm, and various other factors. Cases are allocated based on tiering combined with clinical and professional judgement to determine the grade of offender manager most appropriate for the case. Tiering is being reviewed to meet the needs of the unified probation service.

Emotional labour: The work of managing one's own emotions that is required in certain professions and occupations, such as probation work.

Role overload: A situation which results from an individual taking on a role or multiple roles in which they are asked to do more than they are capable of doing in a specific period of time (*quantitative overload*) or where they are stretched beyond their knowledge, skills, and abilities (*qualitative overload*).

Role drift: A situation where core work duties for a specific role or grade are increasingly undertaken by other staff, typically where work is delegated to more junior staff.

2. Findings

The findings presented in this bulletin are based on evidence from the following five sources (see Annex A for further detail):

1) Relevant official MoJ statistics.
2) Data collected from our probation inspections conducted between June 2018 and June 2019, including aggregated data of inspectors' judgements on 3,308 case inspections, and qualitative analysis of 1,972 interviews with frontline probation staff.
3) A reanalysis of qualitative data obtained from a survey of senior probation officers conducted for our 2019 inspection of NPS central functions (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2020b).
4) A commissioned REA of the UK and international evidence about caseloads and workloads in probation services and other policy spheres (healthcare, social work, education and youth justice).
5) Interviews with senior MoJ officials and NPS/CRC leaders on their experiences of workload and caseload management in probation services.

In this report, we will consider these findings as a whole. In terms of official data, we largely exclude the time of the Covid-19 pandemic as the figures are not finalised. However, we do consider the impacts of new ways of working on the future provision of probation services. Within our core inspections, workloads are considered as part of our inspection standard on staffing (standard 1.3).[1]

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[1] The full standards framework can be found here: https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/about-our-work/our-standards-and-ratings/.

Inspection standards

Our current inspections of probation services are underpinned by standards which are grounded in evidence, learning and experience. In developing the standards, we worked constructively with providers and others to build a common view of high-quality probation services and what should be expected.

The standards are grouped within three domains, the first of which, organisational delivery, covers how well the organisation is led, managed, and set up. Within this domain, the following key question and prompts are applicable to caseloads, staffing levels and workloads issues.

1.2.1 Do staffing and workload levels support the delivery of high-quality services for all service users?

a) Are staffing levels planned and reviewed to meet the changing demands and profiles of service users?

b) Do practitioners have manageable workloads, given the profile of the cases and the range of work undertaken?

e) Are workloads actively managed, with resources being redeployed, when reasonable and necessary, in response to local pressures?

As part of domain two, we look at four aspects of supervision, based on the ASPIRE model: Assessment; Planning; Implementation and Delivery; and Review. Part 2.3.1 of this bulletin considers how caseload size impacts on the quality of delivery in each of these areas of supervision.

2.1 Trends in probation caseloads and staffing

2.1.1 Key trends in probation caseloads 2010-2019

Offender management statistics (Ministry of Justice, 2019a) reveal that probation caseload fell year on year from 2010 until 2014, reflecting decreases in general crime levels, and subsequently the numbers coming to courts and being sentenced. Caseloads began rising again in 2015 following the *Transforming Rehabilitation* reforms, including the introduction of ORA, which brought almost all those leaving custody into post-release supervision. Overall, the number of service users receiving pre- and post-release supervision has risen by 39 per cent since 2010.

Changes have also been seen in relation to the types of cases being supervised. During this period, community sentences in the probation caseload declined by 27 per cent, reflecting the popularity of the SSO which, while delivered by probation services in the community, is a custodial sentence. These changes are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Individuals supervised by probation services by sentence type in England and Wales, 2010-2019

Legend: Community sentences | Suspended sentence order | All pre and post release supervision
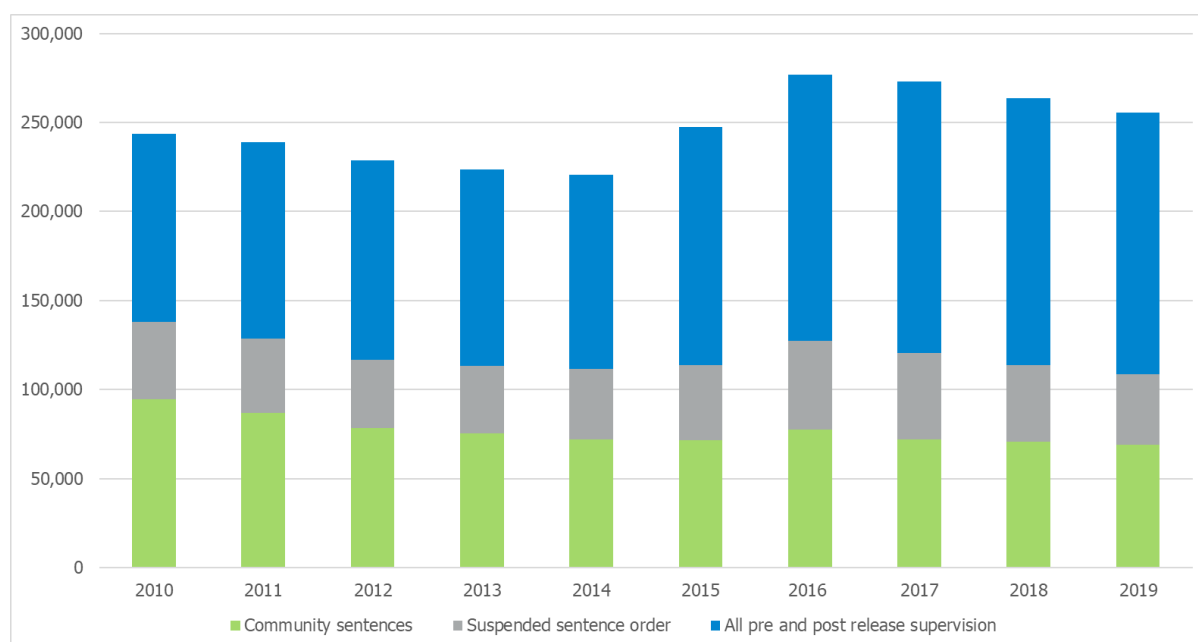
2.1.2 Key trends in NPS frontline workforce 2015-2019

We only have reliable published data on staffing for the NPS from Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) quarterly workforce statistics (Ministry of Justice, 2019b), as CRCs are not contractually required to publish this data. Although we have received workforce data through our inspections of CRCs, we have not reproduced this here due to the data being unpublished and unverified. Undoubtably, this severely restricts our ability to understand the probation workforce as a whole. Some commentary on the complete workforce was included in the 2019 Chief Inspector Report (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2019b), noting that the pressures in the NPS and in CRCs were felt most keenly at probation officer level, where shortages were the greatest. Recent role drift was highlighted:

> 'the profession has been downgraded, with junior staff (probation services officers) doing work formerly undertaken by probation officers. There has been some role drift and confusion as well, with senior staff sometimes doing casework and more junior staff sometimes doing senior tasks, because of resource pressures'.

The frontline in the NPS are those at the grades of senior probation officer (SPO), probation officer (PO), and probation services officer (PSO), with POs and PSOs directly managing service users. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the number and proportion of NPS frontline staff in post by these grades between 2015 and 2019. As shown, the total number of staff in the NPS increased by 22 per cent to 6,757. Broken down by grade, the data reveal that:

- The number of qualified POs increased by 4 per cent to 3,332.
- The number of PSOs increased by 42 per cent to 2,682.
- The number of SPOs increased by 71 per cent to 743.

Consequently, the proportion of POs within the workforce fell from 58 per cent to 49 per cent, while the proportion of PSOs increased from 34 per cent to 40 per cent. However, the

figures also reveal that the trend did not follow a straight trajectory, with fluctuations in the proportion of NPS frontline staff in each grade across this time period.

