

PROBATION VALUES - WHERE ARE WE NOW?

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Abstract

The adequacy of generic social work values as a framework for probation practice has been a contested area over the years and recent changes in the structure of probation practice have added a particular focus to the debate. The purpose of this paper is to summarise the recent history of the debate and to reflect on the current position for practitioners. This is done by examining three pieces of guidance given to probation officers about what values should inform their day-to-day practice: the Regulatory Framework for the Diploma in Probation Studies (1998), the Practice Guide published by NAPO (2000) and A New Choreography published by the National Probation Service (2001).

Introduction

As is usual in any writing on values I must begin by acknowledging that the use of the term 'values' in the broad social work arena poses some problems. This is due to the varied and imprecise way in which the word is employed. Thus one review of the literature on value systems uncovered 180 different definitions of 'values' (quoted in Timms, 1983: 107). More recent authors suggest that there is little consensus about what is meant by the term (for example, Banks, 2002; Shardlow, 2002; Clark, 2000a). Whether you prefer the analogy of Shardlow's 'live, large and very wet fish' (Shardlow, 2002: 30) or Clark's 'creature of allegory, imagination and myth' (Clark, 2000a: 33), the conclusion is that the true meaning and application of the word in the social work context remains just beyond reach and escapes any firm definition.

The difficulties are compounded by the inclusion of the word ethics in any discussion about values as this is another word that appears prone to definitional complexity. I therefore suggest the following as a common starting point: values are 'abstract and general notions of what is good and bad' and ethics are regular practices supported by 'conceptions of normatively required action' (Clark, 2000a: 37). Thus values summarise abstract ideas, and ethics are more concerned with practical application. The dynamic between the two is outlined by Hugman and Smith (1995: 2):

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Ethical propositions are statements of value related to action. In the instance of social work with which we are concerned here, ethics concern the way in which that occupation is practised, organised, managed and planned. Value-statements may draw on abstract or ideal notions but at the same time they necessarily carry with them implications for the way in which individuals act and the relationship between people as members of social groups.

Trying to pin down the meaning of terms in this objective way has some merit, however the contributions under consideration are not necessarily as rigorous. As Smith (1998) has rightly observed, 'values may sometimes be confused with attitudes, behaviours, aims or principles'. The literature which follows, drawn from academia, the professional regulatory bodies, employers, unions and professional associations, reflects this confusion.

One framework which helps in giving form to the subsequent discussion is that outlined by Stephen Shardlow (2002). He suggests there are three descriptions of the subject social work 'values and ethics': narrow, mid-range, and broad. Thus a narrow or 'restricted description' would focus solely on social workers' behaviour with clients, and in the context of the National Probation Service (NPS), the relationship between the probation officer and the offender. The 'mid-range description' would additionally include such elements as 'the nature of social work as a professional activity' and 'the characteristics of social work organisations and their influence on the behaviour of individual social workers'. The 'broad definition' would add (for example) 'the nature and form of social work knowledge' and 'the construction of social work as a social activity'. In terms of academic disciplines, the 'narrow definition' is concerned with professional ethics; the 'mid-range' with the sociology of professions and with managerial and organisational theory; and the 'broad definition' with epistemology and social theory. (Shardlow, 2002). The debate under review - the relationship between social work values and probation values - falls within Shardlow's 'restricted' and 'mid-range' definitions. There is plenty of discussion concerning workers' behaviour with clients, and much about the organisational context of probation practice; the more abstract elements of the 'broad definition' are not evident.

The structure of what follows is simply to consider the principal features of the debate thus far, and to examine guidance given to probation officers about what their values should be in three documents: the Regulatory Framework for the Diploma in Probation Studies (1998); the Practice Guide published by the National Association of Probation Officers (NAPO) (2000) and *A New Choreography* published by the National Probation Service (2001). This approach has been chosen for two reasons; firstly exploring some of the history of the debate about probation values provides the context for contemporary discussions. It will highlight continuities in thinking and approach as well as differences and help us understand why longer serving officers have some difficulties with practice in the NPS of the twenty-first century. Secondly, exploring documents generated by the 'educators', the union/professional organisation and the employers should give a broad

view, though perhaps not a consensus, of what values should inform the practice of the contemporary probation officer.

