

**CEP Conference 'Probation Works' – Malaga, Spain
Friday 28 May to Saturday 29 May 2010**

**Summary of Conclusions
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Introduction

A good conference makes you ask hard questions, provides some answers, opens your mind to new ideas, widens your network, inspires you to do something different on Monday and challenges you to reach for a new level in your career or your contribution. So, have you just drifted through this event or have you worked afresh on the questions: Does Probation work? What is the next development? How is my country contributing to evidence based practice?

I am going to tell you the questions that have been at the top of my mind – but my questions are less important than yours so I suggest you stop listening to me and write down your own...

My summary will be shaped in the following way:

- Sharing some answers
- Assessing the mood/spirit of the event
- Challenging you with the four themes that have emerged from the conference
- Ending with some advice from my father!

Personal Questions

Is probation a science or an art? It has to be both - on the one hand, utilising evidence, structure, processes, organisation and specified outcomes – on the other, passion, creativity, spontaneity, humour and unexpected outcomes. Good art can change a person or a society (as Goya and Dickens demonstrate) just as much as good science can. So I have been thinking that probation methodologies need to combine the cool minds of the north with the warm hearts of the south.

How can we bring effective practice alive for a new generation? I dread creating a new orthodoxy, with probation practice becoming a stagnant reprise of dog eared programmes. We need to encourage innovation, teach best practice and have an ethos of continuous improvement. This event has demonstrated the value of teaching comparative practice from across Europe and a willingness to learn from those jurisdictions that are not weighed down by long probation histories, but are doing new things like the Czech Republic, Turkey and Estonia.

What can CEP do to generate more research on European methods?

Rather than resisting North American research, let us do our own! If every

CEP member country instigated just one soundly based research project and published it before the next General Assembly there would be at least 30 new European studies – that would constitute a refreshing body of knowledge. It is my view that we need to learn from the US and Canada and build research into each major development proposal rather than add it as a bolted on after thought. There are many Director Generals here, think what a difference you could make if you each found the money to contribute to growing European evidence.

What would I have done differently to develop evidence based practice?

I ask this because my days as a probation leader are over, yours are not, so perhaps knowing what I wish I had done might be helpful. On reflection, I wish I had got in the media more. The argument for community sanctions should not take place behind closed doors. I grew up in the era when it was regarded as a success for probation to be out of the public eye, but every day inimical views are given currency in the papers and on the airwaves so I now believe I failed by not participating in the debate. I wish I had told more stories about offenders and, more significantly found ways for offenders to tell their own stories. I once heard Sir Graham Smith say rather shockingly that: “Probation must understand it is part of the entertainment business.” We have the example of how Sjef van Gennip in Holland fought for the reputation of probation – brave rather than entertaining – but over time the balance has changed and the relationship with journalists in Holland has been transformed. Other wishes are: that I had observed more practice, listened to more front-line staff, set up more joint practice training and development with prison and police officers and that I had been less captured by the demands of ‘managerialism’.

The Spirit of the Conference

I have been to many international events and want to highlight three marked components of the atmosphere here in Malaga:

1. the willingness to learn from different jurisdictions and cultures – there is less competitiveness and defensiveness
2. there is an impressive increase in the connection between universities and probation services
3. the workshops have been where the buzz has been for me – probation people presenting with belief and confidence work that is making a difference.

I do not detect fear of the recession, but a ‘can do’ mentality. A confidence illustrated by the reward you will receive if you complete the conference’s evaluation form – a bottle of special CEP correctional fluid that ‘is an evidence based intervention tool that corrects all mistakes and shows everybody can start with a clean slate’!

The Main Themes

I have identified four themes in the conference and, as is popular in reality shows, will announce them in ascending order.

