WHY CHOOSE THE PROBATION SERVICE?

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Abstract
At a time of major re-organisation through the development of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) that brings together the work of the probation and prison services, this paper explores what it is that draws people into a career involving work with offenders. It asks the questions ‘what is it about working with offending behaviour that attracts people to this career’ and are the ‘right’ people being selected for training. It draws on a small research study that asked applicants to and students on, one of the pre-qualifying ‘Diploma in Probation Studies’ (DipPS) programmes in the UK, to comment on their reasons for choosing this career. It also draws on literature that explores gender and employment issues and reflects on what are the determining factors for men and women in their choice of career.

Key Words: Emotional Literacy, Therapeutic Alliance, Probation Training, Gender and Careers

Introduction
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Methodology and Sample

The study employed a quantitative research method, using questionnaires to survey applicants to the DipPS run by De Montfort University in the Midlands and East of England region and current students. A control group of students on social work, pharmacy and youth and community programmes were also asked to complete questionnaires. The questionnaire was designed on the basis of literature related to the gendered nature of employment and with a focus on factors that impacted on the decision of women to choose particular careers. The key findings from the literature indicated that women valued 'work with people' and interpersonal skills more highly than financial remuneration, and that men were more driven by instrumental opportunities and career development. The questions were, therefore, framed around these concepts.

The sample included 145 applicants to the programme (referred to hereon as ‘applicants’), 112 current probation students, 51 social work students, 30 youth and community students and 54 pharmacy students; a total of 392 questionnaires were completed. Most of the findings referred to in this article relate to the applicants and current probation students (257), although some gender aspects are related to the whole group of respondents. Applicants were asked to complete a range of identity questions although for the purpose of this article gender is seen to be the most significant identity factor.

Age

In terms of age the majority of applicants were in the age range 25 to 34 which matched the current probation student profile but was dissimilar to all other student groups for whom the majority was under 25. This correlates with national and local statistics collated by Probation Training Consortia on entrants to the DipPS programmes and suggests a continuing trend of probation as a second career, attractive to people who have already worked in other areas/sectors.

Gender

The majority of applicants were female (70%) which was slightly lower than for current probation students but similar to the other student groups. A gain this matches the national statistics for trainee probation officers (74.13% are female: National Probation Directorate 2005).

Race

The majority of all respondents identified as White, (73.8%) with all Asian groups being the second largest (17.4%), Black students (5.1%) and those of dual or mixed heritage (3.1%).

Sexuality

The majority of all students identified as heterosexual (91.1%), although there were gay (1.5%), lesbian (0.8%) and bisexual students (2.3%) identified in all groups, and it is acknowledged that whilst the return rate on this question was high (only 17 declined to answer), it is likely that only students who are openly ‘out’ within their student group are likely to feel confident about declaring their sexuality on a form.

Educational attainment

Just over half the group of applicants and current probation students had first degrees or higher degrees (52%); significantly higher than any other group including social work students, with pharmacy students being almost exclusively in the GCSE A level or equivalent category. This too is in line with national statistics on trainee probation officer entrants. This raises the question, debated at the time of the development of the new probation training programme, about the merits of locating the qualification at undergraduate level. It is acknowledged that almost all core professional training (social work, training, teaching, medicine etc.) is located at undergraduate level and the question may be to what extent work with offenders does or should attract people who have considerable previous life and qualification experience.