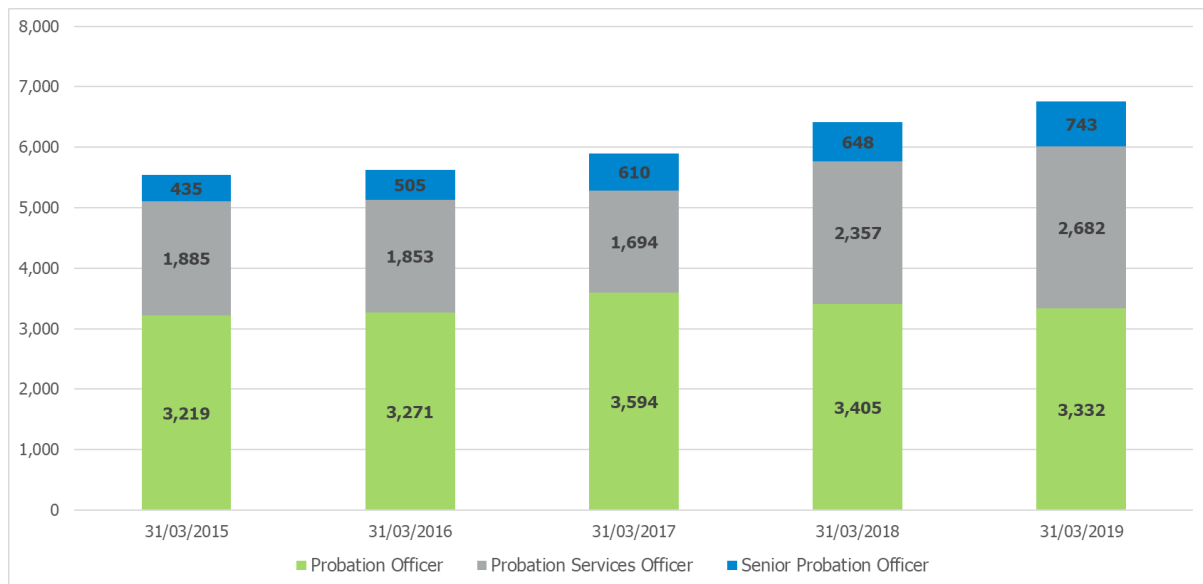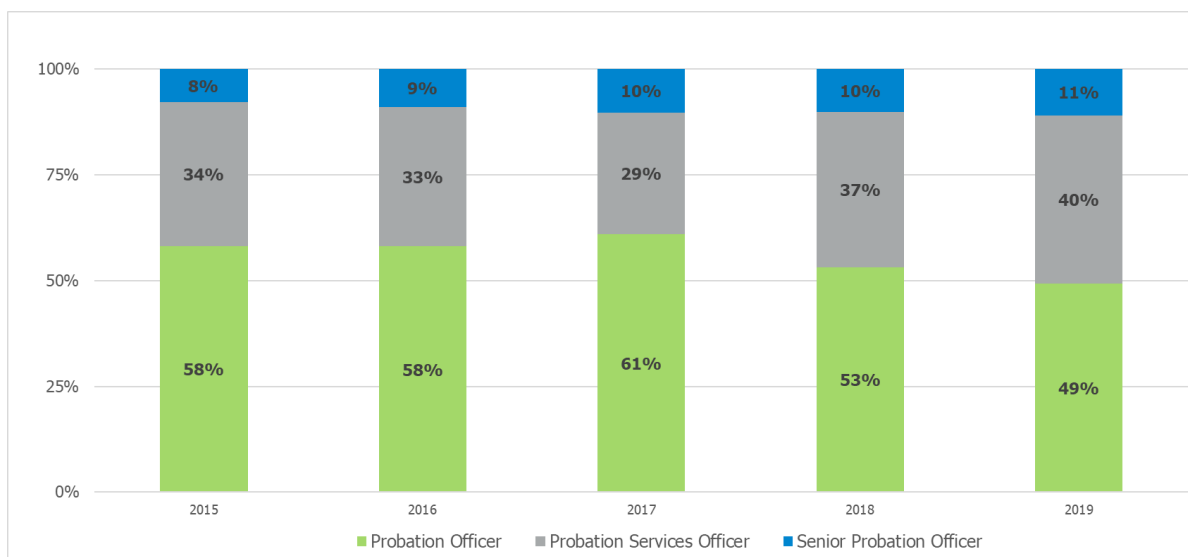**Figure 2: The number of frontline NPS staff in post by grade, 2015-2019**

Figure 3: The proportion of frontline NPS staff in post by grade, 2015-2019

2.2   Caseload size and manageability

2.2.1   Caseload size

Across our 2018/2019 inspections of probation services, inspectors recorded the full-time equivalent number of cases managed by individual practitioners. As shown in Figure 4, CRC caseloads were higher than the NPS caseloads. While this might be expected given the high risk of serious harm cases within the NPS, it is important to recognise that those being supervised by the CRCs can have a high likelihood of reoffending, multiple needs, chaotic lifestyles and domestic abuse concerns, requiring high levels of case management and supervisory support.

Figure 4: Mean caseload numbers by provider and staff grade
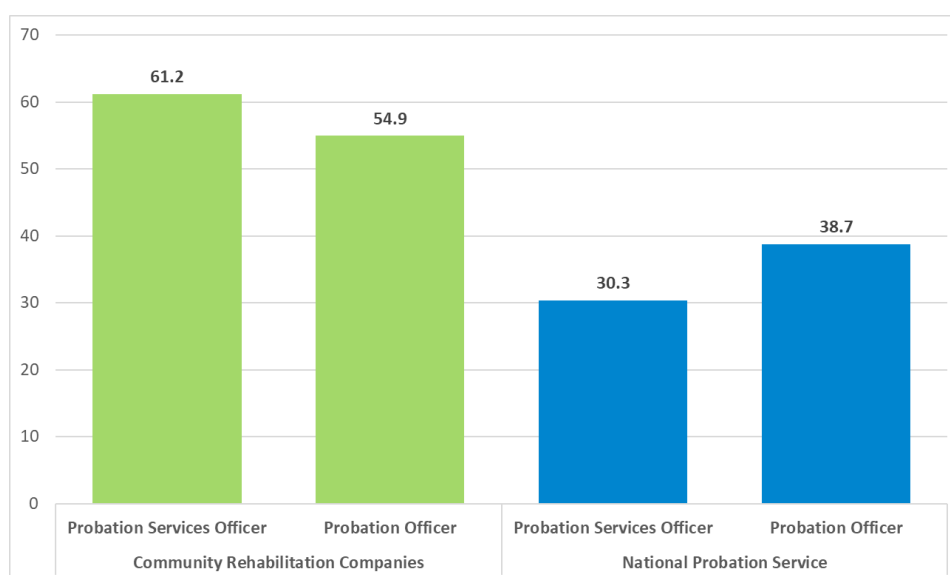
This figure also illustrates that PSO caseloads were higher than those of qualified POs in the CRCs, but caseloads for PSOs were lower in the NPS. This is somewhat to be expected as the PSO role is designed to supervise fewer complex cases, and the NPS has a larger proportion of high risk of serious harm cases requiring qualified PO supervision.

2.2.2   Staff perception of workload manageability

Our inspection standard on staffing emphasises that workloads must be manageable to enable practitioners to deliver a high-quality service. While there is no agreement as to the number of cases which probation staff can be expected to hold and manage well, our accompanying rules and guidance states, 'although dependent on operating models and type of case carried, we do not consider caseloads in excess of 60 to be reasonable'.[2]

We analysed the results of four relevant questions from the interviews undertaken with responsible officers across our 2018/2019 inspections:

1) Do you think your workload is manageable, given the profile of the cases and the range of work you are required to undertake?

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[2] https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2020/06/Probation-Domain-1-RaG-1.pdf

2) Do you think workloads in your team are actively managed (with resources being redeployed when reasonable and necessary, in response to local pressures)?
3) Do you have the skills, ability and knowledge necessary to supervise your caseload?
4) Are you always allocated cases for which you have the appropriate training and experience?

As shown by Figure 5, less than half of the interviewed officers felt that their workloads were manageable, while just over half considered that team workloads were actively managed where they worked. The great majority of practitioners considered themselves to have the skills, knowledge and ability to supervise their cases, while around three-quarters believed they were always allocated cases which matched their training and experience.

