

# **Scottish Advisory Panel on Offender Rehabilitation (SAPOR)**

**Biennial Report  
2020 - 2021  
2021 - 2022**

**December 2023**

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## 1. Chairs Foreword

Dear Readers,

It is my privilege to welcome you to this overview of the Scottish Advisory Panel on Offender Rehabilitation (SAPOR) and its critical work. SAPOR serves as a linchpin in the ongoing mission to enhance offender rehabilitation, reduce reoffending rates, and create safer communities in Scotland.

Our commitment to evidence-based practices and rigorous standards is at the core of SAPOR's efforts. We strive to guide professionals in the field, ensuring that the programmes and interventions they provide are effective, responsible, and tailored to the diverse needs of the individuals they serve.

In these pages, you will discover the multifaceted aspects of SAPOR's work, from accrediting offender programmes to promoting innovative approaches that drive positive change. We take seriously our role in supporting the desistance of those who have offended, for we understand that a rehabilitated individual can have a profound impact on their own life and society as a whole.

As we continue to evolve in our mission, SAPOR is steadfast in its commitment to working closely with justice partners, the Scottish Government, and the wider community. Collaboration is the key to addressing the complex issues of offender rehabilitation, and we are enthusiastic about the future possibilities and contributions we can make together.

Warm regards,

Professor Elizabeth Gilchrist  
Chair of the Scottish Advisory Panel on Offender Rehabilitation

## 2. Background to SAPOR

### **The Panel**

In 2012, the Scottish Advisory Panel on Offender Rehabilitation (SAPOR) was established, succeeding the Scottish Accreditation Panel for Offender Programmes (SAPOP). While SAPOP was primarily focused on accrediting offender programmes and interventions to ensure they met professional standards, it was evident that a more extensive advisory role and a wider professional membership would benefit sponsors and advance evidence-based practices.

The primary mission of the Scottish Advisory Panel for Offender Rehabilitation is as follows:

**To support desistance by providing approval and advice, setting standards, and promoting excellence in programmes, interventions and processes aimed at rehabilitating people who have offended and by encouraging properly evaluated innovation.**

SAPOR's primary emphasis is on programmes and interventions for individuals who have already been convicted of an offence. Therefore, programmes and interventions aimed at those who have not yet been convicted are not currently within the Panel's purview.

While programme accreditation continues to be a vital component of SAPOR's activities, its broader mission is to support professionals in fostering desistance. SAPOR aims to achieve this by offering approval, guidance, and establishing standards, with the goal of promoting excellence in programmes, interventions, and processes dedicated to rehabilitating individuals with a history of offending. Furthermore, SAPOR is dedicated to encouraging the thorough evaluation of innovative approaches in this field.

### **Panel Membership**

The Panel aims to achieve a balance of individuals with experience in accreditation, criminal justice social work, academic institutions, psychology, custodial settings, training, and the evaluation of programmes.

The current membership of the Panel include -

Professor Elizabeth Gilchrist – Chair  
Dr Trish McCulloch – Panel Member  
Dr Beth Weaver – Panel Member  
Michelle Gilluley – Panel Member  
Professor Erica Bowen – Panel Member  
Professor Susan McVie – Panel Member

Mark McSherry – Panel Member

Previous Chairs and Panel Members include -

Professor Fergus McNeill – Chair

Professor Shadd Maruna – Panel Member

Dr Dawn Fisher – Panel Member

Dr Ioan Durmescu – Panel Member

Monica Wilson – Panel Member

Yvonne Robson – Panel Member

### **Accredited Programmes**

The Panel takes immense pride in its role in accrediting and endorsing a range of programmes dedicated to offender rehabilitation within Scotland. These accredited programmes are instrumental in addressing the complex challenge of reducing reoffending rates and fostering desistance among individuals with a history of offending. They represent a concerted effort by professionals, organisations, and the justice system to employ evidence-based practices and standards to effect positive change.

Currently accredited programmes include –

Short Term Intervention Programme (STIP)

The Short-Term Intervention Programme (STIP), developed by the Scottish Prison Service, is a targeted initiative designed to address the needs of short-term prisoners. This programme encompasses problem-solving, motivation, goal setting, and addresses issues related to offending behaviour and substance misuse.

The Caledonian System

The Caledonian System is a comprehensive approach aimed at addressing instances of domestic abuse perpetrated by men against their female partners or former partners. Its primary objective is to reduce reoffending among men convicted of domestic abuse-related offences and, in doing so, enhance the well-being of women, children, and the men involved.