Context and History

Over the last 40 years there has been a very significant change in the demography of staff employed in the probation service and now NOMS. Post the Second World War the predominant staff group was male, many of whom were ex-servicemen looking for an alternative career after the war. During the period between 1950 and 1980 there was approximately a two-thirds male one third female split in gender composition (Annison 2006). When women first worked within the service they were allocated only female offenders to work with. Jarvis states that a ‘few officers, mainly women, had had a university education’, (Jarvis 1972-54 cited in Annison 2006) and Pateman suggests that women probation officers managed to transcend their gender within the work; as ‘the rationality’ imbued by their higher education experience was seen to overcome the ‘disorder’ arising from their gender (Pateman 1994 cited in Annison 2006). A survey of probation officers’ perceptions and attitudes conducted by Loughborough University in 1978 (Centre for Extension Studies 1978) similarly found a 2:1 sex ratio in favour of men, which was identified as in line with the national figures at that time of 33% of female probation officers. The numbers increased to 45.8% in 1980 and 66.32% of the total staff group. Interestingly this level is consistent with national statistics at that time of 33% of female probation officers. The trend through the 1980s and into the 1990s was for the number of male probation officers to remain the same but female numbers began to rise. By 1993 there was a switch-over which has continued since (Annison 2006). In December 2004 there were 22,329 staff working within NOMS, with women making up 66.32% of the total staff group. Interestingly this level is consistent with the public sector average of 64.53% (National Probation Directorate (NPD) 2005). Within the probation officer grade, 64.42% are women and 74.13% of trainee probation officers are women (NPD 2005). There are some differences in percentages within the more senior grades, with 46.5% of senior probation officers being men, and more than 50% of staff at Assistant Chief Officer level and above being men, suggesting that the ‘glass ceiling’ which inhibits women from progression into leadership and management roles (Ryan & Haslam 2005, Davidson & Cooper 1992) still operates albeit to a reduced extent.
Numbers of staff from ethnic minorities have increased and now meet or exceed the quota (1) in most regions (NPD Workforce Planning). At 10.5% overall representation this exceeds that of the general population in the UK (8%). The representation of black and minority ethnic staff is seen to be generally strong across operational posts (10 - 11%) but lower in senior support roles (N PD 2005). However, whilst the service has invested quite heavily in recruiting staff from Black and Asian populations it has been much less successful in reversing the declining numbers of male applicants noted by the Dews Report which cited evidence of a ‘recent trend to younger entry and . . . . . in particular far fewer men than women are joining the service’ (Home Office 1994:1).

Whilst it could be argued that this gender imbalance should not be problematised, it is nevertheless interesting that a service that works with a predominantly male user group (criminal statistics show that in 2002 81% of known offenders were men (Statistics on Women 2003)), and with increasingly ‘tough’ sounding rhetoric related to the ‘new punitiveness’ associated with the service (Nellis 2005) should attract so few men as practitioners. This is at a time when the discourse on masculinities in British society identifies some worrying trends in relation to the lower achievement of boys at school (Hill 2005), the higher rate of male offending and anti-social behaviour, and the incidence of male suicide which, although it has fallen in recent years, still continues to be higher than the average rate for any other group (Department of Health 2006). A n argument put forward for the need for more men in the service relates to the significance of providing potentially damaged and violent young men with male workers who can model pro-social behaviour and alternative models of masculinity (Hearn 1998).

Gendered Perceptions of Probation

Work with offenders can be seen as being divided into ‘tough work’ primarily concerned with crime control, security, surveillance and punishment, and ‘soft work’, primarily concerned with helping and enabling offenders to improve their lives. This terminology now replaces the former language of ‘care and control’ which was seen as a continuum upon which probation officers operated, holding the tension and managing both. Other related concepts such as ‘punishment and welfare’ have also been employed to identify the tensions between challenging and changing unacceptable behaviour whilst acknowledging the needs and disadvantages of the person to be changed. All of these definitions clearly have strong gendered implications. The ‘tough work’ within criminal justice has stereotypically been seen to be undertaken by the police, prison service and security industry, all of which have traditionally been viewed as male dominated careers. The attraction to men of these careers can be seen to be those of status, control, security of employment and ‘toughness’, supportive of a masculine image, perhaps sustained in most cases by the wearing of a uniform (Hearn 1998, Tempest 2005).