Figure 5: Percentage of responsible officers responding positively to workload questions
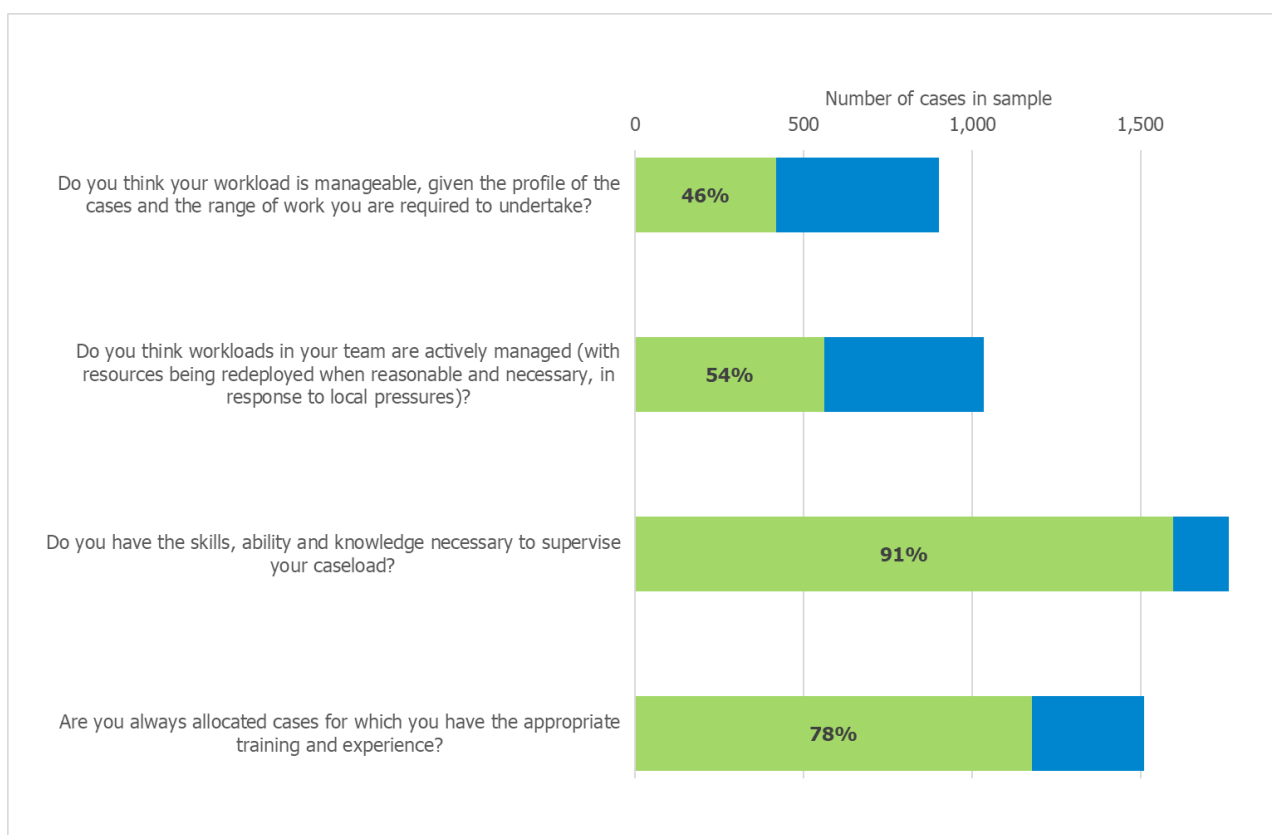
Figure 6 summarises workload manageability in relation to both provider and staff grade, illustrating that: (i) PSOs were more positive about their workload than POs, especially in the NPS; while (ii) those working in the NPS were more positive about their workload than those working in CRCs.

Figure 6: Percentage of responsible officers reporting their workload as manageable
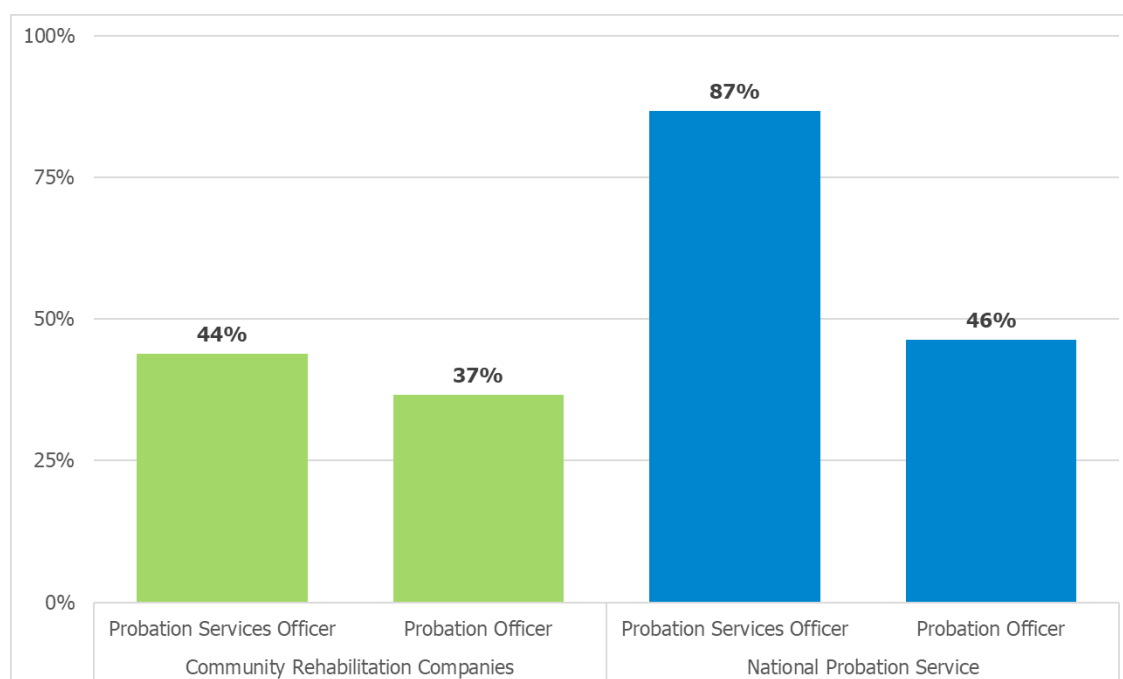
Analysis of the qualitative data from the staff interviews revealed how individual staff felt about the manageability of their workloads. There were some staff members who described their workloads as manageable, and indeed there was one officer (but only one) who had asked management for additional cases. Yet even when staff said their workloads were manageable, they often then added that it was still "*not ideal*", or only manageable "*to a degree.*" They were also aware of other colleagues whose caseloads were not manageable.

Nevertheless, the overwhelming message from staff was that they saw their caseload levels as too high to be manageable, with one describing caseloads as "*an ongoing nightmare.*" In some CRCs, staff reported that they had over 100 cases to manage, whereas the ideal was seen by staff to be somewhere around 45 cases:

> "*60 cases for a PO is too many. I would be completing quality work if this was approximately 15 less." (PO, CRC)*

> "*I think a caseload that is manageable would be 45 to 50 but I am above that.*" (PSO, CRC)

> "*I would prefer to have 40 cases where I can do more meaningful work.*" (PSO, CRC)

CRC senior leaders we interviewed agreed with that benchmark for case numbers, one remarking, "*40 to 50 cases [has been] seen as reasonable since time immemorial.*" Another CRC leader argued that more than 45 cases was too many life stories to try to absorb.

Linked to the high-risk nature of NPS cases, caseloads were generally lower, but still many staff reported being over capacity:

> "*My caseload has traditionally been over 60 and it is not manageable. I have forced the issue with my manager to have it reduced so I can try and deliver a quality service. All except two of my cases are high risk.*" (PO, NPS)

Within the CRCs, PSOs could play an important role in easing workloads. However, due to the differing nature of the cases, it was often not appropriate for cases to be allocated to PSOs within the NPS:

> "*The team has a high proportion of trainees and PSOs and so there are limits as to the number and type of cases that the staff can hold*" (PO, NPS)

> "*Across the team we have PSOs with capacity to do more but they can't hold the high-risk cases we need managing.*" (PO, NPS)

Those who were working part-time said they felt additional strain, and that allowances were not always made for their reduced hours:

> "*I went part-time, but my caseload did not change.*" (PSO, CRC)

> "*I work part-time, but I hold what I would consider to be a full-time workload.*" (PO, CRC)

Even though many staff did say that their workloads were now lower than they had been in the past, they were still seen to be far too high.

> "*Workload is not manageable although it has been significantly worse in recent months.*" (PSO, CRC)

> "*I used to have 67 cases, so 57 seems more manageable in comparison. But this in itself is not manageable.*" (PSO, CRC)

2.2.3 The management of caseloads and workloads

Analysis of the interviews with responsible officers indicates that those working in the NPS were more likely to be satisfied with how team workloads were managed than CRC staff.