The Caledonian System is composed of three key components:

- The Men's Service: This segment involves a multi-year programme, spanning at least two years, encompassing preparatory and motivational sessions, a series of twenty-six groupwork sessions, and ongoing maintenance sessions.

*Notably, during the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, a one-to-one version of the Men's Service was developed and has also received accreditation.*

- The Women's Service: Focusing on the safety and support of women who are current or former partners, this component provides safety planning, essential information, advice, and emotional support.
- The Children's Service: Dedicated to addressing the needs and safeguarding the rights of children whose parents are engaged with the Caledonian System, ensuring their well-being is a central priority.

### The Ultimate Self Programme

The Ultimate Self Programme, developed by the Scottish Prison Service, is an offender rehabilitation initiative that caters to the specific responsivity needs of women in custody. This programme is designed to help participants comprehend the nature of their offending behaviour and to equip them with strategies to reduce the risk of reoffending.

### 3. Policy Context

SAPOR is acutely attuned to the broader policy landscape, with a primary focus on supporting the overarching policy objectives of reducing reoffending rates and minimising the use of short-term imprisonment.

Scotland has one of the highest prison population rates in Western Europe, at 144 prisoners per 100,000 population.<sup>1</sup> The surge in the prison population can be attributed to a range of factors, notably the tendency for specific convictions, such as sexual and violent offenses, to result in custodial sentences. Additionally, there has been an increase in the average length of sentences for certain offences, including the extension of the minimum period to be served in custody for life sentences before release under supervision can be considered. SAPOR's role encompasses the promotion of effective interventions within both custodial and community settings to curtail the number of individuals entering custody. It emphasises the efficient treatment of individuals within the community or while incarcerated, expediting their reintegration into society.

A fundamental shift is imperative, moving away from custodial sentences, particularly short-term ones, in favour of an increased reliance on community-based sentences and interventions that more effectively address desistance from further crime.

The Scottish Government, along with broader community justice stakeholders, is actively taking steps to support this transition. This includes the recent extension of the Presumption Against Short Sentences, which encompasses custodial sentences of up to 12 months. Furthermore, the Management of Offenders (Scotland) Act 2019 introduced provisions to expand the use of electronic monitoring, providing additional means to manage individuals within the community.

The new model for community justice, as outlined in the Community Justice (Scotland) Act 2016, underscores the significance of prevention drawing from public health models, at all levels (primary, secondary, and tertiary) and recognises that effective rehabilitation is an integral component of any intervention. It emphasises that addressing and reducing reoffending cannot be accomplished by justice services alone and underscores the pivotal role played by broader partners, including the NHS, local government, and third-sector organisations.

This model is guided by a national strategy with four key priorities:

1. Enhanced community awareness and participation.
2. Strategic planning and collaborative efforts.
3. Effective utilisation of evidence-based interventions.

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<sup>1</sup> World Prison Brief (2023) United Kingdom: Scotland, URL <https://prisonstudies.org/country/united-kingdom-scotland> (last accessed October 2023)

4. Equal access to services that support desistance, health, housing, and welfare.<sup>2</sup>

The legislation also established Community Justice Scotland (CJS) as the national body for improving community justice. SAPOR is eager to further strengthen its collaboration with CJS to explore opportunities for increasing the adoption of community interventions and enhancing public confidence in these disposals.

To successfully promote the use of community sentences and interventions, it is imperative that there is a deeper understanding and confidence in these measures and that high-quality interventions are consistently available throughout Scotland.

SAPOR recognises the value of effective community disposals, core supervision practices, evidence-based justice social work services, the review of mental health provisions, the proportionate allocation of resources, and meaningful partnership collaboration.

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<sup>2</sup> Guidance for Local Partners in the New Model for Community Justice (2016) Strategy for Community Justice, URL <https://www.gov.scot/publications/guidance-local-partners-new-model-community-justice/pages/5/> (last accessed October 2023).



#### 4. Overview of 2020-2021 to 2021-2022

##### **COVID-19 Pandemic**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, SAPOR played a crucial role in collaborating with various justice partners to adapt and ensure the continued effectiveness of offender rehabilitation programme and interventions. The pandemic presented unique challenges, as the justice system needed to maintain its operations while also safeguarding the health and well-being of both offenders and those working within the justice system.