Probation Values: The Past

Discussion concerning the adequacy of social work values as a framework for probation practice has been ongoing since the introduction of a common training path in 1971. The origin of the disquiet appears to be in the absence of academic input on subjects relevant to the understanding of crime, for example criminology and penal policy, and a lack of consideration of the 'social control' elements of practice (See Nellis, 1996 for a discussion of probation training arrangements during this period). During the 1990s the discussion gathered pace in the context of the Home Office's amendments to training arrangements and the developing expectation that probation training would be removed from the framework of the Diploma in Social Work and possibly even from higher education.

In response to this expectation, some commentators chose to reaffirm their commitment to social work values, thus all the contributors to Probation Values argue 'that social work values are, and must remain, the foundation of probation work' (Williams, 1995: 1) and Anthony Vass in *Social Work Competences: Core Knowledge, Values and Skills* states that 'the same core values are, nonetheless, relevant to every organisational context of work' (Vass, 1996: 192). However, there was also an acknowledgement that these differing organisational contexts could not be ignored in any representation of social work values. One of the clearest statements in this regard was provided by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW). In the second edition of Paper 30, *Rules and Requirements* for the Diploma in Social Work, Annex 2 listed new requirements for probation training. The following probation values were added to the list of generic values, under the heading 'Values in context':

Qualifying officers must be able to:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of ethical issues and dilemmas, including the potential for conflict between organisational, professional and individual values;
- recognize the need for and seek to promote policies and demonstrate practices which are non-discriminatory and anti-oppressive;
- demonstrate the capacity to manage the tension between the court, the offender, the probation service, the family and the wider community. (CCETSW, 1991: 39)

In addition, writers with professional experience of probation practice such as Williams (1995) and Vass (1996), included probation specific values in their contributions. Williams (1995), in what he suggests is a list of preliminary, rather than definitive values, includes opposition to custody and protection for victims and potential victims of crime. Vass has three separate lists of probation values (1996: 136, 138, 198) the first of which includes the requirement to 'challenge attitudes and behaviour which result in crime and cause distress, or harm to victims and others' (Vass, 1996: 136). These values reflect the

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specific context of probation practice i.e. that probation officers work with people who have committed criminal acts. This attention to the context of practice was a theme that was also emerging in generic writing on social work values, for example in the contributions from Sarah Banks (1995; 1998; 2001) who acknowledged that the settings of mental health, family therapy or youth justice might have differing impacts on the values of workers in those settings.

This sensitivity to the context of probation practice is further underlined by the extent to which the lists provided by Williams (1995) and Vass (1996) reflect *political* developments which were influencing public services generally. New Right initiatives of the 1980s and 1990s concerned with individual rights were represented in the criminal justice system by the introduction of the Victim's Charter. Williams (1995) suggests protection for victims and potential victims of crime as a value. Managerialist endeavours promoting efficiency, effectiveness and economy in the public sector found expression in the style and structure of probation intervention and were reflected in the values offered by Vass (1996: 198): 'the need to manage risk safely', be 'publically accountable' (ibid: 136), 'provide quality assessment', and 'offer value for money' (ibid: 198).

This commitment to social work values, albeit with some modification for the probation setting, was not the only representation of probation values in the 1990s. The most outspoken critic of the link with social work values has been Mike Nellis who argued

There is an urgent need for distinctive probation values which actually sensitise practitioners to the repressive elements and dystopian leanings of contemporary penal policy.... and which facilitate reasoned resistance to them in a way that generic social work values, however well-intentioned, have never done (Nellis, 1996: 24).

Nellis proposed three key values which should underpin the work of the probation service: anti-custodialism; restorative justice; and community safety (Nellis, 1995). Anti-custodialism is understood as diversion from custody or a reduction in the use of custody; restorative justice is concerned both with victim-offender mediation and neighbourhood dispute settlement; community safety with crime prevention and reduction initiatives including work with potential offenders (Nellis, 1995: 183-88).