Figure 7: Percentage of responsible officers reporting that team workloads were actively managed
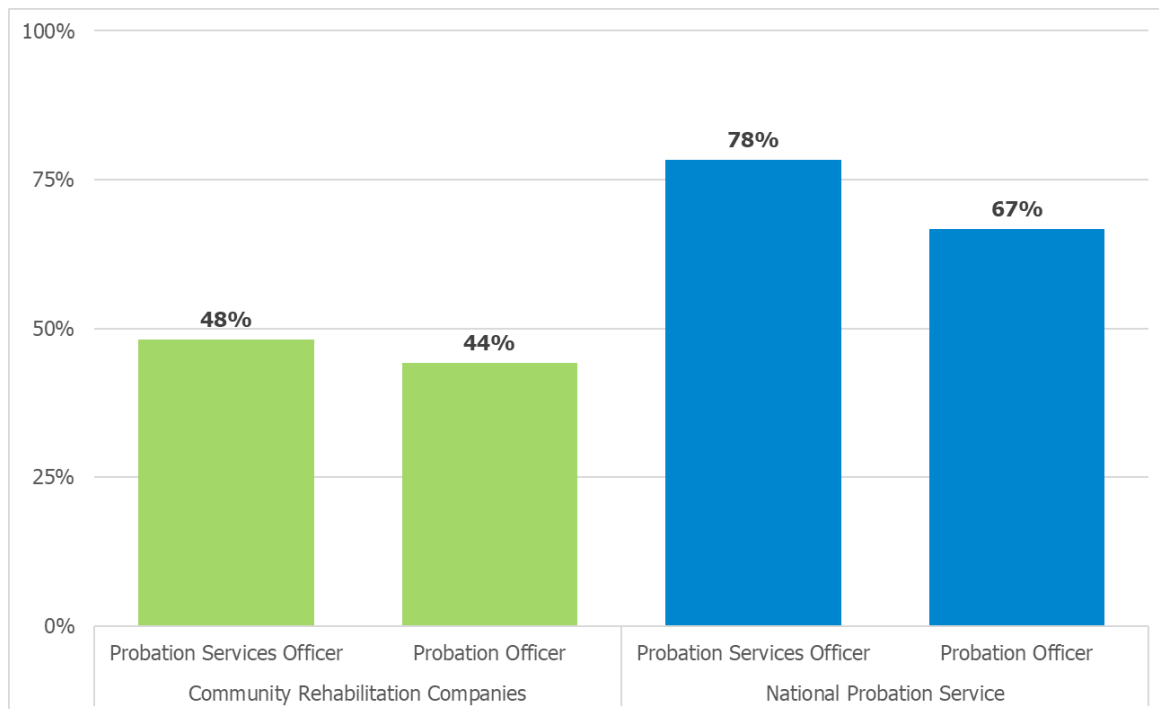
Where staff considered their workloads to be manageable, they often said this was due to caseloads being actively managed:

> "*Managers are very good at reallocations and take good care not to overload those who may not have the mental or physical capacity to have their caseloads increased.*" (PSO, CRC)

For others, even though they believed that their work was being managed, this had not led to a smooth-running system:

> "*It would be unfair to say we are not actively managed but there is a lot of firefighting.*" (PO, CRC)

In some areas, staff were able to have their cases reallocated to new staff or PSOs but this was not the norm. In many areas, while managers were sympathetic, there was little that could be done regarding reallocation. Often there did not appear to be a ceiling to the number of cases which staff could hold, and as all cases had to be allocated to someone, staff did not feel in a position to refuse work, even when they were already over capacity:

> "*Our manager understands, but the cases can't go anywhere else as no one else is not up to capacity.*" (PO, CRC)

> "*Everyone is struggling with workloads but there is no one else to redeploy the cases to.*" (PO, CRC)

In these instances, the main advice which managers could give was around how best to prioritise workloads.

There were also concerns from many staff that if they did have work taken off them, it would simply be reallocated to a colleague who was similarly overworked:

> "*I was struggling with stress and my manager eventually took 10 cases off me but she gave them to a colleague who sat next to me. I then had to watch her struggling. It really affected our relationship.*" (PSO, CRC)

> "*There are difficulties in managing the cases we have, then when we are covering for others – which is quite often – it causes more difficulties.*" (PSO, NPS)

The NPS use the online *Workload Measurement Tool* (WMT) to monitor staff capacity. Much of the data is uploaded each evening from the nDelius case management system but line managers need to undertake some data entry (adding reductions or changing contracted work hours as appropriate) and to monitor accuracy. The WMT takes account of:

- attributable time (time spent managing service users)
- non-attributable time (travel, ICT problems, supervision, comfort breaks – 16 per cent is assumed)
- non-effective time (holidays, sickness, training – 20 percent is assumed).

The current measure of excessive workload is where an officer has a WMT capacity of over 110 per cent over a consecutive four-week period.

Some CRCs have commissioned bespoke workload measurement systems, or use resource management tools or other manual calculation methods based upon routine management information.

When speaking to probation staff, many indicated that their levels on the WMT or equivalent systems were constantly over 100 per cent. Consequently, they deemed the tools largely ineffective for managing workloads, and seeing the high numbers could be a cause of raised anxiety:

> "*The last time I looked at the WMT I had the highest workload so I have stopped looking at it.*" (PSO, CRC)

> "*Staff often do not know how many cases they have as they find it distressing. I purposely do not look at the WMT because it is always over 100 per cent and causes me stress.*" (PO, NPS)

Managers complained that they often felt that they did not have the time to complete the WMT. It was also noted that this rarely offered a full picture, with the time required for more complex cases or other tasks not being accurately reflected. This was seen by one PO as especially true in the NPS, although there will be other aspects of complexity in managing CRC cases:

> "*NPS have complex cases which generate parole reports, referrals, ARMS assessments, recall reviews etc. These processes are massive and it is difficult to keep up with the pace. The WMT does not adequately account for all the work that is required.*" (PO, NPS)

Those senior NPS managers we interviewed were concerned at the focus given by some staff to the WMT capacity metric, with one senior leader recognising that it did not fully reflect the manageability of an individual's workload, going on to explain:

> "*[WMT] is not a tool for telling you whether an offender manager has got too many cases. It is to tell you whether compared to their colleagues they've got too many cases. It is to balance a caseload, not to say whether too much is too much. If one offender manager has a score of 130 and another has a score of 70, that does not tell you that the person with 130 has too much workload – they may be able to manage that – but it does tell you that the workload is unbalanced.*" (NPS senior official)

There is clearly a need to better communicate the purpose of the WMT to frontline NPS staff and create a common understanding of what the capacity metric does and does not demonstrate. It currently appears to be causing considerable stress and anxiety to those for whom being anywhere over 100 per cent logically feels like the workload is too high (although, of course, this may well be the case). A senior NPS HQ official did concede that a WMT capacity metric over 120 per cent was, on average, too high but it was important to remember that the number could not describe the full complexity of probation work situations.

One of the hopes for the new unified probation service from summer 2021 is that the revised WMT will be able to demonstrate more clearly when 'probation is full' in a similar fashion to the measures that indicate when prisons are overcrowded.

2.2.4 Training and experience to manage caseloads and workloads

Research findings stress the importance of establishing positive, respectful and trusting relationships between individual practitioners and service users, as well as applying approaches such as prosocial modelling, effective reinforcement, cognitive restructuring, and problem solving. Service users themselves have often highlighted the value of individual relationships and the need for continuity of support – they have reported disliking 'pass-the-parcel' case management. Positively, we found that the probation frontline overwhelmingly (91 per cent) believed in their ability to deliver, that is, they felt they had the skills, ability and knowledge to properly manage their caseload. This confidence was matched by senior managers. As one NPS HQ senior official commented:

> "*there are some very experienced, brilliant POs in the CRCs who would be excellent at managing high-risk cases – and probably did that before TR. There is real expertise across the whole of the probation system. That will help with the balancing of the load and that is something to look forward to.*"

As illustrated in Figure 8, the responsible officer survey data reveals that qualified POs were more confident in their skills, ability and knowledge than PSOs, as might be expected.

Figure 8: Percentage of responsible officers reporting that they had the skills, ability and knowledge necessary to supervise their caseloads
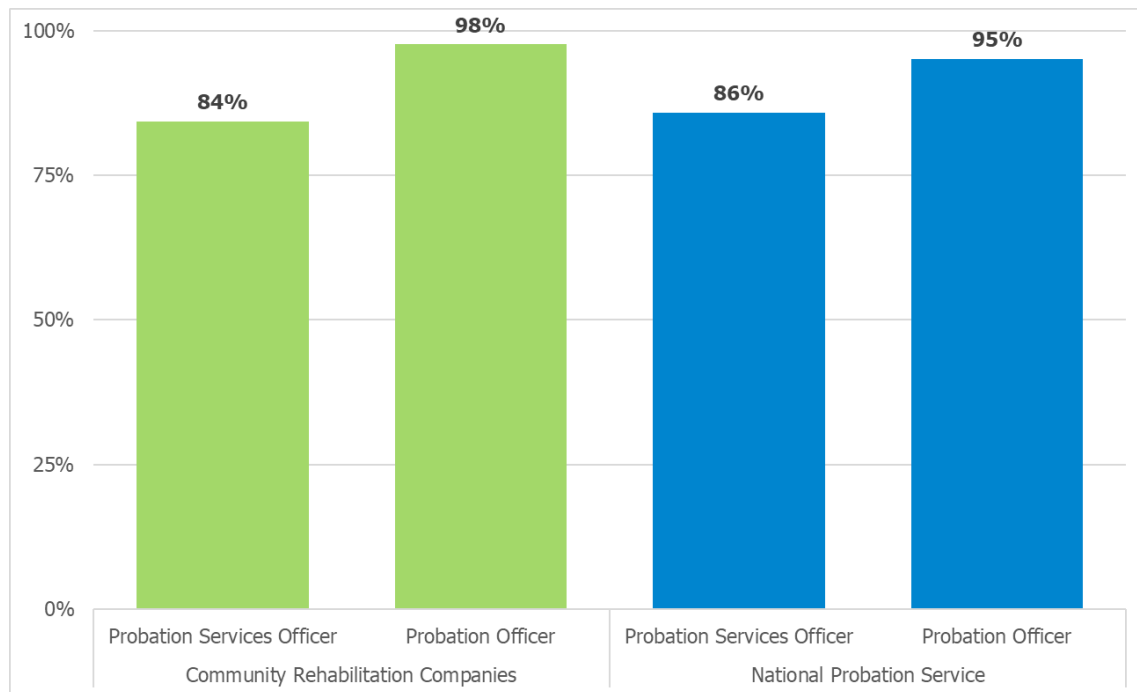
We asked frontline staff if they were always allocated cases which matched their training and experience. We found that qualified POs were much more positive than PSOs about the cases allocated to them, while NPS staff were more positive about having the appropriate training and experience than CRC staff.

