

Scottish Advisory Panel on Offender Rehabilitation (SAPOR)

Interim Report 2023

December 2023

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1. Chairs Foreword

I am honoured to step into the role of Chair of the Scottish Advisory Panel on Offender Rehabilitation (SAPOR). As a newcomer to this pivotal position, I am excited about the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. I am grateful to colleagues in the secretariat at the Scottish government for their welcome, heavy administrative lifting and wise counsel. Also, I have benefitted from the experience and wisdom of both experienced and new panel members already – I am confident that the whole will be more than the sum of the parts in our work together.

SAPOR's legacy is one of dedication to improving offender rehabilitation, reducing reoffending, and building a safer Scotland. We take immense pride in our work, which extends from accrediting offender programmes to promoting innovative strategies in the field.

It is my firm belief that SAPOR's impact can be strengthened through collaboration, innovation, and a renewed commitment to evidence-informed practices. We are living in a time of constant and rapid change, and as such, we must remain adaptive, open to new ideas, and ready to embrace emerging challenges.

I look forward to working alongside our justice partners, professionals, and the wider community to ensure that SAPOR continues to be a beacon of excellence in offender rehabilitation. Together, we can forge a future where rehabilitation is not only effective but compassionate and equitable.

I extend my gratitude to the former Chair and the entire SAPOR Panel for their outstanding work, and I am eager to contribute to the remarkable legacy of this Panel. Your support and insights will be invaluable as we embark on this journey together.

To start our work together we will be focussing upon our strategy for the future.

Thank you for your trust and confidence in SAPOR. I am excited about what we can achieve as we move forward in our mission to contribute to reduce crime in Scotland.

Warm regards,

Professor Graham Towl
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 wider advisory role and professional Membership would benefit sponsors and advance evidence-informed practices.

The current 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.

While programme accreditation has been 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.

With the appointment of a new team comes the opportunity to look afresh strategically at the work of the panel and to take stock of progress to date and opportunities for the future in how we may most effectively contribute to crime reduction in Scotland.

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 Graham Towl – Chair
Rona Fraser – Panel Member
Dr Sarah Lewis – 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 Elizabeth Gilchrist – Chair
Dr Trish McCulloch – Panel Member
Dr Beth Weaver – Panel Member
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 has taken immense pride in its role in accrediting and endorsing a range of programmes dedicated to offender rehabilitation within Scotland. These accredited programmes have been instrumental in addressing the complex challenge of reducing reoffending rates and fostering desistance among individuals with a history of offending. They represent part of a concerted effort by professionals, organisations, and the justice system to employ evidence-informed 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 (SPS) 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.¹ 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 punishment duration for life sentences. 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 the root causes of criminal behaviour.

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. Taken together these are encouraging developments.

The new model for community justice, as outlined in the Community Justice (Scotland) Act 2016, underscores the significance of a public health-based approach to prevention at 3 levels; primary, secondary, and tertiary, and recognises that effective rehabilitation is an integral component of any such 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. If we want to maximize our contribution to crime reduction working together across agencies and organizations needs to underpin our approaches.

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-informed interventions.

¹ 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.²

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 approaches.

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. And this is a broader question that we need to consider as we move into 2024 - how we allocate our resources, including our time and financial resources too to maximize our impacts.

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

² 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 2023

Changes in Panel Membership

SAPOR has recently undergone notable changes in its panel membership due to the conclusion of the terms of the previous Chair and two Panel Members. These transitions mark a significant juncture in SAPOR's journey, characterised by the infusion of fresh perspectives, expertise, and leadership into the Panel's composition.

The outgoing Chair and Panel Members have played pivotal roles in advancing offender rehabilitation in Scotland. Their contributions have left an indelible mark on SAPOR's work and legacy. Their dedication and commitment are deeply appreciated.

With the arrival of new Panel Members, SAPOR is poised to enter a new phase of growth and innovation. The newcomers bring a diverse array of skills and experiences from various sectors, including justice, social work, psychology, and academia. Their presence promises to reinvigorate SAPOR's mission and to meet the evolving challenges in the realm of crime reduction.

COVID-19 Recovery

SAPOR has navigated the challenging landscape of the COVID-19 pandemic with resilience, adaptability, and a commitment to its mission. The pandemic presented unforeseen challenges to offender rehabilitation, but it also underscored the importance of our work in supporting desistance and reducing reoffending during such trying times.

