



HM Inspectorate  
of Probation

**HM Inspectorate of Probation**

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Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice  
Minister for Prisons and Probation  
Minister for Victims and Safeguarding  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Justice  
Chief Inspectors of Criminal Justice  
HM Chief Inspector, Ofsted  
Victims Commissioner  
Chief Executive, Care Quality Commission  
Chief Inspector, Estyn  
Chief Executive, Healthcare Inspectorate Wales  
Chief Executive, Care Inspectorate Wales

24 November 2025

## **Re: Consultation on our thematic inspection and research programmes for 2026/2027**

### **1. Background**

- 1.1. Under the Police and Criminal Justice Act 2006, we are required to consult key stakeholders on our inspection frameworks and programmes. It is our practice to consult more widely, with those we inspect and associated bodies who can provide valuable insight and information as we develop our framework and programmes.
- 1.2. This consultation sets out proposals for our upcoming thematic inspection programme and research programme for 2026/2027 in sections 2 and 3. These are the proposals that we are consulting on.
- 1.3. We would very much welcome your comments on these proposals by **19 December 2025**.

#### *Thematic inspections*

- 1.4. We apply a number of criteria to identify and prioritise our thematic topics as follows:
  - Has this been identified as an ongoing area of weakness/concern in our core inspections?
  - Is this a ministerial priority?
  - Are there major change programmes or major national changes being applied to the operating model that require external oversight and

assurance?

- 1.5. As part of our current thematic programme, we are undertaking scoping work for a forthcoming inspection on electronic monitoring (adults). In addition, we have committed to the [joint criminal justice inspection programme for 2025–2027](#), which includes inspections on knife crime and substance misuse.

### *Research programme*

- 1.6. We are committed to reviewing, developing and promoting the evidence base for high-quality probation and youth justice services. We will add value through our research programme by: making valuable contributions to the policy and operational evidence base; ensuring that our inspection standards, frameworks, organisational positions and effective practice products are evidence based; and by providing technical advice so that our inspections are robust and impactful.
- 1.7. To help us prioritise topics for new research projects, we apply the following criteria:

#### **Current level of risk**

- Significant changes to policy, service delivery or caseloads
- Risks to public protection/ safeguarding
- Findings from inspections, research and other forms of evidence

#### **Potential impact**

- Potential impact of our findings
- Ministerial and other key stakeholder interests
- Quality of current evidence
- Development of inspection standards

#### **Other**

- Suited to research or inspection
  - Estimated resource requirements and timescales
- 1.8. We are currently completing/undertaking research projects on the following topics – the last of which will continue into 2026/2027:
- Bridging custody and community: The role of Approved Premises in successful reintegration
  - Serious Further Offences: Promoting a culture of learning in probation
  - Delivering a high-quality, rights-compliant and procedurally-just service for all children and all victims
  - Working together: designing and delivering collaborative approaches to support people on probation to build social capital
- 1.9. In addition to our primary research projects, we have continued with secondary analysis of our inspection data and the publication of Academic Insights papers and reflections from research videos. See: [Academic insights – HM Inspectorate of Probation](#) and [Reflections from research – HM](#)

[Inspectorate of Probation.](#)

### *Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI)*

- 1.10. We will be maintaining our contribution to the Joint Targeted Area Inspection of child protection.
- 1.11. The JTAI programme is led by Ofsted. Inspectors assess how local authorities, the police, health, probation and youth justice services are working together in an area to identify, support and protect vulnerable children and young people.
- 1.12. The JTAI theme for September 2025 to May 2026 is the multi-agency response to children who are sexually abused in the family environment. We are inspecting the work of the Probation Service.
- 1.13. JTAI reports can be viewed on the Ofsted website here: [Joint inspections of local area services - GOV.UK](#)

## **2. Thematic inspection programme – suggested topics**

- 2.1. We will be looking to carry out up to four thematic inspections during 2026/2027.
- 2.2. **We would like to get your views on which topics from the list below should be included in our thematic inspection programme for 2026/2027:**

### *Adult*

- a) **Court Work**: this topic was last inspected in 2016 and has gained renewed significance in light of the Sentencing Bill. Ensuring the quality of probation advice to the courts and maintaining sentencer confidence will be critical. The proposed inspection could also incorporate problem-solving courts, reflecting emerging practice and innovation within the system.
- b) **Probation interventions**: the availability and access to probation programmes and structured interventions are recurring themes in our core inspections. We published a [Research & Analysis Bulletin on the interventions landscape](#) in March 2024 in which many probation professionals found that CRS were not sufficiently responsive to referrals or how well the individual was engaging.
- c) **Recall practice**: revisiting this topic provides an opportunity to examine recent changes to the prison recall policy, which aims to alleviate overcrowding and streamline the release process. It also allows us to assess progress since the previous inspections in 2020 and 2023, particularly in how risk is evaluated and managed in recall decisions, and whether practice has evolved in response to earlier findings.