Most of these occupations are associated with the enforcement of the law, and thus carried out by the statutory sector, although an increasing number of private sector organisations are now becoming involved in security and prison management. All of these characteristics are likely to have made these careers less appealing to women although their representation has increased in recent years. Interestingly, in the early years of probation the ‘tough’ image is likely to have been the prevailing one, and it could be speculated that the attraction of men to the probation service pre the 1970s was based on the perception of ‘probation’ being about the ‘discipline’ of wayward youth, and the exercise of authority, traditionally seen as a male prerogative. Probation in the 1960s and 1970s would not have associated itself with the notion of ‘emotional literacy’ (Orbach 2001); this concept would have been anathema to the men who staffed the service. Nevertheless, the predominance of men, in the guise of being ‘tough’, was able to carry out some very humane and caring work with offenders. Thus their masculinity and image as ‘tough’ men was preserved intact, allowing them to express the more emotional aspects of their characters, with their ‘emotional literacy’ hidden from critical view.

In contrast to the current ethos of ‘punishment in the community’, the early work of the service from the ‘missionary era’ to the ‘welfare’ and ‘treatment’ models from the 1930s onwards was a rehabilitative one. This ‘welfarist’ conception of probation lasted through to the 1970s when probation training merged with child care and mental health training within the social work qualification (Hong Chui & Nellis 2003). The advent of the era of ‘punishment in the community’ in the 1990s might have lent itself to a further increase in male interest, but conversely more women were applying to and being accepted by the service during this period.

Leaving aside for the moment the notion that real ‘toughness’ may well lie with those highly trained and experienced probation officers who are able to identify and work with some of the most distorted and complex thought processes and emotions of offenders in a rehabilitative way, the question to explore is what the stereotypes and contested meanings of ‘tough’ and ‘soft’ have meant for staff recruitment to the service.

Research suggests that people’s perceptions of the gender role or ‘sex-typing’ of different careers and occupations has a strong influence on their subsequent choice of career (Muldoo & O’Reilly 2003). Leung and Plake (1990) found that people allowed themselves greater scope in choosing occupations of higher prestige as long as the sex-type of the occupation was not in clear opposition to their gender (cited in Radford 1998). In other words, both men and women choose careers that fit with their notion of what are appropriate roles for men and women to occupy in the field of employment.

The current research study identified some interesting differences between student groups and between males and females on their perceptions of the gender domination of probation. From the whole sample 48% of men and 38.5% of women thought that the service was female dominated, 18.6% of men and 15.25% of women thought it was male dominated and the remainder thought it was gender neutral. When examined in relation to applicants and probation students; 33.3% of applicants thought it was female dominated, and 61.4% thought it was gender neutral. This changed dramatically once people had entered the profession with 82.1% of current students seeing it as female dominated, based obviously on their direct knowledge of the service. This suggests that,
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without detailed knowledge, men are slightly more likely than women to view the service as female dominated, and this view only changes for both genders when they enter the service. This may well be one factor that influences men away from the probation service as a career choice, although the study identified that, contrary to the research cited above, both male and female students saw gender dominance of a career to be of relatively low significance. In order to test this hypothesis more directly it would be necessary to question the views of a random sample of the population rather than just university students who had already embarked on a chosen career.

Choice of Career

Respondents were asked to comment on a range of factors that might describe their career of choice which ranged from factors such as ‘production orientated’ through to ‘wants to help people change’, ‘strong commitment to meeting government targets’ and ‘wants its staff to be open-minded and creative’. Of the 10 factors listed the two most highly rated by both applicants and probation students were ‘is people centred’ (91.9% agreed or strongly agreed) and ‘wants to help people change’ (95.4% agreed or strongly agreed). They were later asked to comment on the importance of a range of factors to the overall work of the criminal justice system ranging from ‘knowledge of diversity’, ‘willingness to exercise authority and control’, ‘ability to problem solve’, ‘emotional literacy’, and ‘wearing a uniform’. Of these factors the ones rated as the most important were ‘commitment to help people change’ (96.1%), a ‘willingness to challenge’ (94.6%), and ‘ability to problem solve’ (89.1%). Other factors were seen as slightly less important and interestingly the wearing of a uniform was rated as the least important (1.2%). This supports the earlier findings that for applicants and probation students, helping and challenging people to change is the single most important or influential factor in their career choice. This is mirrored by the research undertaken by Eadie and Winwin Sein on the outcomes of training under the new DipPS programmes. In their section on applying for training they discovered that the most significant factor, overwhelmingly, in the decision to apply was ‘working with people’, with career development next and ‘helping offenders’, third (Eadie and Winwin Sein 2004/2005). Similarly, the study carried out by Loughborough University in 1978 identified that the number one priority for all staff at that time was ‘improving the client's quality of life’, and with ‘providing an alternative to custody’ as the second priority (Centre for Extension Studies 1978).