This grouping has not been without its critics and both James (1995) and Spencer (1995) took Nellis to task for offering a list of organisational aims rather than true values. Nellis, has however, remained faithful to his original conceptualisation of the new value base of probation practice and has repeated them in a speech given at the Probation Values seminar in January 2000 organised by NAPO (NAPO, 2000: 20-9). These were summarised in the *Probation Journal* (2001) and reiterated in a contribution to *Moving Probation Forward* (Nellis and Gelsthorpe, 2003). NAPO has worked closely with Nellis on the formulation of a contemporary set of probation values and NAPO's guidance will be discussed in more detail below.

Probation Values - Where Are We Now?

Two developments gave a renewed impetus to the values debate in the mid and late 1990s: revised training arrangements for trainee probation officers, and the changing practice context. In respect of the former, the decision to remove probation training from the framework of the Diploma in Social Work was eventually announced in October 1995, and after initial concerns that higher education would no longer be involved in the training of probation officers, the service's new recruits commenced employment as trainee probation officers on a combined degree and NVQ course - the Diploma in Probation Studies - in late 1998. This change affected only trainees in England and Wales; in Scotland probation officers continue to receive generic training with social workers and work within the same organisational structure in the statutory sector, whilst in Northern Ireland probation officers are generically trained with social workers and are subsequently employed by the Northern Ireland Probation Board. The implication for the values debate (in England and Wales) is that if there is a separate route to professional practice, then the professions of social worker and probation officer are themselves separate, in which case the value base for practice should also be separate.

The second development - the changing practice context - had similar implications. To expand a little, changes in policy and practice took place from the 1980s onwards which to some represented 'a gradual but determined effort to shift policy and practice away from the 'social work' base of probation work to an ethos more conducive to administering surveillance and control' (May and Vass, 1996a; 2). The Criminal Justice Act (1991) was key to this development in its introduction of the concept of punishment in the community. As a more punitive stance towards offenders evolved the probation service came under scrutiny for being overly focussed on the needs of the perpetrators rather than the victims of crime. Further to this, individual officers appeared to lack accountability and there was doubt as to the efficacy of interventions (Raynor, 1997; Robinson, 2002). Although this was perhaps a simplistic representation of the service's endeavours at that time, there was clearly a huge variation in the way probation clientele were supported and managed and consequently measures were introduced both to improve consistency of service delivery and to undertake interventions with proven success rates. Alongside this was the development of the public protection agenda which 'effectively meant thinking about offenders in terms of the potential risks they posed to members of the public rather than the welfare or other needs they presented' (Robinson, 2002: 261).

Thus, after a decade of rapid change, the contemporary probation officer approaches his/her case load as a case manager, assessing the intervention needed following a risk assessment using standardised risk assessment tools, then referring the offender to a partnership agency for specialised input, or requiring them to attend an in-house group work programme designed to address either their cognitive deficits in general terms (for example, Enhanced Thinking Skills programmes) or their specific offending behaviour (for example, Drink-Drive programmes). The content of these programmes and the probation staff delivering them are both accredited by the Home Office and the delivery is framed by the concept of 'programme integrity', that is, the material is delivered in a prescribed order, at a standard pace and with no deviation from the accredited content. If

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an offender fails to comply with any aspect of the order, usually attending appointments, National Standards require the offender to be returned to court for noncompliance. In total, these changes reduce significantly the amount of discretion enjoyed by individual probation officers in terms of how they organise and manage their work. The job has thus moved from being a 'professional social work agency guided by the rehabilitative ideal' into 'the agent of supervision in the community, with the requirements of the courts and the public coming before the needs of the offender' (Crow, 2001: 98). If it is accepted that the organisational context is an important moderator of values then significant changes in that context ought to have significant implications for the form those values take.