Figure 9: Percentage of staff reporting that they were always allocated cases for which they had the appropriate training and experience
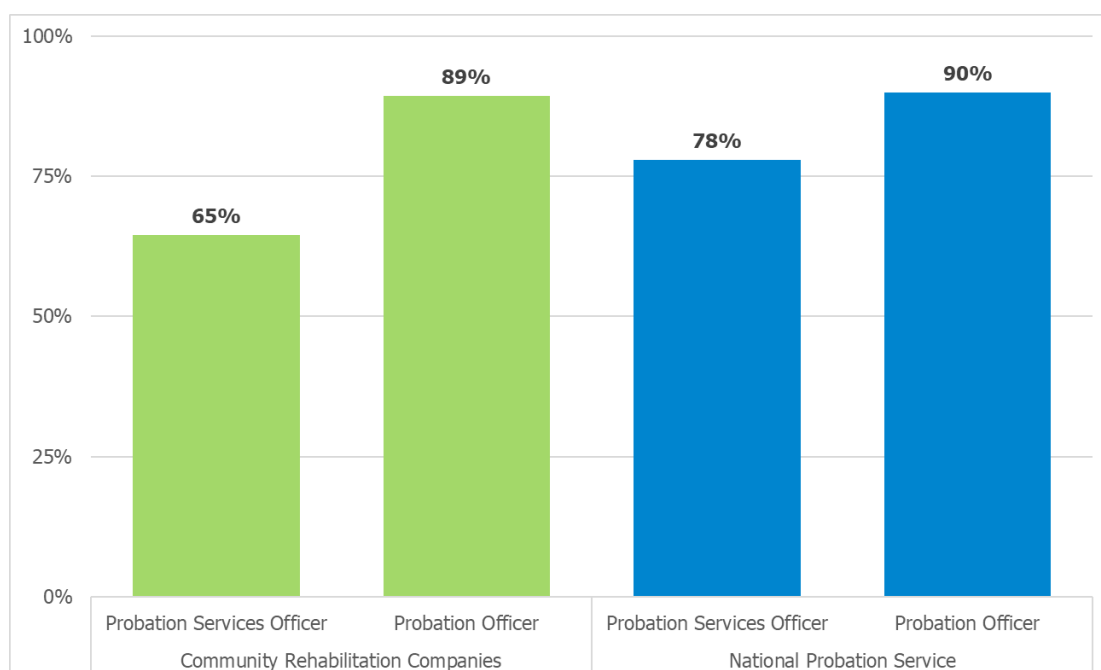
Despite the fact that the majority of staff felt that they were always allocated cases for which they had the appropriate training and experience, some concerns were raised by CRC staff and echoed by our inspectors. A specific concern related to the management of domestic abuse – some staff had not received any training at all in this area, but were still expected to manage such cases.

2.2.5 Caseload manageability: other factors to consider

When looking at caseload figures, it is important to recognise that the number of cases held will only ever be part of the picture, and that the variability and complexity of probation work means that we should not expect to see a perfect correlation between caseload and officer perception of manageability. Notably, the number of cases managed by an individual (caseload) does not fully reflect all the elements of work activity required from that officer (workload).

There are a number of factors which will impact on the manageability of caseloads and workloads. Instances where staff may be expected to hold smaller or 'protected' caseloads include the following:

- newly qualified POs and those still in training in order to facilitate learning and oversight
- POs with additional responsibilities, such as multi-agency work or training
- staff managing more complex cases, such as those within the Integrated Offender Management scheme
- staff with disabilities or those recovering from illness
- those who are working part-time should also have their caseloads adjusted proportionally.

In their interviews, leaders from the NPS and CRC spoke about a number of factors which impact on the manageability of caseloads and workloads. As previously noted, one of the current consequences of *Transforming Rehabilitation* is that staff do not work a mixture of cases in terms of risk levels, which can present them with a number of challenges:

> "*The NPS complain it's all sex offenders and prison. For the CRC, it's more concerning, it is easier to manage people in the NPS, you can breach quickly. But the CRC has not got the resources and the cases are harder. Probation work is more borderline. Everyone should have more generic [caseloads] to avoid burnout*". (Leader, CRC)

> "*There is no mix [of cases] in the NPS, no relief from intense, emotionally-draining high-risk cases*". (Leader, NPS)

One CRC leader did point out, however, that within the CRC, the work is extremely varied, encompassing prolific offenders, organised crime and gang-related issues, as well as domestic abuse and child safeguarding issues. Overall, leaders were in favour of the return to mixed caseloads through the current probation reforms.

Having support and access to the right services was seen as important for being able to manage cases effectively. Without these services, case management is likely to be very challenging:

> "*if you have a probation officer with a caseload of 60 cases but no interventions to meet the [service user] needs you have identified, if you have got no admin back-up, or very few pieces of management information to enable you as a manager to support those officers, you are not going to get very far.*" (Leader, CRC)

In some areas, high caseloads have resulted from not having sufficient staff, with underfunding and challenges in recruitment being cited as key underlying reasons. Ensuring sufficient staff are in place who are suitably qualified and with up-to-date training was seen as essential for providing a quality service.

Probation staff also spoke about the difficulties of managing their workloads when a wide range of additional tasks had to be undertaken alongside active case management. Staff in one area spoke about how they did not have a receptionist, and that, as such, all staff had to take turns in undertaking this role. Other aspects seen to impact on the ability to manage caseloads included:

- lack of sufficient or slow-running computer systems
- having to cover for colleagues absent due to leave or sickness
- delivering inductions
- running interventions, which could be in the evenings or at weekends
- covering large rural areas
- additional roles such as being a union representative.

Furthermore, where suitable interventions were not available, staff were having to undertake one-to-one work with service users. This could be especially time consuming, particularly where a significant number of Rehabilitation Activity Requirement days had been imposed by the court.

2.3   Impact of high caseloads

2.3.1 The impact on staff wellbeing

The REA commissioned as part of this project (covered in more detail in section 2.3.3), indicated that high caseloads can negatively affect staff wellbeing. A recent Canadian survey of 541 parole officers (Union of Safety and Justice Employees, 2019) found that the vast majority of custodial and community officers (86 per cent and 87 per cent respectively) believed that their workload was affecting their psychological or physical health. In a study involving an anonymous online survey of 277 Iowan community corrections staff, Rhineberger-Dunn and Mack (2019) found that *role overload* – defined as stress which occurs when individuals perceive there is too much to do, not enough time to do it, and that the amount of work is more important than the quality of work – was the only variable to predict job stress among a number of factors considered (including dangerousness and threat of harm, role ambiguity and role conflict).

However, there are some conflicting research findings. Garner et al. (2007) undertook a postal survey with 151 drug treatment counsellors from all eight state-run

correctional-based treatment programmes in a south-western US state. The authors found that counsellor caseload size was not itself significantly associated with staff burnout; rather, other resource issues such as overall staffing levels, training, and access to ICT were the strongest predictors.