Applicants and students who had already embarked on a chosen career.

Some further interesting questions. It suggests that, despite the shift in language and more coercive style of operation, the view of the prevailing probation ethos continues to be one of enabling and helping offenders to change.

Gender Differences in Work Style

If we take from these perceptions the idea that work within the probation service requires ‘people’ rather than ‘instrumental’ skills, then it is important to reflect on how this might be gender influenced. Parker (1994 cited in Radford 1998) found significant gender differences in 21 of the 30 Occupational Personality Questionnaire (OPQ) scales (Parker 1994). He identified that these differences concurred with male and female stereotypes, with males scoring higher on factors relating to persuasiveness, control, independence, tough-mindedness, competitiveness and achieving behaviours, while women score higher on scales of affiliative, democratic and caring interpersonal styles. Whilst some of these differences may be stereotypical and may also be reducing, there is continuing evidence that men and women employ different leadership styles, and certainly there continues to be strong evidence of the barriers that women face in trying to climb the corporate ladder, with evidence that they continue to confront a ‘glass ceiling’, and that organisations continue to favour typically male behaviours as leadership qualities against which women are to be judged (Ryan & Haslam 2005).

Images and Stereotypes – ‘Masculine’ and ‘Feminine’ Work

A side from the differences described above, there is also history to contend with, and the manner in which social structures have traditionally been dominated and maintained by a patriarchal system that broadly favours men over women in career choice and progression (Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) 2004). Sokoloff argues that women began to gain their greatest access in the male professions to jobs that were becoming less desirable to white men. The only profession in which men (in this case black men) came close to parity with white women was social work (Sokoloff 1992). Women constitute 50% of the population; more girls (59%) than boys (49%) gain five or more A*-C grades at GCSE or equivalent grades, and 46% of people in the labour market are women. In broad terms the differences between women’s and men’s jobs have declined dramatically since the 1970s, however, certain occupations are still mainly held by women or men, particularly in skill shortage areas. For example less than 1% of people in plumbing occupations are women and only 2% of childcare workers are men. Women continue to dominate many traditional female fields particularly health and social work (79%) and education (73%). However, they are now making significant in-roads into law, medicine, business and architecture. Men continue to dominate in construction (90%), transport and storage (76%), manufacturing (75%) and real estate, renting and business activities (58%). Men still occupy 66% of all managerial and senior official posts, and 58% of all professional roles are filled by men (EOC 2006). A round three in ten head teachers in secondary schools and FE college principals are women, compared with only one in nine university vice chancellors. A quarter of Civil Service top management are women. Only 10% of senior police officers and 9% of the senior judiciary are women, and less than 1% of senior ranks in the armed forces are women (EOC 2006). Traditionally careers such as nursing,
teaching, social work and child care have continued to be female dominated – with no significant change in demographics. It is apparent that the probation service sits within the ‘health and social work’ career categories in terms of its attractiveness to women. The reasons for this need further exploration.

**Women’s Choice of Career, Vocation or Job? - Changing Expectations in the role of Women in the Labour Market**

Until 30 years ago very few women entered any of the quasi professional fields. With the increase in educational opportunities and emancipation of women, they have entered these professions in increasing numbers. The suggestion is that work that had been seen as masculine sex-typed began to change its image. For example, probation began to change its image with the advent of social work training, in 1971, which had a feminine sex-type and men began to lose interest in it. One theory is that women entered probation in greater numbers because it was a job that had become ‘less desirable’ to men (Solokoff: 1992).