Teaching the 'Values and Ethics' unit on the Diploma in Probation Studies since the qualification's inception leaves me with the clear impression that the majority of trainee probation officers (TPOs) resist the traditional alignment of social work values and probation values, feel that generic definitions of social work underplay the specific controlling elements of their work, yet believe there is something about the qualitative nature of the relationships which social workers are allowed to have with their clients which they wish to retain for probation officers. There may be a tendency here for trainee probation officers to interpret social workers' relationship with service users rather simplistically, however, the message is clear - this new generation of probation officers, whilst accepting their enforcement role, nevertheless feel there is something about the 'old style' of worker-client relationship that is worth preserving. As the feedback from one trainee probation officer discussion group put it: 'You have to advise, assist and befriend before you can challenge, confront and change'.

Probation Values: The Present

Three specific pieces of guidance are given to contemporary probation officers in respect of how their values might be framed and I will consider each of these in turn. The first is formulated solely for trainee probation officers and is found in the *Regulatory Framework for Probation Training*, under the heading 'Values':

Probation practice is based on a commitment to

- preventing and reducing crime and the distress it causes
- the protection of vulnerable individuals
- treating people fairly, openly and with respect
- building on people's strengths to enable them to change and realise their full potential as members of the community' (Regulatory Framework, 1998: 2).

The list in the Regulatory Framework is the most concise of the three lists under consideration and the one which presents its principles in the most general terms. It opens with a representation of what Nellis has referred to as 'community safety' (see above), continues with a broad statement about vulnerable individuals, who could be either victims or offenders or both, and concludes with two statements which echo unashamedly concepts which are recognisable as 'traditional' social work values - respect and the capacity for change - whilst the phrase 'members of the community', with its suggestion of

social inclusion, owes more to what have been termed 'emancipatory values' (Thompson, 2000).

To expand: firstly in regard to 'traditional' social work values, concepts of respect and the capacity for change both date from a period described as the 'classic' phase in the formulation of social work values and are specifically offered by Butrym as 'propositions' which underpin the 'principles for casework' outlined by Biestek more than a decade earlier (Hugman and Smith, 1995: 3-5). The *Regulatory Framework* is thus offering guidance about the worker-client relationship based on Kantian principles of according respect to the individual simply because she or he is a person. 'Respect for persons' is cited as one of the best known and most influential statements about behaviour in social work ethics (See Banks, 2001: 24-30 for a discussion of this). Belief in the capacity for change has been discussed less consistently though is offered by Butrym (Hugman and Smith, 1995) and described by contemporary writers as a value associated with social work (for example, Smith, 1998: 114). Trainee probation officers, during my Values and Ethics teaching, have been more inclined to offer belief in someone's capacity to change as their motivation for working with offenders than the more generalist principle of respect for persons.

Whilst the *Regulatory Framework* offers some guidance on the specifics of the worker-client relationship it also attempts to put this into a context relevant to the criminal justice arena, hence 'preventing and reducing crime and the distress it causes'. This echoes the purpose of the probation service as outlined in the National Standards of 1995: '...protecting the public from harm from the offender, or preventing the offender from committing further crime' (Home Office, 1995). Including this as a value base goes some way to overcoming the individualisation implicit in Kantian principles, acknowledges the political climate concerning crime and public protection developing in the 1990s, and reflects the broadening debate about the meaning of values in a probation context.

The other way in which this list places individuals in their broader social context is by the reference to 'members of the community'. This is an example of the social inclusion implicit in what Thompson (2000) describes as 'emancipatory values'. These are values which arise from an approach which pays attention to the sociological context of individuals i.e. the range of cultural and structural factors influencing their choices and behaviour. Thompson lists these values as deindividualisation, equality, social justice, partnership, citizenship, empowerment and authenticity (Thompson, 2000: 116-123).