Resources

The link to evidence is clear. There is going to be competition for resources for prison and probation places. Unless we marshal our evidence probation will lose out to prison – or the police, or health, or education. Dealing with the recession is going to be every government's overwhelming priority over the next five years. Probation needs to respond in a mature way with strong arguments that it IS cheap, flexible and effective. We have to develop community products that save money and win the confidence of politicians and public alike and marketing will be a top priority. In the business world, you do not cut your advertising budget during a recession. Every jurisdiction needs a policy to reduce the use of prison and probation has a key role in delivering the savings that a reduction in prison sentences will bring. In the drive to identify efficiencies there is always the temptation to go for 'easy' cuts rather than seeking ways to hold on to effective practice. Holding firm to priorities will be essential. I have a friend who says: "Don't waste a good recession." This phase in the economic cycle is demanding but it is an opportunity to 'shape up and sharpen up'.

Partnership

I am not keen on the way partnerships can be used to justify talking shops. It seems to me that this event has emphasised the potential of international partnerships to deliver practical, hard nosed products – Probation Rules, framework agreements, and information sharing for cross-boundary benchmarking. If offenders are increasingly mobile, probation services need to be seamless between jurisdictions so that assessments and community sanctions can be exchanged as easily as prison sentences. CEP should be the enabler for pragmatic implementation of the framework agreement for the transfer of orders – partnership in action. I wonder if we have not yet explored the potential of system wide approaches to specific crimes at the international level. I have a colleague who espouses the value of inter-disciplinary approaches to crimes such as gun crime or people smuggling and has wondered whether CEP could examine collaborative work with Interpol and the International Prosecutors Association and Directors of Social Services to develop new approaches.

But I do not want to undervalue what may be seen as 'soft' international gains through sharing of ideas and experiences – CEP helps probation colleagues to keep in touch and there is mutual support and encouragement from partnership work which definitely inspires fresh enthusiasm and positive action. My perception of 'twinning' partnerships is that the so called 'experts' receive as much as they give.

Practice

The link to evidence is clear – unless we can demonstrate effectiveness the benefits of probation will be drowned out. This whole event has focused on what can reduce offending behaviour, how to assess offenders and analyse

offences. The scientific approach is gaining credence so that practice is not driven by whim or pet interests. There is less investment in 'welfare' but we have been challenged to move on from the 'care vs. control' argument – not least by representatives from the Czech Republic who have suggested that 21st Century thinking should be systemic and focused on 'seeking resolution of the whole process'. It is argued that the victim mediation dimension prevents probation being sidelined into a pro-offender position and creates new space for probation interventions. Evidence is required but in a sense every practitioner is part of gathering evidence – the skill is to capture it. We have much to learn from the health model where community doctors are as committed to writing papers to spread best practice as learned professors.

Leadership

Top theme! Everyone here is a leader of practice, of a team, an academic department or a national service – so my challenge is to use your leadership position to:

- develop a joint curriculum for probation staff using shared materials across Europe
- make probation more visible
- hold onto your roots
- reach beyond 'fortress Europe' to spread the probation methods we know work
- be evangelical in reaching out to those countries in the Council of Europe which do not yet have developed probation systems.

One of the strengths of probation is that leadership comes from all levels across our organisations but as current leaders, we have the responsibility to grow the next generation of leaders – not boring managers. Isaac Newton, the Cambridge physicist, said:

'If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.'

I recommend that we use CEP's shoulders to help the future leaders of probation to see further. Money may well be short but I believe probation exchanges of staff between different jurisdictions will open the eyes and minds of the next leaders like nothing else. Let us use the CEP seminars and workshops to initiate our young people into comparative practice – and not send the 'usual suspects'.

An act of leadership, which I would urge on the new Board of CEP, is to organise a World Congress on probation perhaps linked to CEP's General Assembly in Germany in 2013 – let's act on the world stage with confidence.

Concluding Advice

I promised some paternal advice. My father worked for Rowntrees of York – they make Kitkats and Smarties and were bought out by Nestle – the Swiss have great taste in chocolate. He is in his 80th year so I asked him what had

made Rowntrees successful through good and bad economic times. He highlighted his view of four factors:

1. continuity of leadership
2. conservative finances
3. strong products
4. excellent staff relations.

My advice is to attend these four priorities during the recession and be confident in what you can do – above all be confident in your probation people. It is our probation staff and their quality that will see us through. Our people are our gold. Dig alongside them.

John Scott

President of CEP 2004 - 2007