

Inaugural Probation in the British Overseas Territories Conference, March 2025

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Inaugural Probation in the British Overseas Territories Conference

March 2025

**By Fiona Campbell, Laura Aston and
Nicola Robinson**

The inaugural Probation in the Overseas Territories (OTs) conference took place in London between the 17th-21st March 2025. The event was hosted by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) Overseas Territories Justice Programme and delivered in collaboration with the Community Justice Overseas Territories network (CJOT). CJOT was formed to develop connections in probation across the British Overseas Territories (OTs), where nine of the fourteen OTs have permanent populations and established probation services. The Caribbean region is home to the greatest number of territories, ranging from the largest both in terms of population and probation provision - the Cayman Islands. This is followed by the Turks & Caicos Islands, the British Virgin Islands, Anguilla and the smaller island of Montserrat, whilst nearby neighbour Bermuda in the North Atlantic is Britain's oldest overseas territory. The South Atlantic is home to St Helena and the Falkland Islands, and in European waters, the closest to Britain is Gibraltar. The OTs probation provisions range in both size and setup, from smaller territories such as Montserrat, Falkland Islands and St Helena which have one or two probation officers, to services like Anguilla who recently celebrated their 20th anniversary, and the Turks and Caicos Islands who have a recently launched Department of Rehabilitation and Community Services which is going from going from strength to strength.

Despite this considerable probation presence in the OTs, it is an area that has not historically benefited from consistent support or collaboration, unlike other areas of the criminal justice system. For example, policing and prisons have long been engaged with the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)

and the MoJ in England and Wales, respectively, and conference attendance, knowledge exchange opportunities and peer support are commonplace within these.

Seeking to address this gap, in August 2023, the CJOT network was launched by three individuals with experience of practice in the OTs. The network's terms of reference are facilitating knowledge exchange, enabling peer support, and developing and sharing evidence-based practice in community justice. Recently, the MoJ Overseas Territories Justice Programme expanded to include a probation and rehabilitation workstream. This welcome expansion of the programme aims to increase the support provided by the UK government to probation in the OTs and was the catalyst for the development of this conference, alongside CJOT, given their aligned objectives.

Previously having only met online as part of regular CJOT meetings, this inaugural conference was the first opportunity probation professionals from across the OTs had to meet in person. The conference was formally opened by Lord Ponsonby, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the Ministry of Justice with responsibility for the Overseas Territories. He shared his perspective on the value of probation in a court setting, from his experience as a Magistrate. Delegates had the privilege of hearing Professor Rob Canton deliver the conference keynote speech, which explored probation practice across cultural divides, recognising that each OT is unique, with a rich cultural, social, political and historical context of its own that must be taken into consideration by those responsible for probation delivery in each territory.

Delegates spent time engaging in sessions aimed at supporting continuous professional development, including visiting the probation team in Winchester Crown Court to explore the role of pre-sentence reports, and HMP Winchester to understand how probation supports rehabilitation and resettlement of individuals in prison. There were additional inputs from His Majesty's Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) on working with recovery and individuals who use substances, and electronic monitoring systems.

The conference provided a platform for territories to share accomplishments, and two such successes included practitioners from Anguilla and Bermuda, who shared their experiences of introducing electronic monitoring. This discussion highlighted some of the differing practices between territories based on geography, crime profiles and infrastructure. For example, for some of the smaller, more remote territories, electronic monitoring is unlikely to be a viable response to crime, given the small populations and remote locations. In exploring this, it was also positive to learn of the recently launched Caribbean Association of Probation & Parole (CAPP), a network seeking to encourage regional cooperation across Caribbean probation.¹ Caribbean Association for Probation and Parole (CAPP) Taking Steps to Modernize Regional Criminal Justice System It was positive to learn that OTs of Anguilla and the Turks and Caicos Islands are founding members of CAPP. Other achievements included effective partnerships

between prison and probation in the Falkland Islands, a well-utilised Youth Diversion Scheme in St Helena, comprehensive court assessments in Gibraltar, CBT accreditation for practitioners in the Turks and Caicos Islands, work towards the introduction of MAPPA in the British Virgin Islands and much more.

Fiona Campbell delivered an input on behalf of the CJOT network, which explored evidence-based practice in the OTs, highlighting that 'copying and pasting' probation policy from England and Wales is not necessarily the route to best practice in a nuanced context like the OTs. This input encouraged delegates to take a role in developing this evidence base and included Nicola Robinson presenting the research conducted into voluntary engagement with probation services in the Falkland Islands. Nicola was supported to undertake this research through the Probation Institute's Graham Smith Award. Laura Aston presented a session exploring the processes involved in writing an academic publication, based on her experiences of co-authoring a paper on the community service partnership with the National Trust on St Helena² in an effort to encourage probation professionals from other territories to consider contributing to the probation evidence base in the OTs. Fiona also provided input and led a discussion entitled 'Professionalisation of probation in the Overseas Territories,' in her capacity as Senior Lecturer in Criminal Justice at Sheffield Hallam University.

¹ [Caribbean Association for Probation and Parole \(CAPP\) Taking Steps to Modernize Regional Criminal Justice System](#)

² [The world's most remote community service? Partnership working and building community capacity on the British Overseas Territory Island of St Helena - Fiona Campbell, Laura Aston, 2024](#)

The conference was also an opportunity to explore some of the common challenges of probation practice in the territories. These challenges centred around two broad themes;

- Understanding probation – often issues pertaining to a lack of probation knowledge at senior levels led to issues around recruitment, funding, and the visibility of probation, particularly where there were competing demands, for example, with other criminal or social justice departments.
- Access to training/CPD – the absence of a probation-specific pathway for new recruits, as well as ongoing, relevant training for existing staff.

In some instances, issues around recruitment are naturally linked to the remote geographical location of territories. Additionally, the issue of being able to employ suitably qualified probation officers locally when working in small populations³ and where access to higher education to complete required or relevant degree-level education was a challenge for many territories. Related to this is where probation provisions are situated within wider departments, for example, social services or prison settings, or where responsible senior leaders were not probation-qualified. In such instances, delegates shared instances where competing priorities or limited knowledge of probation practice

exacerbated issues, leading to difficulties accessing funding to support practice or difficulties in gaining the support of senior leaders with responsibility for probation provisions.

As a network, CJOT have engaged with members to identify learning from the conference and is in the process of mapping this into future activities. This includes the continuation of ‘spotlight sessions’ drawing focus on specific areas of, or challenges in practice, offering opportunities for CPD and learning, and working in collaboration with members and the team from the MoJ Overseas Territories Justice programme to support a broader understanding of probation both within the OTs and beyond. The conference was an excellent opportunity for those involved with probation and community justice across the OTs to come together and learn from one another, and the support for this critical area of work continues to shape and build as we move into 2025/26 and beyond.

For more information on the formation of the CJOT network, see [PQ 28 Article - Building a network for British Overseas Territories and remote/rural probation provisions – a legacy of the 5th World Congress on Probation and Parole](#).

For any CJOT-related queries or comments, please email: cjotnetwork@outlook.com

³ The total population of the British Overseas Territories is estimated to be around 270,000. Several islands have populations under 5,000 people (St Helena, Falkland Islands, Montserrat), where others are between 20,000-75,000 (Turks and Caicos Islands, British Virgin Islands, Bermuda, Anguilla).