The values of the *Regulatory Framework*, therefore, reflect social work values in both their traditional and emancipatory sense, within the context of the community justice system. The influences behind the final value, 'the protection of vulnerable individuals', are harder to determine. If 'vulnerable' individuals are victims, or potential victims, of crime, the inclusion of this as a value is a reflection of the growth of victim awareness from the 1980s onwards in policy (Victim's Charter), practice (mediation and reparation schemes) and academia (the development of victimology, an area of criminology devoted to the

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study of victims). If 'vulnerable' individuals are the offenders themselves, perhaps it is meant as a reminder that the social context for many offenders is one of discrimination or exclusion because of race, education or employment, and is thus a reflection of the importance of the anti-discriminatory advances of the 1980s and 1990s. If vulnerability is about an individual being both a victim and an offender, it could be an acknowledgement of the duality of, for example, drug users, or of a young person forced into prostitution, or of someone with mental health difficulties. Is the inclusion of this sentiment as one of the value bases of probation practice a protest against the contemporary structure of intervention in the probation service, a structure which organises work with offenders according to the type of offence committed, stressing their 'offender' status, and not their 'victim' experience?

I have perhaps laboured the discussion a little, however the point is that at the time the Regulatory Framework was written, the inclusion of a commitment to the protection of vulnerable individuals as a specific value base of probation practice was unusual if not unprecedented. And 'vulnerability' as a concept, whilst recognisable in the burgeoning literature on risk assessment and management, is not discussed in literature exploring social work values, whether generically or in the specific context of probation practice.

The second piece of guidance in terms of chronology is the list drawn up by NAPO and issued in *Probation Values: Practice Guide*, a document which is intended to inform the practice of all probation officers, whether in training or after qualification. Thus:

NAPO is committed to:

1. The integration of respect, support, guidance and the establishment of trust in working with individuals who commit offences and those who are the victims of crime.
2. Treating people fairly and openly according to their individual needs.
3. Empowering people to make informed choices to increase control of and improve the quality of their lives in order to reduce the risk of harm to themselves and to others.
4. Promoting equality, diversity, anti-discriminatory and anti-racist practice.
5. Promoting the rights of both victims of crime and those who commit offences whilst recognising the competing rights of different sections of the community.
6. Building on people's strengths to enable them to change (NAPO, 2000: 4).

Subsequent discussion in the Practice Guide about the value base of probation practice links it to 'anti-discriminatory practice, the contextualisation of offending beyond individual responsibility, and the building of sound and effective working relationships with individuals' (NAPO, 2000: 11). Anti-discriminatory practice is specifically mentioned in point 4; most of the other statements in the list above, in whole or in part, refer to sound relationships with individuals. The contextualisation of offences 'beyond individual responsibility' is not explicit in NAPO's list of values, though the preamble to

the list of values does attempt to do this by references to social injustice and the curtailing of life opportunities by 'poverty, discrimination and social exclusion' (NAPO, 2000: 2).

There is an interesting, and possibly uneasy, mix of influences on NAPO's guidance. 'Sound and effective working relationships with individuals' falls within the 'narrow' definition of what constitutes social work values. The concepts of respect and capacity for change are straight from the 'classical' period of writing about social work values and reflect a Kantian approach to work with individuals. Probation officers, and others who regularly work with individuals with difficult behaviour often indicate that the way they approach this work is to separate behaviour from the person themselves. This approach is fundamental in Kantian ethics i.e. 'the individual continues to be uniquely valuable even if he or she sometimes acts in a morally unacceptable way' (Clark, 2000a: 70). However, focus on the individual does not mean, in NAPO's guidance, that their social situation is ignored and the language of the emancipatory values of the 1980s - empowerment, anti-discriminatory practice, anti-racism - runs alongside the traditional language of respect. Further, regard for victims of crime and acknowledgement of the 'competing rights of different sections of the community' touches on the public protection agenda that has become a central feature of contemporary probation practice.

Public protection as a rationale needs some comment, because its theoretical influences are hugely different from the Kantianism which tended to underpin practice based on the needs of the individual offender. The move from this exclusive attention on the worker-client relationship to the 'rights' of others in the wider community signifies a philosophical shift towards utilitarianism, which with Kantianism, form two of the major classical philosophical approaches to ethical issues.