In our interviews with responsible officers, conducted as part of our 2018/2019 probation inspections, we found many staff spoke about the stress which high workloads had caused them. They informed inspectors that they were having difficulty coping. Phrases used included being "*at breaking point*", "*burnt out*", or being in a state of "*panic*". It was also having an impact on life outside of work:

> "*I am just constantly working and thinking about work when I am not in work.*" (PSO, CRC)

> "*It's very stressful. I am waking up in the night worrying.*" (PSO, CRC)

A number of staff highlighted that they were now receiving counselling for work-related stress, while others said they had considered leaving the profession. Even when they took steps to report the stress, staff often felt unsupported:

> "*I've put in stress forms and they've been ignored. I have given up putting them in now.*" (PO, CRC)

> "*I got really stressed at one point and emailed my manager saying I can't manage and was having panic attacks before I came into the building. But I was advised they couldn't reduce the caseload.*" (PSO, CRC)

For a number of staff, high workloads had led to either themselves or colleagues having to take a period of sickness:

> "*We have people off sick, I mean long-term sick, because of the stress.*" (PSO, CRC)

> "*I had the highest workload in the CRC, but nothing was done about it despite me asking for help. This culminated in me being signed off sick for two months.*" (PSO, CRC)

When staff were absent due to sickness, this then put an additional strain on those who were still at work. Consequently, due to loyalty to colleagues, some did not feel able to take sick leave, even though they were struggling to cope:

> "*I would have been off work with stress, but I can't put such a burden on my friends and colleagues.*" (PSO, CRC)

> "*The office has an ethic of not going sick as we are aware that a colleague will then have to pick up the work.*" (PSO, CRC)

Those SPOs interviewed as part of our inspection of NPS central functions echoed the concerns about unmanageable workloads and the impact this was having on their health:

> "*I really enjoy my job and believe in what I do but the workload is relentless, especially in offender management, and the impact that the workload has on staff is not acceptable. SPOs have an impossible job and would never be able to meet the demands of the service if they were not prepared to work in their own*

time due to their commitment to what we do and the staff we manage. The NPS to a large extent runs on the goodwill of operational staff who go above and beyond the hours they are paid for." (SPO, NPS)

"*The role has become unmanageable, it is a hostile environment, some days I feel the stress of the job will cause a premature death for me. Numerous staff shortages; a job that was done by two people is now done by one.*" (SPO, NPS)

One theme which emerged very strongly from the interviews was that staff were extremely grateful for the advice and support which they received from colleagues. This included:

- completing each other's assessments and appointments when required
- attending meetings on their behalf
- being mindful of any colleagues who appeared to be struggling, offering whatever assistance possible.

Some staff also indicated that they would have left their job if it was not for the fact that they felt so appreciative of the team in which they worked. But, as noted above, this loyalty could sometimes be to the detriment of prioritising their own health and wellbeing.

2.3.2 The impact on case quality

Our 2018/2019 aggregated inspection data covers a number of case-level 'summary judgement questions' on the overall quality of probation work based on the ASPIRE model:

Looking at our inspectors' judgements across all 12 summary questions, there was a clear fall in the quality of delivery where probation staff were managing more than fifty cases (as indicated by Figure 10).

Figure 10: Inspector judgements on quality (all summary questions) by caseload number
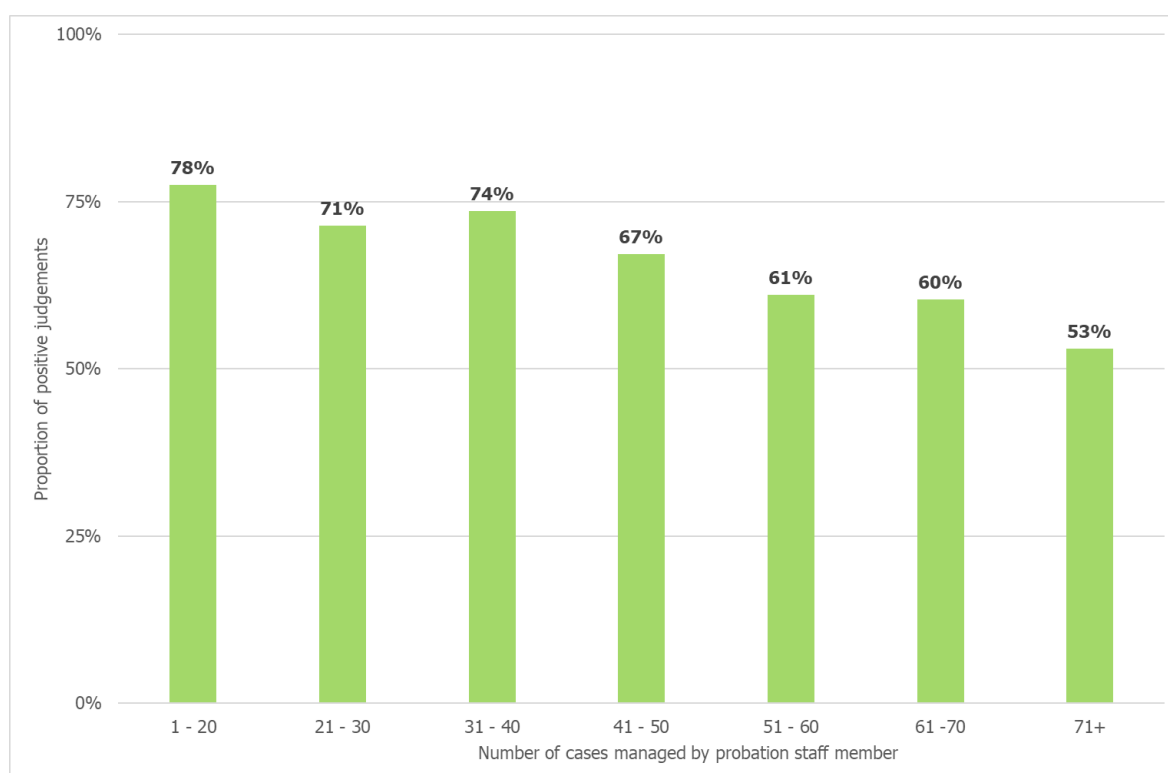
In our *Research & Analysis Bulletin* on organisational inputs and the quality of delivery (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2020f), we further examined the impact of caseloads and workloads when controlling for a range of other factors.[3] We found an association between caseload numbers and our inspectors' judgements regarding the effective implementation of the sentence – judgements were much less likely to be positive when the responsible officer held more than 50 cases (see Figure 11). We also found that the responsible officers' views

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[3] The responsible officers' views on a range of organisational inputs were entered into regression models, alongside variables covering the service users' demographics (age, gender and ethnicity), type of supervision (community sentence or post-custody), risk levels (both likelihood of reoffending and risk of serious harm), and the responsible officers' grade.

on their workload manageability was associated with our inspectors' judgements regarding implementation/delivery effectively supporting the service users' desistance. The inspector judgement was positive in nearly two-thirds (64 per cent) of those cases where the practitioner perceived their workload to be manageable, compared to just over half (53 per cent) of those cases where it was not perceived to be manageable.

Figure 11: Inspector judgements on the quality of delivery by caseload number
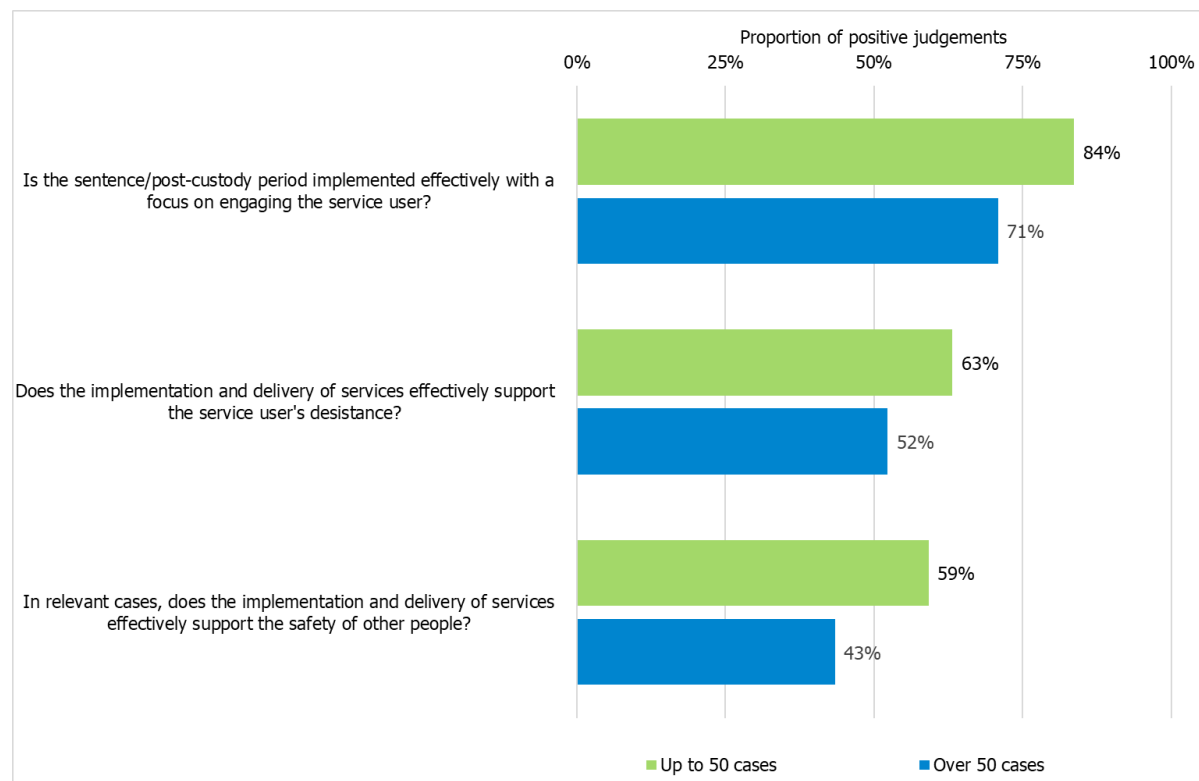
During their interviews with inspectors, both CRC and NPS staff indicated that they were concerned that high caseloads were having an impact on the quality of the work they could produce, with some seeing their role as becoming "*a box ticking exercise*". This also left staff with little time to reflect on their work. As such, staff were disappointed that they could not fully implement effective, evidence-based, supervision skills and produce work to a standard which they would like.