### *Youth*

- d) **Youth justice services strategic arrangements**: We have seen a range of issues around YJS strategic arrangements. The span of control of service managers has increased significantly since being absorbed into children's

services. Resource constraints are affecting partner agencies contributions at a strategic and operational level, and these gaps undermine the multi-agency approach. The Probation Service is not always meeting its statutory obligation to second staff to YJSs, and as experienced YJS managers move on, there is a risk of youth justice being lost in wider children's services. A thematic inspection into this area would provide an opportunity to look in depth at the strategic landscape, delivery models, enablers, and barriers.

### *Consultation questions – thematic inspections*

We are seeking your views on which of the topics under 2.2. should be prioritised for our thematic inspection programme for 2026/2027. We are also open to receiving additional suggestions on thematic topics from respondents, to be considered. Where additional suggestions are proposed, please outline the following in support of your proposals:

- What is the compelling evidence to suggest your proposal needs to be covered as a thematic inspection in this next financial year?
- If you offer more than one proposal what priority order do your suggestions take and why?
- Which project(s) described above would you replace with your proposal(s) and why?

***Q1: Do you have any preferred thematic inspection topics from our list set out under 2.2. for 2026/2027?***

***Q2: Do you have any additional proposals for thematic inspection topics for 2026/2027?***

## **3. Research programme – suggested topics**

3.1. Taking into account our available internal resource and external research budget for undertaking and commissioning projects, we will be looking to commission one new project during 2026/2027. Any other projects and activities will be undertaken internally.

3.2. **We would like to get your views on which of the topics below should be prioritised for 2026/2027:**

- a) **Staff safety:** There has been an increased focus on probation staff safety following the serious attack on a female probation officer in Preston in July 2025. In response, the Chief Inspector publicly called for a review of safety protocols across England and Wales, citing the seriousness of the incident and growing risks linked to early prisoner releases and rising caseloads. Despite this heightened concern, there remains limited probation or youth justice research specifically addressing physical safety protocols or assault prevention, with much of the existing literature focusing on psychological safety, stress, and burnout. This primary research project would aim to fill a critical gap by examining enablers of physical safety, potential safety measures, and organisational responses/learning across probation services, youth justice services and Approved Premises. It would draw upon insights

from other jurisdictions and relevant sectors (e.g. health, social care, education) to identify transferable practices and innovations.

**b) High-risk panels in youth justice:** Evidence gaps have recently been highlighted in relation to the operation of high-risk panels in youth justice, including the level and nature of child participation in panels, how to ensure the types of participation are ethical, meaningful and child-centred, how to balance victims' needs (recognising the blurring of the victim/offender binary), and how to work with and respond to children in a creative, safe, inclusive and collaborative manner.<sup>1</sup> The differing philosophies of practice between risk, protection, safeguarding and children's rights have also been highlighted. This primary research project would help to fill these evidence gaps, informing future policy, training, and operational guidance, ultimately strengthening consistency and quality across youth justice services.

3.3 Alongside our primary research projects, we will continue to publish Academic Insights papers, update our evidence webpages, and undertake secondary analysis of our inspection data. With regard to the latter, our current secondary analysis projects are as follows:

- Youth justice inspection ratings/scores by local area characteristics
- Key components and drivers of high-quality work with children
- The quality of youth justice delivery in knife crime cases
- The quality of delivery in youth out-of-court disposal cases
- Children subject to wider local authority involvement
- The views of people on probation: relationships, engagement and support

### *Consultation questions – research programme*

We are seeking your views on which of the project areas set out in section 3.2. should be prioritised for 2026/2027. We are also open to receiving additional project areas from respondents, to be considered. Where alternative suggestions are proposed, please outline the following in support of your proposals:

- What is the compelling evidence to suggest your proposal needs to be covered by HM Inspectorate of Probation, as a research project, in this next financial year?
- If you offer more than one proposal, what priority order do your suggestions take and why?
- Which project(s) described above would you replace with your proposal(s) and why?

***Q3: Do you have any preferred research topics from our list set out in 3.2. for 2026/2027?***

***Q4: Do you have any alternative proposals on research topics for 2026/2027?***

<sup>1</sup> See [Co-production with Children in High-risk Panels: Lessons from England - Children and Young People's Centre for Justice](#).

## 4. Conclusion

- 4.1. In this consultation we have set out suggestions for thematic inspection topics and research projects for 2026/2027. Ministers may ask us to conduct specific pieces of work or investigations over the course of 2026/2027, and we will respond to these and any risks as they arise.
- 4.2. We would very much appreciate your views on our thematics and research programmes for 2026/2027 by Friday, 19 December 2025.
- 4.3. Please direct your responses and any queries to:  
[communications@hmiprobation.gov.uk](mailto:communications@hmiprobation.gov.uk).



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