Briefly, utilitarianism is an act-based moral theory, focussing on the consequences of actions to determine whether the action is morally good or bad. Utilitarianism is often understood to mean the greatest good for the greatest number, though this is a modification from the original concept of utility (see Banks, 2001: 30-4 and Clark, 2000a: 72-4 for discussions of utilitarianism in a social work context). In the probation or social work context, utilitarianism is the theoretical underpinning of the emphasis on public protection where the needs of the individual have to be balanced against the needs of the rest of the community. Whilst a Kantian approach encourages a focus on the worker-client relationship, utilitarianism helps explain the wider practice context in which that relationship takes place. Clark (2000a: 73) suggests that whilst both theories might in practice lead to similar conclusions they are, in fact, based on 'incompatible first principles; to support both families of theory seems to involve a high price in philosophical inconsistency'. However, he then goes on to conclude that 'mixed' theories of morality are possible. Banks (2001) similarly quotes several authors who suggest it is possible to combine Kantian and utilitarian frameworks in a 'common morality' approach (Banks, 2001: 34-40) as a reflection of the fact that we draw on both sets of principles in our everyday moral reasoning. The point for the practitioner would be to recognise that it may not be possible to approach practice in a philosophically 'pure' manner, that there are

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conflicts arising from these different philosophical approaches, and that these may have to be weighed against each other on a case by case basis.

The final piece of guidance is that offered in *A New Choreography*, the strategy document issued by the Director of Probation on the creation of the National Probation Service in April 2001. Under the heading 'The NPS Vision and Ethical Framework' the following list of 'the values of the NPS' is given.

Valuing NPS staff and partnership colleagues - seeing them as the organisation's greatest asset.

Victim awareness and empathy are central.

Paramountcy of public protection particularly where there are specific, known victims of violent and sexually violent crimes.

Law enforcement, taking positive steps to ensure compliance but, where this fails, acting swiftly to instigate breach or recall proceedings.

Rehabilitation of offenders, working positively to achieve their restoration.

Empiricism, basing all offender and victim practice on the evidence of 'What Works' - also applying the same principles to the design and reconstruction of the Service.

Continuous improvement, always pursuing excellence.

Openness and transparency in all aspects of service delivery and in the internal workings of the NPS.

Responding and learning to work positively with difference in order to value and achieve diversity.

Problem solving as a way of resolving conflict and 'doing business'.

Partnership, using a highly collaborative approach to add value to the capacity of the NPS to achieve its expected outcomes.

Better Quality Services so that the public receive effective services at the best price (National Probation Service, 2001: 8).

These values are not explicitly elaborated upon, though a lot of the material in *A New Choreography* implicitly reflects them. The list does, however, illustrate the confusion already referred to of attitudes, behaviours, aims and principles. Few of the sentiments

expressed above are recognisable as 'values' in the sense in which they have been discussed so far in this article. Trainee probation officers, when considering this list within the context of values and ethics teaching, readily describe the points as organisational aims rather than values. This is correct and the fact that the list in *A New Choreography* reads more like a statement of organisational aims than moral principles tells us a lot about the contemporary context for practice in the National Probation Service. Thus the role of the probation service in the criminal justice system is one of public protection and law enforcement. Organisationally this is achieved by partnership with other agencies and through valuing staff, demonstrated by better quality services, openness, transparency and continuous improvement in service delivery. In practice terms, 'What Works' and problem solving assist in the rehabilitation of offenders and both practitioners and employers work 'positively with difference' rather than challenging discrimination.

Elsewhere in the document two 'major outcomes' for the NPS are identified:

That by 2004 it achieves a reduction of 5% in the reconviction rate of offenders subject to supervision; and

That by 2006 the NPS is recognised as a top-performing public service as benchmarked by the European Excellence Model (National Probation Service, 2001: 51).

Most of the 'values' outlined above spring from these proposed outcomes for the Service, and are thus concerned with the organisational context of a probation officer's work and consequently fit into one of the areas of Shardlow's mid-range definition of values - the characteristics of social work organisations and their influence on the behaviour of individual social workers (Shardlow, 2002: 31). To further emphasise the point about organisational context, the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act (2000) lists the aims of the NPS as protection of the public, reduction of offending, proper punishment of offenders, ensuring offenders' awareness of the effects of crime on the victims of crime and the public, the rehabilitation of offenders (Ward, 2002: 304), aims which are well represented in the values above.