These challenges included:

- **Adapting to Remote Services:** SAPOR, in cooperation with justice partners, swiftly pivoted to support and promote the use of remote services and interventions. This transition was essential to ensure that rehabilitation efforts could continue while adhering to social distancing and public health guidelines.
- **Guidance and Standards:** SAPOR provided updated guidance and standards to justice partners to ensure that remote interventions met the necessary criteria for effectiveness and safety. This was particularly important in situations where in-person sessions were not possible.
- **Support for Frontline Workers:** SAPOR collaborated with justice partners to provide support and resources for frontline workers who were delivering interventions. This support ranged from offering advice in virtual intervention techniques to addressing the unique challenges of remote supervision and support.
- **Flexibility and Innovation:** In response to the evolving nature of the pandemic, SAPOR and justice partners demonstrated flexibility and innovation. New methods, tools, and technologies were explored to enhance the delivery of rehabilitation programme and maintain their quality.

The collaborative efforts of SAPOR with justice partners during the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the resilience and adaptability of the criminal justice and rehabilitation systems. By working together, they not only managed to continue their essential services but also laid the foundation for a more agile and responsive approach to offender rehabilitation in the face of unprecedented challenges.

## Endorse Function

SAPOR considered the implementation of an "Endorse Function," a hallmark of good practice for community justice initiatives and interventions that promote rehabilitation and support desistance. The aim was to provide recognition and wider dissemination of effective practices within community settings. However, after a thorough evaluation, SAPOR decided not to adopt this function for specific reasons:

- **Programme vs. Practice:** One of the central considerations was the distinction between programme and practices. SAPOR traditionally focused on accrediting offender programme that followed structured curricula. While these programmes could be rigorously evaluated and accredited, practices within community justice settings often encompass a broader array of interventions, including case management, counselling, support services, and various other methods. Determining uniform standards for such diverse practices presented a significant challenge.
- **Accreditation vs. Endorsement:** SAPOR's core function had been programme accreditation. While the Endorse Function aimed to recognise and endorse good practices, it was distinct from the accreditation process. SAPOR recognised that endorsing practices within the community justice sector required a separate set of criteria and evaluation parameters than the accreditation of structured programme.
- **Diversity of Practices:** The community justice sector is characterised by a wide range of diverse practices and interventions. These practices can vary significantly depending on the local context, resources, and the unique needs of the individuals involved. Creating a single set of endorsement criteria that could encompass this diversity was a complex task.
- **Quality and Consistency:** SAPOR understood the importance of promoting good practices within community justice, but it recognised the challenge of ensuring consistent quality across such a wide spectrum of interventions. Without rigorous accreditation criteria, there was a concern that endorsed practices might vary significantly in quality.
- **Resource Constraints:** The implementation and maintenance of an Endorse Function would require additional resources. SAPOR needed to carefully consider how these resources would be allocated and whether they could be better used to strengthen existing accreditation processes.

While SAPOR decided not to adopt the Endorse Function, it remained committed to promoting good practice in community justice. The decision was made with the intention of ensuring that the Panel's efforts continued to align with its core function of accrediting offender programme and that the best approach for endorsing and recognising diverse practices within community settings could be explored through

collaboration with relevant partners, including CJS. This decision allowed SAPOR to focus its resources on its core mission while also fostering collaboration to advance rehabilitation and support desistance within the Scottish Justice System.

### **Accreditation of the Ultimate Self Programme**

SAPOR is proud to provide an overview of our recent accreditation efforts concerning the Ultimate Self Programme, developed by the Scottish Prison Service. This initiative holds significant importance as it is tailored to address the unique responsibility needs of women in custody.

The Ultimate Self Programme is an offender rehabilitation programme meticulously designed to support participants in comprehending the nature of their offending behaviour. Its central goal is to equip individuals with effective strategies to reduce the risk of reoffending, thus promoting a more rehabilitative and secure environment.

Our Panel, in collaboration with justice partners and experts, has undertaken a thorough process of accrediting the Ultimate Self Programme. This rigorous evaluation ensures that the program meets the highest standards of evidence-based practices and is aligned with the principles of effective offender rehabilitation.

The accreditation of the Ultimate Self Programme not only reflects our commitment to fostering safer communities but also highlights the programme's dedication to addressing the specific needs of women in custody. SAPOR remains devoted to its mission of reducing reoffending and promoting rehabilitation, and we are pleased to contribute to the ongoing success of the Ultimate Self Programme.