Women’s choice of career has historically been defined and constrained by societal expectations, and women identified as undertaking the ‘emotional labour’ and men the ‘intellectual labour’. Women had been excluded from most professions at their emergence. In addition, many semi-professional occupations in which women predominated e.g. nursing and midwifery were subordinated to male-dominated occupations such as medicine. Much professional employment demanded a two person household; the professional’s capacity to work depended upon unpaid input from a partner, usually a ‘wife’ (Crompton 1999). Other research on highly educated women has revealed a similar reluctance amongst them to pursue a career ‘at any cost’ (Ferrand et al 1996).

The research study asked respondents to choose which of the following most closely matched their view of their career: a) vocation b) job and c) career (2). Whilst the applicants to the programme were slightly more likely to view their choice as a vocation (52.4%) rather than a career (44.8%), probation students, once embarked on the programme, had switched position with 40.2% viewing it as a vocation and 50% as a career. Overall a marginal gender difference emerged with the female students seeing their choice as vocational (48.7%) compared with men (44.1%). Only a very small minority of all students identified it as a job although the current probation students gave this the highest score (6.3%) of all groups. This lends some small support to the idea that women are more likely to see themselves as ‘practitioners’ rather than ‘careerists’.

**Factors that Impact on Choice of Career: Financial Remuneration and Career Advancement**

Pay differentials continue to exist across all sectors even those where women traditionally dominate; for example in health and social work the gender pay gap is 32.2%. It is highest in banking, insurance and pension provision (41.4%) (EOC 2006). The differences become even starker in management grades in terms of representation and pay. For example directors and chief executives of major organisations are primarily male (83%) and earn an average of £56 per hour, whereas receptionists are primarily women (95%) and earn £7.07 per hour on average (EOC 2006). One of the most consistent themes that occur throughout much of the literature on masculinity is the centrality of paid work to men’s working lives and to their construction and reproduction of masculinity. Despite advances in female equality within both the domestic and employment spheres it may be that men continue to be more driven by the need for financial remuneration to support their family coupled with an identification with the more ‘masculine’ and ‘rational’ occupations. Women are as committed and motivated by their careers as men but may be less confident in applying for promotion or advancement because they question the relevance or sufficiency of their knowledge and skills rather more than men. They may also fear engagement with a more aggressive and isolated experience of management and prefer the less high profile role of ‘grass-roots’ activity. According to Eccles, women tend to place more value on interpersonal factors such as helping people or enjoying positive relations with co-workers, whereas men place more value on extrinsic rewards such as earning a good income and attaining high status (Eccles, 1994, Lips, 1992, Rowe & Sniazek, 1995). Eccles argues that women are relatively more likely than men to spontaneously cite people-oriented reasons for career choices, although a sizeable number of men also cite this type of reason. In contrast, men are relatively more likely than women to cite high pay and status reasons. The notion that gender differences in actual pay may stem, in part, from differences in pay expectations has received some research attention (Gasser, Flint, & Tan, 2000). The logic behind this connection is that having lower expectations may lead people to request a lower starting salary, be less aggressive in seeking pay rises, and be less likely to seek employment elsewhere as a result of dissatisfaction with salary (Gasser et al., 2000). In essence, expectations of lower pay result in satisfaction with lower pay (Hojat et al 2000). In support of this idea, researchers have shown that pay expectations can affect actual salary offers (Majer, Vanderslice, & M Carlin 1984) and that despite having lower average salaries, women, as a group, are not less satisfied than men with their pay (Keaveny & Indereden 2000), (H Eckert et al 2002).

There was no significant difference between the men and women in the research study in relation to their view on financial remuneration, which may indicate that once people have chosen a career and embarked on training money becomes less of a driving factor than for those who have not yet made the choice. To test the hypothesis that men are deterred from entering the probation service because of the relative lack of financial remuneration would require a wider sample group of people who are not currently embarked on training.