The values are thus concerned with standardisation of service delivery, and whilst they may have implications for the structure and content of the probation officer-offender relationship, they give little other guidance and certainly offer nothing resembling values such as respect and self-determination, part of the mantra of 'traditional' social work values. Additionally, there is no reference to the structural elements influencing 'emancipatory' values; in fact the one value which owes something to the anti-discriminatory initiatives of the previous twenty years in the probation service (responding and learning to work positively with difference in order to value and achieve diversity) is not about challenging discrimination in any structural sense. This is the only value which is expanded upon in *A New Choreography*, and it is clear from this elaboration that the principal application of this value is in respect of staffing issues, rather than service

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delivery issues: 'the assumption apparently being that services for minorities will be more easily improved if a more diverse staff group...can be created' (Nellis and Gelsthorpe, 2003: 230). In theoretical terms the influence of the public protection agenda means these values are more closely connected with a utilitarian moral approach than with a Kantian one.

Overwhelmingly, then, these values reflect the managerialist agenda touched on by Vass (1996) and discussed earlier when he cited accountability, quality assessment and value for money in his representation of values. A few other contemporary influences are apparent: the importance of victim awareness; the increasing profile of restorative justice (working positively to achieve their restoration) and the problem solving approach of Chris Trotter's model for working with involuntary clients (Trotter, 1999).

Discussion

At the start of this article, I suggested that values could be described as abstract or general ideas whilst ethics were more concerned with practical application. In the review above, the guidance given to trainee probation officers and that offered by NAPO do contain general statements about treating people (N.B. not *offenders*) fairly, openly and with respect and building on people's strengths to enable them to change. To a small extent these can properly be termed values. However, part of the *Regulatory Framework*, most of the NAPO document and the whole of *A New Choreography*, include as values statements that could more correctly be described as ethical principles. This perpetuates the blurring of meaning between values and ethics. However, in writing this article, I have come to the conclusion that values need to be discussed in a specific context in order for them to have meaning and application for practitioners, even if this is semantically imprecise.

If the practice context is important in giving meaning to values, is the practice context of probation sufficiently different from that of social work in general to require a different set of values? The consensus among commentators is that probation is still social work, thus David Smith observed that regardless of the government's attempts to redefine probation as punishment 'the content of probation practice retains a resemblance to social work' (Smith, 2000: 642). The understanding that social work explicitly includes probation is contained in texts such as *Social Work Ethics* (Clark, 2000a) and *Social Work: Themes Issues and Critical Debates* (Adams et al, 1998 and 2002). Chris Clark, writing specifically in the Scottish context emphasised of probation, 'it is social work and it shares the aims, methods and skills and values of social work more generally' (Clark, 2000b: 45 emphasis in original). The point has also been made that statutory social work is both increasingly concerned with issues of public protection and has always been more about control than some of its practitioners have cared to acknowledge (Miller and Buchanan, 1997; NAPO 2000; Robinson, 2002: 261).

NAPO, in producing its *Practice Guide* about probation values, is clearly familiar with the practice context of working with offenders and has developed values it considers reflect that context. It is interesting to note therefore, that this guidance in fact bears more than

a passing resemblance to the *Values Requirements of the Diploma in Social Work*, issued by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work in revised form in 1995 (CCETSW, 1995). These Values Requirements are intended both to guide the practice of student social workers and reflect their working context. The similarities in these values might suggest that the authors of the second list (NAPO) have recognised the overlap of function, duties, skills and knowledge base between probation officers and social workers generically. This recognition may be implicit, it may be in general terms rather than detailed application, nonetheless the influences of CCETSW's interpretation of values clearly runs through NAPO's interpretation. Thus both lists contain some elements from the 'classic' period of writing about social work values - respect, capacity to change - but temper this individualisation with statements about competing rights of differing sections of the community and the control of behaviour. The centrality of anti-discriminatory practice is recognised; the importance of the practice context is noted as a general statement in the DipSW Requirements, whilst NAPO specifically refers to the practice context of working with offenders; and both touch on their respective agency's role in public protection. It would be possible to argue that there are differences of emphasis in these two lists - variations in words and phrases - however, these do not alter the fundamental meaning of the values deemed appropriate for student social workers and for NAPO members at the turn of the century. NAPO may be offering a slight reworking of social work values for a probation context but there is no clean break with the social work values of the past, no new direction.