> "*As a team we can just about offer an adequate service but not a good service.*"
> (PSO, CRC)

> "*The work is not manageable in the sense that you can do the basics but have no time to dig into the detail. No time for reflection or professional curiosity.*"
> (PO, NPS)

Many staff constantly lived in fear that mistakes would be made which would result in harm to the public. This was of particular concern in the NPS when working with high-risk cases:

> "*Workload is at 164 per cent and unmanageable due to levels of complex cases. I feel exhausted and scared that if there is an SFO (Serious Further Offence) I will be unable to defend my decisions.*" (PO, NPS)

2.3.3 The impact on recidivism

The REA commissioned from Manchester Metropolitan University explored the existing empirical evidence relating to the impact of probation caseloads on recidivism. Over 3,000 potentially relevant papers were sifted on the basis of relevance and methodological rigour, from which five were deemed robust enough to be analysed in detail.

All five were US studies which examined the impact of particular initiatives delivered by mainstream community-based probation officers working for the local city or state. Further, all five were comparative studies seeking to examine the differential impact of these initiatives compared with mainstream probation practice.

However, there were also substantial differences between the programmes. Three of these studies (Cox et al., 2005; Jalbert et al., 2011; Taxman et al., 2006) compared intensive probation programmes with reduced caseloads against mainstream probation supervision. The Cox et al. (2005) study compared two different programmes[4] in Connecticut, both of which were designed to increase supervision completion rates and reduce reoffending via evidence-based models of intervention with low caseloads. Jalbert et al. (2011) and Taxman et al. (2006) both set out to test whether reduced caseloads improved probation outcomes in jurisdictions specifically chosen because they applied Evidence-Based Practice (EBP), an approach analogous to the Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) paradigm implemented widely in England and Wales.

The two other studies (Manchak et al., 2014; Wolff et al., 2014) compared specialist mental health probation teams to mainstream probation provision. In these cases, although a reduced caseload was a critical component of the specialist provision, there were other differences in terms of specialist mental health probation officers having additional training and adopting a different approach to the people they supervised. Due to the differences in the interventions studied, a decision was made by the REA authors not to undertake a statistical meta-analysis.

All five studies were rigorous about measuring the caseload size for both the intervention and comparison groups. As shown in Table 1, the reductions in caseload size were considerable, with an average caseload for the intervention group ranging from 25 to 55.

Table 1: Caseload size for intervention and control groups

Study	Average intervention officer caseload	Average comparison group officer caseload	Ratio between intervention & comparison group
Cox et al. (2005) (PTP)	25	100	1 : 4
Cox et al. (2005) (TVU)	25	100	1 : 4
Jalbert et al. (2011)	54	106	1 : 2
Manchak et al. (2014)	50	100	1 : 2
Taxman et al. (2006)	55	100	1 : 1.8
Wolff et al. (2014)	30	130	1 : 4.3

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[4] The Probation Transition Program (PTP) and the Technical Violation Unit (TVU).

All five studies recorded reductions in measured outcomes compared to comparators. As can be seen from Table 2, both Jalbert et al. (2011) and Taxman et al. (2006) found lower rearrest rates among the probationers supervised by officers with smaller caseloads while Cox et al. (2005) (in both the programmes evaluated) and Manchak et al. (2014) found lower probation violation rates for these groups. Wolff et al. (2015) recorded a lower number of average jail days for the intervention group in her study, although she does not specify whether these jail days are related to probation violations or rearrests.

Table 2: Summary of findings from five studies

Study	Outcome Verdict	Outcome detail
Cox et al. (2005) (PTP)	Probation violation rates lower for intervention group	8% violation rate compared to 13% for comparison group
Cox et al. (2005) (TVU)	Probation violation rates lower for intervention group	30% violation rate compared to an expected 100% violation rate[5] for comparison group
Jalbert et al. (2011)	Lower rate of reoffending for intervention group	25.5% reduction in recidivism at 6 months and 36% reduction in both property and violent crime reoffending at 18 and 30 months.
Manchak et al. (2014)	Probation violation rates lower for intervention group	Violation rate approximately half that of comparison group [Odds Ratio = 2.19]
Taxman et al. (2006)	Lower rate of rearrests and probation violation rates for intervention group	32.1% rearrest rate compared to 40.9% for comparison group 20.1% violation rate compared to 29.2% for comparison group
Wolff et al. (2014)	The average number of jail days reduced by a greater proportion for the intervention group	19% and 24% violation rate for two intervention groups compared to 32% for comparison group

Overall, although the number of robust studies remains quite small for such a key issue, there appears to be a growing body of evidence from the US that lower probation caseloads have a positive impact in terms of reducing reoffending. Clearly, there are numerous differences between jurisdictions which means that caution should be exercised in assuming that lower caseloads in England and Wales would also result in reduced reoffending.

All of the research teams in the five US studies were aware that previous evaluations had found that intensive supervision programmes could result in a higher rate of what are known in the US as probation violations (the equivalent of breaching the conditions of supervision in an English and Welsh context). They attributed this finding to the fact that supervising officers in intensive programmes have more contact with their probationers and were therefore more likely to detect when such violations/breaches had occurred. In these five evaluations, the research teams looked at a range of criminal justice outcomes including

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[5] Probationers were only referred to the TVU programme if they had already demonstrated poor compliance and were at the point of violation.

technical probation violations, violations for new arrests and reconvictions. The studies looking at mental health probation teams (Manchak et al., 2014; Wolff et al., 2014) also looked at the extent to which probationers engaged with community treatment services.

Interestingly, although researchers were expecting to find a higher rate of probation violations among the cohorts supervised by probation officers with lower caseloads, this did not turn out to be the case. In fact, the violation rates for the intervention groups were consistently lower than for the comparison cohorts receiving mainstream supervision from probation officers with higher caseloads.

2.4 Promising practices and future prospects

The CRC leaders we interviewed cited several examples of how their operating models assisted in reducing workload pressure on the frontline. Promising practices identified across CRCs and the NPS were as follows:

- **Support services:** In some areas administrative support hubs undertook the paperwork, data entry, and other routine processes necessary for court enforcement, scheduling interventions, and chasing referrals to other voluntary and statutory partners. Similarly, the NPS regional leaders we spoke to discussed their future plans for a central support service. This new hub is anticipated to relieve offender managers of the administrative elements of planning, scheduling and monitoring interventions for service users. The expectation is that this service will free up probation staff time to focus upon rehabilitation and resettlement.

- **Accessing wider services:** In one area, a women-only reporting centre encouraged compliance by providing a safe space and access to other community services.

- **Co-location:** The co-location of services with partners, especially the police, reduced the workload of sharing information and making referrals to services and interventions. A CRC leader hoped that the new NPS would continue and extend multi-agency co-location by keeping the additional estates' capacity that the new national service will inherit from CRCs. The NPS HQ senior official told us that a pilot police/probation co-location scheme in an English region was welcomed by both sets of staff and was improving joint working on public protection cases.

- **Lived experience:** Some CRCs found that having support workers with lived experience, and the authenticity and credibility that this brings, encouraged service users to comply with probation conditions and take up interventions and other opportunities.