**Job Accommodation to Working Life**

Research by H Eckert et al (2002) indicates that women give higher importance ratings to the manner in which their work can accommodate to their family life, and to pleasant working conditions. The notion of ‘dual roles’ occupied by women, relating to home and work has been looked at by a number of writers (Joshi & Hinde 1992, Jenkins 2004). Women play parts in both the private reproductive sphere and the public productive
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prescribed and circumscribed by national standards, national testing and target setting. These professions now may be disappointed on finding that much of their work is imposing constraints or expectations on people. These vocational areas traditionally lend intuition and emotional connectivity, enjoy working with and through people rather than opportunity to engage with people in a process of change. Women, through their skills of professions. The probation service, like social work and teaching, is seen as an option with a reasonable financial remuneration for those without access to higher status work with offenders in the probation service (NOMS) offers a relatively secure career

In the research study, of the applicants to the probation programme, 29.7% were carers and amongst current students 31.3% were carers. Across the whole sample of students 19.6% of men and 30.4% of women were carers. All students were asked about the significance of child care facilities to their choice of career and for 42% of all male students and 53.5% of all female students it was significant. The gender bias in these answers is apparent although perhaps no longer as strong a differential as historically and is also influenced by the fact that these students had already made professional career decisions. Most probation areas are unlikely to make child care provision so there cannot be a strong, if any, correlation between probation as a ‘child-friendly’ service and women being attracted to it. However, there continues to be a strong ethos of independent and flexible working arrangements within the service which may well encourage people with caring responsibilities to believe they can manage their working lives around their family needs and requirements.

**Personal Fulfilment**

Work with offenders in the probation service (NOMS) offers a relatively secure career option with a reasonable financial remuneration for those without access to higher status professions. The probation service, like social work and teaching, is seen as an opportunity to engage with people in a process of change. Women, through their skills of intuition and emotional connectivity, enjoy working with and through people rather than imposing constraints or expectations on people. These occupational areas traditionally lend themselves to these skills and abilities more than, for example the ‘hard-edged’ subjects of science and engineering. These occupational worlds are changing and women entering these professions now may be disappointed on finding that much of their work is prescribed and circumscribed by national standards, national testing and target setting.

Within these parameters, however, they may still find the personal satisfaction of building relationships and engaging people in the change process. It is likely that women see the probation service as offering them an opportunity to work with people and make a difference to their lives, within a structured and organised framework and that as indicated earlier, personal fulfilment is a stronger motivational force for women than for men.

**The Rise of Psychology**

The rise in the significance of psychology as the dominant discourse in probation methods and practice may well be another influencing factor. Psychology is a ‘feminine subject’ and on the ‘soft’ side of the spectrum of academic disciplines. Increasingly the work of the probation service has applied a psychological perspective to both the causes of and responses to crime, within the ‘tight wing’ ideology of both the conservative governments and now ‘New Labour’ in identifying criminality within the individual. Solutions are to be found via the application of psychological techniques, most notably cognitive behavioural methods (Wing Chui & Nellis 2003) to engage the offender in thinking differently about themselves and their behaviour. It seems likely that as women are drawn to the study of psychology and its focus on human behaviour and development so too will the probation service appear an attractive career to women.

Linked to the rise of psychology is the focus on the skills of ‘problem-solving’, using a cognitive behavioural approach. Women, through their experience of ‘multi-tasking’ (Gray 1993) are more likely to be involved in problem-solving activity on a regular basis and perhaps more willing to be open about problems within their own lives than are men.

**Emotional Literacy**

There is an emerging field of emotional literacy in the UK (Orbach 2001, Evans & Allen 2002, Freshwater and Stickley 2004) which, with particular relation to nursing, builds on the work on ‘emotional intelligence’ (Goleman 1996). A through the work of Goleman and others in the States has been largely confined to the educational field and work with schools, it is beginning gain a foothold in the business world and in management training as a way of improving workforce experience/delivery.

For the purpose of the questionnaire ‘emotional literacy’ was defined as

The capacity to register our emotional responses to the situations we are in and to acknowledge those responses to ourselves so that we recognise the ways in which they influence our thoughts and actions (Orbach 2001:2).

