



# HM Prison & Probation Service

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Ms Alison Mutch,  
Senior Coroner,  
South Manchester Area  
1 Mount Tabor Street  
Stockport.

**By email only to:** ██████████

31<sup>st</sup> October 2024

Dear Madam,

## **Inquest Touching the Death of Elizabeth Sarah Jayne McCann**

Thank you for your Regulation 28 Report of the 29<sup>th</sup> May 2024, following the conclusion of this Inquest and thank you also for extending the timescale for this response which is being issued on behalf of the Ministry of Justice.

I know that you will share a copy of this response with the family, and I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere condolences for their loss.

In your Report, you raised the following concerns specifically in relation to the Probation Service which are responded to below.

**The Inquest heard evidence that the probation staff were carrying significant caseloads. This was due to challenges in recruiting sufficient staff. The evidence was that there is still a national shortage of probation officers. Steps have been taken to recruit and train further probation officers which provides some assistance but means that overall, a significant number of probation officers are young in service and experience.**

**It was important that newly qualified probation staff were closely supervised and supported by their managers. Without that supervision performance issues identified by the trackers were not being tackled. Ensuring this had been and was challenging as the number of staff line managed by senior probation officers had been too high. This was being addressed but was only achievable if sufficient senior staff were retained.**

Whilst at a national level, the staffing position of the Probation Service is improving, it remains the case that raising staffing in some Probation Delivery Units (PDU) to a full complement remains a significant challenge. Until such time as the situation improves, in PDUs with acute pressure remaining, staff will follow a Prioritisation Framework which was

first implemented in January 2022. Those PDUs will also benefit from wider national workload relief through Probation Reset as reflected in a refreshed Prioritisation Framework published in May 2024.

We continue to prioritise recruitment to put the Service on a sustainable footing and secure sufficient Probation Practitioner staffing (Probation Officers and Probation Service Officers). As of 30 June 2024, the staffing level of Probation Officers working across the Probation Service was 70%, with 5,136 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Probation Officers in post. This number shows a considerable increase relative to June 2021 (when Community Rehabilitation Companies were dissolved, and the Probation Service was unified) when we had 4,517 FTE Probation Officers in post. Across HMPPS, 4,582 new Trainee Probation Officers have started their training since April 2020 (1,007 in 2020/21, 1,518 in 2021/2022, 1,514 in 2022/23 and 543 in 2023/24). Many of these trainees have already qualified and taken up Probation Officer posts, and we expect the remainder to qualify by the end of 2025, taking on Probation Officer caseloads. We are beginning to see large numbers of newly qualified officers coming through and continue to run national recruitment for Trainee Probation Officers to meet the Lord Chancellor's commitment to bringing in at least 1,000 new Trainee Probation Officers by the end of March 2025 so that we continue to have a pipeline of qualified Probation Officers.

HMPPS also recognises the pressure placed upon Senior Probation Officers (SPOs) and how this can affect their supervision of junior staff. The number of SPOs has increased by 249 nationally since June 2022, whilst initiatives continue to strengthen the SPO role, including a review of the Management Oversight Policy Framework and roll out of the revised Management Oversight model by December 2024, to ensure the approach to staff supervision is consistent and effective. HMPPS has invested in a suite of capability options for SPOs to further develop their skills by way of continuing professional development, and additional support from dedicated case administration officers to reduce the demand on SPOs in relation to administrative tasks.

**Clear Information Sharing protocols between Probation and such groups as drug and alcohol services were limited. Without clear agreements understood by both sides there was a significant risk that crucial information that impacted risk assessments would not be shared**

The HMPPS Information Sharing Policy Framework sets out clearly the steps to be taken to share information in addition to the various statutory frameworks for the sharing of risk information. This includes guidance on the preparation of Information Sharing Agreements in the absence of a contractual arrangement with a partner agency which will include information sharing protocols.

As well as improving information sharing protocols, we are committed to improving professional standards of practice and have introduced mandatory professional registration for Probation Officers, which aims to sharpen focus on Continuous Professional Development and drive improved performance and personal accountability to deliver public protection. The professional standards will, alongside increased staffing levels ensure that Probation Officers do all that is required of them, including the sharing of risk information with partner agencies, whose contribution is vital to the efficacy of risk management plans.

Effective risk assessment and management is a clear HMPPS priority and is assured at both local and national levels. Locally, risk assessment and management practice is assured within teams and PDUs using the approved case audit tool. Nationally, the HMPPS

internal Performance Assurance and Risk Group (PARG) undertakes an annual sentence management audit, a key component of which is the quality of risk management practice. The results of this audit are shared with regions and recommendations given, which are incorporated into their local improvement plans.

**It was accepted that there needed to be a level of professional curiosity by staff dealing with high risk offenders such as in this case and that training for probation officers and police staff needed to reinforce that**

Professional curiosity in the Probation Service is an essential part of the assessment and management of risk and is a golden thread throughout the recently updated risk training material available to all probation practitioners. It will also be incorporated into the new Continuing Professional Development risk learning product, which is currently being developed by HMPPS in conjunction with subject matter experts. This will be piloted with probation practitioners towards the end of this year before being launched from February 2025.

The need to demonstrate professional curiosity is also woven into several other learning products, most notably Skills for Effective Engagement Development and Supervision (SEEDS2) for practitioners and middle managers. In recognition of the importance of SEEDS2, this has been identified as a strategic learning priority for 2024-2025 with Probation Officers required to complete the learning by September 2025 as part of their Continuing Professional Development requirement.

Reflective Practice supervision (a key aspect of the SEEDS2 approach) plays a crucial role in fostering professional curiosity by creating a supportive environment where practitioners reflect on casework and practice issues by critically analysing and evaluating their experiences. It encourages practitioners to question their own practice, assumptions and decisions with their line manager, who provides feedback based on observations and other sources of information.

Probation Practitioners also have access to the HM Inspectorate of Probation Effective Practice Guide on Professional Curiosity, published in October 2022, and are encouraged to use this as a reference document to support continuous professional development and apply professional curiosity in their practice.

Thank you again for bringing your concerns to our attention. I trust that this response provides assurance that action is being taken to address these concerns.

Yours sincerely,



Director General Operations  
HM Prison & Probation Service