As we embark on the path of COVID-19 recovery, SAPOR is focused on several key areas:

- **Adapting to New Realities:** We recognise that the pandemic has reshaped the landscape of offender rehabilitation. SAPOR is committed to adapting to these new realities, whether through innovative programme delivery methods or responding to wider emerging needs in the field.
- **Leveraging Information Technology:** The pandemic has provided a welcome acceleration of the adoption of information technology in the justice system. SAPOR will seek to ensure that benefits from the increased use of information technology are further realised.
- **Supporting Mental Health:** The impact of the pandemic on mental health has been profound. SAPOR is dedicated to addressing the mental health needs of those involved in offender rehabilitation and promoting well-being throughout the system.

- **Learning from the Crisis:** The pandemic has offered valuable lessons. SAPOR is committed to learning from this experience and integrating these lessons into our strategies, ensuring that we are more prepared to navigate future challenges.
- **Collaborating with Partners:** SAPOR recognises the importance of collaboration. We will continue to work closely with justice partners, community organisations, and professionals to build a stronger, more resilient offender rehabilitation network.
- **Communications:** there are opportunities for us to further enhance our communications with the wider field and to seek innovative ways to disseminate the work and profile of SAPOR to further extend its ultimate impact on crime reduction and disseminate evidence informed approaches more widely.

As we recover from the pandemic, SAPOR is committed to emerging stronger, more adaptable, and more innovative than ever in our pursuit of our critical mission.

Reaccreditation of the Caledonian System

SAPOR is pleased to provide an overview of our recent efforts in reaccrediting the Caledonian System, a vital initiative aimed at addressing domestic abuse perpetrated by men towards their women partners or ex-partners.

Our Panel, in collaboration with justice partners, has undertaken a rigorous process of reaccreditation, reaffirming the quality and effectiveness of the Caledonian System. This programme plays a pivotal role in reducing reoffending, enhancing the well-being of women, children, and the men involved, and fostering safer communities.

The reaccreditation process involved a meticulous evaluation of the Caledonian System, encompassing its objectives, impact, and adherence to evidence-informed practices. The Panel Members closely examined the programme's components, including the Men's Service, Women's Service, and Children's Service, to ensure they continue to meet the highest standards of offender rehabilitation and domestic abuse intervention.

SAPOR is proud to report that the Caledonian System has not only maintained its accreditation but has also demonstrated a commitment to ongoing improvement. The reaccreditation process has reaffirmed the programme's crucial role in addressing the challenging area of domestic abuse, supporting desistance, and contributing to a safer Scotland as part of wider contributions to crime reduction.

5. Future Priorities

Refreshing Strategy

SAPOR is embarking on an exciting journey with a new panel refreshing strategy. This strategy represents a thoughtful and purposeful approach to enhancing the Panel's effectiveness, relevance, and impact.

Our panel refreshing strategy is centred around several key principles:

- **Diversity and Inclusion:** We are committed to diversifying our Panel to include a broader spectrum of voices and perspectives. This diversity fosters richer discussions and decision-making processes and ensures that SAPOR remains relevant and proactive in an evolving landscape of offender rehabilitation and crime reduction.
- **Fresh Expertise:** We actively sought new members with fresh expertise and insights. By bringing in professionals with varied backgrounds and experiences, we enrich our collective knowledge and enhance our ability to address emerging challenges.
- **Innovation and Adaptability:** Our current strategy places a strong emphasis on innovation and adaptability. We recognise that offender rehabilitation is an evolving field, and we aim to remain at the forefront of evidence-informed practices and creative solutions.
- **Community Engagement:** We will engage more closely with the wider community and justice partners. By soliciting input and feedback, we ensure that SAPOR's work aligns with the needs and expectations of the communities we serve.
- **Mentorship and Knowledge Transfer:** As we refresh our Panel, we are dedicated to nurturing mentorship and knowledge transfer between outgoing and incoming members. This ensures continuity and the preservation of institutional memory.

SAPOR's new panel refreshing strategy is a testament to our commitment to continuous improvement and our mission of reducing reoffending and enhancing the lives of individuals in the Scottish Justice System whilst contributing to crime reduction. We are excited about the possibilities this strategy presents and look forward to the positive impact it will have on our work which we hope to reflect in 2024.



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