Historically value has been placed on the ability of workers to build relationships with offenders from which encouragement and motivation for change could take place. The importance of this forging of relationships took a dip in the developing era of ‘What Works’ and accredited programmes where the emphasis in the probation context was on referral to appropriate cognitive behavioural group work programmes and adherence to ‘programme integrity’ in the sense of following a prescribed script for teaching input. The
re-emergence of the concept of ‘case management’ (Home Office 2005) returns to the importance of continuity of contact and the quality of the relationship between offender and practitioner. Some of the most recent academic literature on the reduction of re-offending suggests that the processes of personal change in thinking, attitudes, perceptions of self, are as important as services to meet offenders’ practical needs (Hough et al 2006, Dowden and Andrews 2004, Farrell 2002, Burnett and McNeill 2005).

Research evidence defines ‘relationships’ as crucial to offenders (Bailey 1994, Bailey 2002). Into this arena fits the notion of emotional literacy and emotional labour. If being ‘tough’ has traditionally been stereotyped as the ability to endure hardship, to withstand difficulties, to be rigid and unbending in the carrying out of one’s duty then an alternative concept of toughness in the mental and emotional lives of workers can mean an ability to deal with and manage some of the most difficult, dangerous and distressing areas of human life and activity. Whilst this can continue to summon notions of masculine toughness, the war hero who withstands torture and deprivation, the spiritual leader, normally male, who holds onto a vision or belief in the face of much ridicule or challenge; it can also be seen to mean an emotional toughness that historically women have portrayed through endurance in the face of deprivation and in the pursuit of care of their children. This form of emotional ‘toughness’ can be translated to mean a capacity to use inner emotional strengths to support and negotiate through the traumatic experiences of others. The term ‘therapeutic alliance’ defines the emerging discourse in this area (Dowden and Andrews 2004). It is proposed that women are naturally more emotionally literate than men and tend to value emotional literacy above the more hard-edged, rational, skills favoured by men.

The research study identified a marked difference between applicants and probation students and one of the control groups of students (pharmacy) with the former groups scoring an average of 76% when asked to rate the significance of emotional literacy to the work of the criminal justice sector, and the male pharmacy students only 20%. There was no significant difference between male and female applicants and probation students in their consideration of this issue which would suggest that once embarked on a career in probation both men and women consider this skill to be important. A more detailed survey of men who choose not to join the probation service might suggest, as did the male pharmacy students, that emotional literacy as a concept and a significance within criminal justice is seen to be of little importance or relevance.

Conclusion
All the themes covered within this paper and illustrated by the research study point to the probation service continuing to be more attractive to women than to men as a career. Some of these themes are more speculative than others, but the trend within the probation service is in step with the health and social care sector as a whole so perhaps should not be surprising for those who continue to see the service as operating within a similar framework. Rigorous and challenging work with offenders requires a combination of robust strategies for management and treatment operated with ‘soft’ processes associated with people skills and emotional literacy. It is likely that these processes will continue to be more attractive to women, although men who are interested in this work seem equally able to employ these skills. The preponderance of women in the service should, in theory, pose no problems. It only becomes a ‘problem’ if policy makers and legislators continue the rhetoric of toughness and punishment and conflate this with images of ‘masculinity’. If the service continues to drift towards commercially-derived ‘technocorrections’ (Nellis 2006), with an increasing use of technological, managerial and instrumental processes at the expense of human relationships and emotional processes, then we might begin to see more men re-joining the ranks. It will be interesting to see if the merger of the prison and probation services within the National Offender Management Service as anticipated by the Carter Review (Carter 2003) continues apace, whether the probation service can survive at all as an independent ‘people-focused’ service. The might of the prison service may be sufficient to tip the scales in favour of a male dominated organisation. Probation Training Consortia, responsible for the recruitment and selection of staff for the DipPS programme may need to reflect on the implications of this gendered view of probation in determining whether they are content to continue to recruit predominately female trainee probation officers.

Notes
1 In 1999 as part of the government’s commitment to race equality in employment the Home Secretary announced targets for recruitment, retention and career progression of minority ethnic staff within the Home Office, including the probation service. The targets covered a 10 year period with milestones in 2002, 2004 and 2009 (Home Office 2000).
2 a) Vocation: defined as a strong feeling of fitness for a particular career or occupation, especially regarded as requiring dedication
   b) Job: defined as a paid position of employment
   c) Career: a profession or occupation, especially as offering advancement
References