- **Remote supervision and digital interventions:** The NPS HQ senior manager noted how the Covid-19 crisis and the ensuing Exceptional Delivery Model (EDM) had 'opened the eyes' of senior leaders in probation to the possibilities of remote supervision, digital interventions, and working from home/other locations.[6]

All senior leaders paid tribute to the resilience and commitment of probation staff during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the words of an NPS leader, "*we have continued without stopping and blinking or drawing a breath to provide a service. Everyone has been remarkable, we never stopped.*"

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[6] We discuss these issues in more detail in our EDM thematic review (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2020d).

3. Conclusion

While there is no 'magic number' for the ideal caseload in probation services, our analysis demonstrates how the quality of probation delivery can fall when practitioners hold caseloads above 50. This is in line with the, albeit limited, academic evidence that reducing probation caseloads is associated with improved compliance and reductions in reoffending. Notably, there was a consensus among staff and senior managers that between 50 and 60 cases is the maximum number that can be managed well. The toll that higher caseloads was having upon staff in terms of stress, anxiety and sickness was very evident.

Transforming Rehabilitation was experienced as painful by many probation staff, whether they worked in the NPS or in a CRC. Probation leaders will need to work hard to rebuild trust and heal the rifts that have developed within the profession. Senior leaders we spoke to agreed that there should no further 'big bang' for probation, with caseloads slowly blended after appropriate training and bedding-in periods. CRC staff will need refresher training, or to be inducted, into working with sexual offenders, MAPPA cases, and foreign nationals. NPS staff will need to (re)learn the challenging work of managing low and medium risk of serious harm cases, where post-sentence discovery often reveals chaotic lifestyles, multiple needs and deeper problems such as domestic abuse and child safeguarding concerns.

The *Probation Reform Programme* is an opportunity for joint learning and the sharing of experience that could help overcome divisions and build the new probation culture so urgently needed. In addition to the plans to recruit more staff, there is much to learn and retain from the CRCs who have developed innovations such as support hubs, co-location with statutory and voluntary partners, and service user involvement. These initiatives, when implemented well, have improved service delivery and relieved some of the workload burden on the frontline. CRCs have led the way in working with or developing community hubs to bring probation into neighbourhoods and ease access to essential services (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2020e). Some CRCs have co-located with other agencies to reduce costs, while improving information flows, referrals and joint work.

The *Workload Measurement Tool* (WMT) is being taken forward in the unified probation service. The tool is being used to model staffing requirements and likely caseload scenarios, including the impact of an additional 20,000 police officers to be recruited over the next three years. The WMT will need revising to meet the post-pandemic world of work; there is the potential for more remote supervision, more home visits, and more working from home. The time values at the heart of the WMT will require reworking in consultation with frontline staff and middle managers. Staff also need a clear explanation from probation leaders as to the function of the WMT. Leaders must stress that it is not necessarily a reliable indicator of workload at the individual level, but a management tool for rebalancing team workload and caseload. At a strategic level, it could be invaluable in making the case for resources, particularly if it could indicate more clearly when probation services are operating at a maximum capacity (in a similar way to how HMPPS monitors prison capacity).

The innovations we have seen in the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent probation EDMs will need to be carefully evaluated in terms of the impact on workloads. For example, although travel times have been radically reduced by remote supervision (telephone or videoconferencing), the amount of contact has in some instances increased. Moreover, we currently have no strong evidence that remote supervision is an effective means to

supervise and help rehabilitate probation service users, and protect the public (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2019a). The Target Operating Model for the new unified service proposes a blended approach to contact (HMPPS, 2021), and we have thus recommended in a recent thematic review that HMPPS should 'urgently conduct a large-scale, robust outcome evaluation of the effectiveness of remote (telephone-based) supervision for different types of service user' (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2021).

Probation staff and managers have demonstrated impressive levels of dedication and resilience to keep services running and keep protecting society during the Covid-19 pandemic. Moving forward, the frontline and their leaders are clearly determined to successfully unify and reinvent probation for new times. But, as we emphasised in our 2019/2020 Annual Report, success will also depend upon:

- a reasonable financial settlement enabling the recruitment and training of sufficient qualified staff
- providing the right amount of administrative support
- ensuring the availability of a broad range of interventions and community services for probation service users.

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Annex A: Methodology

This report is based upon five sources of data and evidence.

(i) *Relevant official MoJ statistics*

- *Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service workforce statistics* are available online at https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-offender-management-service-workforce-statistics. This quarterly dataset monitors staffing numbers in the NPS (and other HMPPS organisations) over time.
- The *offender management statistics quarterly* are available online at https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/offender-management-statistics-quarterly. This quarterly dataset provides key statistics on probation caseload and other activity.

(ii) HM Inspectorate of Probation inspections

A full round of probation inspections was completed between June 2018 and June 2019 (first fieldwork weeks), with the reports being published between September 2018 and September 2019 (as set out in Table A1 below).

Table A1: Probation inspections, June 2018 – June 2019

Provider	CRC or NPS	Month of report publication
Merseyside	CRC	September 2018
Essex	CRC	October 2018
West Yorkshire	CRC	October 2018
South West South Central	NPS	November 2018
Northumbria	CRC	November 2018
Thames Valley	CRC	November 2018
Midlands	NPS	December 2018
Staffordshire and West Midlands	CRC	December 2018
Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Rutland	CRC	January 2019
Dorset, Devon and Cornwall	CRC	February 2019
Humberside, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire	CRC	February 2019
North West	NPS	February 2019
Durham Tees Valley	CRC	March 2019
South Yorkshire	CRC	March 2019
Cheshire and Greater Manchester	CRC	April 2019
Wales	NPS	April 2019
Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire	CRC	May 2019
Hampshire & Isle of Wight	CRC	May 2019

Provider	CRC or NPS	Month of report publication
London	NPS	May 2019
Cumbria and Lancashire	CRC	May 2019
Kent, Surrey and Sussex	CRC	June 2019
North East	NPS	June 2019
Wales	CRC	July 2019
Warwickshire & West Mercia	CRC	July 2019
London	CRC	August 2019
South East and Eastern	NPS	September 2019
Norfolk and Suffolk	CRC	September 2019
Bristol, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire	CRC	September 2019

Case samples

The cases selected were those of individuals who had been under community supervision for approximately six to seven months (either through a community sentence or following release from custody). This enabled us to examine work in relation to assessing, planning, implementing and reviewing. We examined service users' files and interviewed responsible officers. Where necessary, interviews with other people closely involved in the case also took place.

The overall sample size in each inspection was set to achieve a confidence level of 80 per cent (with a margin of error of five percentage points). Proportionate stratified random sampling was used to achieve sufficiently representative samples – we ensured that the ratios in relation to gender, type of disposal and risk of serious harm level matched those in the eligible population.

All sampled cases were then allocated to individual inspectors. To support the reliability and validity of their judgements against our standards framework, all cases were reviewed using standard case assessment forms, underpinned by rules and guidance.[7]

(iii) A reanalysis of qualitative data obtained from a survey of SPOs conducted for the inspection of NPS central functions in 2019

Our inspection of NPS central functions included an online survey of SPOs. Our survey generated 266 replies from staff working across the regions of England and Wales. The headline results of the survey are reported in Annex 3 of the inspection report.

As part of this research, we reanalysed the textual data submitted by respondents, using the nVivo qualitative data analysis software. All commentary was read, coded and themes (patterns in the data) generated.

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[7] The reliability and validity of judgements was further supported through training and quality assurance activities.

(iv) A commissioned REA of the UK and international evidence about caseloads and workloads in both probation services and other related policy spheres

The Policy Evaluation and Research Unit (PERU) at Manchester Metropolitan University was commissioned to conduct a REA of the evidence about caseloads and workloads in probation services and in other policy areas.

The search of the probation services literature identified 3,202 potentially relevant papers, of which only five survived the sift for relevance and methodological rigour. All were US studies.

The search in other policy areas, which used existing REAs and other literature reviews, identified that the healthcare sector was the best source of evidence. Six peer-reviewed papers were identified for examination.

The results of the REA will be published on the PERU Reducing Reoffending website: https://reducing-reoffending.uk/

(v) Interviews with senior officials and leaders on their experiences of workload and caseload management in probation services

We conducted semi-structured interviews involving nine senior leaders in the probation world:

- three interviews with CRC representatives which involved five senior managers
- one interview with three senior managers in an NPS division
- one interview with an NPS HQ senior official.

The interviews were led by an HM Inspector, with considerable probation leadership experience, supported by a member of the Inspectorate's Research Team. The interviews were recorded and reviewed, with key themes being identified.

The interviews covered these areas:

- the main issues in workload management as seen by the interviewee(s)
- how workload is measured
- the elements of an acceptable workload
- examples of good and promising practice at the strategic and local level
- lessons from working through the pandemic and lockdown
- hopes for the unified probation service in terms of workloads and caseloads.