The event which, symbolically at least, marked the separation of probation values and social work values was the publication of *A New Choreography* in April 2001. This document provided the new National Probation Service with a set of national probation values which remind probation officers in precise ways of the organisational context of their work and make it abundantly clear that values in the twenty-first century have very little to do with the worker-client relationship. In theoretical terms, there is a clear shift away from a Kantian approach to working with offenders towards the more utilitarian principles implicit in the reframing of probation as a public protection service.

Nellis has recently referred to a 'hiatus' in the values debate (Nellis and Gelsthorpe, 2003: 227) following the publication of *A New Choreography*, and has sought to stimulate discussion by considering the relevance of the human rights agenda to the probation values debate. His conclusion is to reaffirm his commitment to his new values for the probation service - community safety, restorative justice and anti-custodialism - first vaunted a decade ago.

In contrast, two recent contributions concerning generic social work values have chosen to re-emphasise the worker-client relationship. The training organisation, Topss, offers a statement of values in the National Occupational Standards that begins 'Social workers must have respect for users and carers, regardless of their age, ethnicity, culture, level of understanding and need' (www.topss.org.uk). The professional association for social workers, the British Association of Social Workers has issued 'A code of ethics for social

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work values and principles' which lists five 'basic values' of: 'human dignity and worth; social justice; service to humanity; integrity; competence' (www.basw.co.uk). Whilst both contributions make reference to the context of social work practice - Topss refers to 'the power invested in (social workers), including legal powers' and BASW to 'the pursuit of social justice' - the majority of each (brief) document is concerned with ethical principles guiding the relationship between worker and service user.

Conclusion

What we understand as values in a probation context are open to revision and modification.

This article has examined the 'formal' guidance provided for probation staff by those involved in training, by the union/professional association and by the employers. The first two documents suggested continuities with some earlier contributions in terms of their allegiance to what have been termed 'traditional' social work values such as 'respect' and a capacity for change. Other values were alluded to which reflected an awareness of the social situation of offenders. The specific context of probation practice was acknowledged and this attention to practice context was developing in the discussion of generic social work values. The third document, *A New Choreography*, representing the views of the employers, appears most radically different to what has gone before, though Vass (1996) in his contribution discussed earlier clearly foreshadowed the managerialist agenda in his references to accountability and value for money. The ethical frameworks of Kantianism and utilitarianism were used to help analyse the material as these are the ones most frequently referred to in the literature on social work values generally. In the context of the National Probation Service, these frameworks help illuminate the theoretical shift of moving the practice focus from the individual offender to public protection.

In terms of the future of the values debate in the NPS, the values of the service are a live issue both for staff who have been employed for some years and for those new to the service. Discussion with trainee probation officers indicates that their reasons for joining the service are about working with people to change their behaviour; these new recruits may be more comfortable with enforcement issues than their counterparts of a decade ago and see their role in the wider context of public protection but they also recognise the omissions in *A New Choreography* and do not view the values expressed in this document as a definitive statement of their relationship with offenders.

I conclude with the suggestion that underlying all the discussion about values in the NPS, and perhaps in social work generally, what writers are trying to represent - albeit in different language - is the same thing. Nellis's injunction that 'a new way must be found of expressing core values' (Nellis, 2000: 34) is possibly the key to understanding the values debate. For there is an indication here that there *are* core values, and that what we are wrestling with is how these values are expressed in different practice contexts and different historical contexts. These different contexts may place different professional requirements on practitioners and limit the approach of practitioners in different ways,

they may offer different understandings of the way to work with people experiencing difficulties, but essentially whether the term is 'respect' or 'anti-discriminatory practice' or 'restorative justice' or even 'public protection' when we start exploring what these terms mean when working with offenders at the start of the twenty-first century, we find we are discussing the same thing.

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