## 5. Future Priorities

### **Advice Function**

SAPOR is dedicated to strengthening and expanding its advisory function, recognising the critical role that guidance and advice play in promoting effective offender rehabilitation and desistance.

Here's how SAPOR plans to continue building its advice function:

- **Comprehensive Expertise:** SAPOR aims to build a team of experts with a deep understanding of offender rehabilitation, evidence-based practices, and the evolving landscape of the justice system. These experts will be at the forefront of providing guidance to professionals in the field.
- **Tailored Advice:** Recognising that the needs of professionals working in offender rehabilitation can vary significantly, SAPOR will focus on providing tailored advice that is specific to the unique challenges and contexts within the Scottish Justice System. This personalised approach ensures that professionals receive guidance relevant to their circumstances.
- **Evidence-Based Recommendations:** SAPOR is committed to providing advice that is grounded in evidence-based practices. By staying up to date with the latest research and best practices, SAPOR ensures that its recommendations are in line with the most effective approaches to offender rehabilitation.
- **Standards and Quality Assurance:** SAPOR will continue to set and maintain high standards for offender rehabilitation. By offering advice on these standards and quality assurance, the Panel ensures that professionals adhere to best practices, contributing to improved outcomes in reducing reoffending.
- **Promoting Innovation:** While SAPOR emphasises evidence-based practices, it also recognises the importance of encouraging innovation in offender rehabilitation. The advice function will actively promote the proper evaluation of innovative approaches that have the potential to enhance rehabilitation outcomes.
- **Collaboration with Partners:** SAPOR will build partnerships with other key stakeholders, such as the Scottish Government, community justice organisations, and third-sector entities. This collaborative approach ensures that the advice provided is holistic and considers the broader context of offender rehabilitation.
- **Regular Updates and Communication:** SAPOR recognises the dynamic nature of the justice system and the evolving needs of professionals. It will

maintain open lines of communication with its audience, offering regular updates and guidance on emerging trends, policies, and practices.

- **Public Awareness:** In addition to supporting professionals, SAPOR will work to raise public awareness of the importance of effective offender rehabilitation. This involves sharing advice and information that helps the public understand the role they play in supporting desistance.
- **Feedback and Continuous Improvement:** SAPOR is committed to a culture of continuous improvement. Feedback from professionals and stakeholders will be actively sought and used to refine and enhance the advice function.

By continuing to build its advice function in these ways, SAPOR ensures that it remains a valuable resource for professionals working in offender rehabilitation. The Panel's commitment to providing evidence-based, tailored guidance and fostering collaboration with key partners positions it as a central hub for promoting effective practices and supporting the overarching policy objectives of reducing reoffending and improving the Scottish Justice System.

### **Future Panel Membership**

As the terms of the current Chair and Panel Members of SAPOR are ending, the process of recruiting new leadership and members is a critical step to ensure the Panel continues to fulfil its mandate effectively.

Here's how SAPOR plans to go about this transition:

- **Advertisement and Outreach:** SAPOR will advertise the vacancies for the Chair and Panel Members in various relevant channels, including government websites, professional networks, and legal publications. The outreach will be designed to reach a diverse and highly qualified pool of candidates.
- **Clear Job Descriptions:** The Panel will develop clear and comprehensive job descriptions for the positions, outlining the roles and responsibilities of the Chair and Panel Members. This transparency helps candidates understand what is expected of them.
- **Criteria and Qualifications:** SAPOR will define the criteria and qualifications required for the roles. This will include expertise in offender rehabilitation, a commitment to evidence-based practices, an understanding of the Scottish Justice System, and other relevant qualifications.
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** The recruitment process will emphasise the importance of diversity and inclusion. SAPOR is committed to ensuring that the new Chair and Panel Members represent a broad spectrum of perspectives and backgrounds.

- Continuity of Function: Throughout the recruitment and transition process, SAPOR will prioritise the continuity of its core functions. The outgoing Chair and Panel Members will work closely with their successors to ensure a seamless transition and handover of responsibilities.

By following a robust and transparent recruitment process, SAPOR aims to select individuals who are dedicated to advancing the mission of offender rehabilitation and reducing reoffending rates in Scotland. This process also ensures that the Panel continues to provide effective guidance and support to the Scottish Justice System in the years to come.



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