



Sept



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CEP Technology in Probation Expert Group
Helsinki, 3-4 September 2018

Using technology in
Probation: Reflections on the
evidence and questions for
Probation work



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I have been invited to:

- Reflect on emerging evidence and uses of technology in criminal justice and other fields with people with criminal convictions.
- Consider some questions, insights, implications for Probation work.



TECHNOLOGIES

- Electronic monitoring & biometric technologies;
- Apps for mobiles, tablets, touch screens;
- Digitally enabled toolkits and interventions;
- Virtual reality, visualisation, simulation;
- Video conferencing communication technology;
- Digital platforms with user-generated content;
- Gaming/computer based serious game;
- Digital screening and assessment tools;
- Staff digital desks and client portals;
- Digital decision support tools for staff;
- Artificial intelligence (AI) and big data;
- Social media;
- Others...

(See Kip et al (2018))





WHY? PURPOSES FOR USE MATTER

- Punishment: retribution, restriction of liberty and/or privacy.
- Decarceration and diversion: reducing the use of custody by using technology as/within a community sanction or measure.
- Surveillance and monitoring.
- Motivating compliance.
- Crime control and reducing reoffending.
- Risk management, victim protection, and public protection.





WHY? PURPOSES FOR USE MATTER

- Responsivity and personalisation to the individual and their circumstances.
- Supporting (or being less harmful to and inhibitive of) desistance, recovery and reintegration processes.
- Agency and self-efficacy, growth;
- Instrumental and systemic purposes: trying to reduce time, money, workload and resource inefficiencies; communication, digitising traditional interventions or systems.
- Others? See Graham (2018)





STRENGTHS

Kip, Bouman, Kelders and van Gemert-Pijnen (2018) conducted a systematic review of 50 studies of e-health technological interventions with offenders with a mental illness. They found evidence to suggest strengths of some uses:

- Increasing access and engagement;
- Personalisation and responsivity to individuals;
- Positive opinions of service users, fun to use;
- Enhancing rapport and relationships with staff;
- Helping in eliciting sensitive information;
- Receiving care in highly secure settings;
- Consistency and standardisation of delivery;
- Reductions in time and costs of interventions.





CHALLENGES

Kip and colleagues (2018), Ross (2018) and Alison-Davies and colleagues (2018) identify limitations, issues and challenges:

- Evidence of effectiveness is limited/emerging;
- Use of tech not suitable for every person;
- Privacy concerns and data protection;
- Faulty technology, slow or lost connection;
- Misuse, unintended uses of the technology;
- Professional ideologies and implementation;
- Lack of regulation and standardisation, no clear protocols, guidelines, legislation;
- Proportionality and intensity: adding *more* to the penal toolkit? Higher risk of breach & recall?





WHY NOT?

Graham (2018) and Beyens (2018) identify limitations, issues and challenges:

- 'Remoteness, distancing, automation' – Bauman and Lyon (2013) critique 'doing at a distance' and 'action-in-absentia'.
- Disproportionality of use, punitive uses.
- Neoliberal ideologies influencing uses:
 - Privatisation and marketisation of justice.
 - Austerity, cost-cutting, funding priorities
 - Individual responsabilisation.
- Net-widening: Stan Cohen's (1979, 1985) warnings are apt, as well as Beyens (2018)





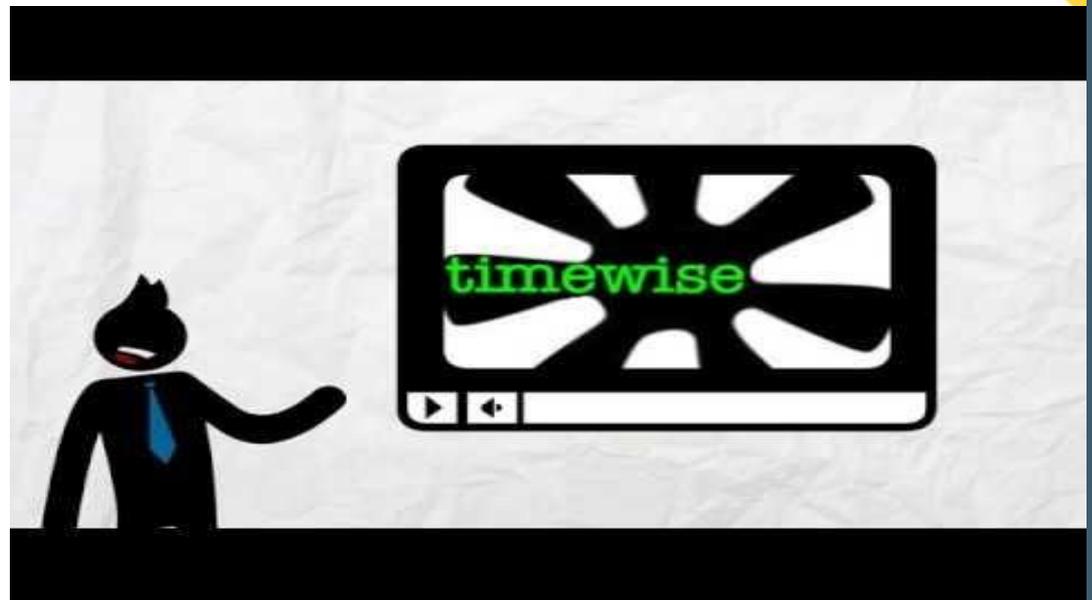
Digital Innovation, Technology and Justice

- Criminal Justice
- Digital Justice
- Data Justice
- Social Justice





Digitally enabled toolkits & interventions



Timewise channel toolkit, HMPPS, England & Wales
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_n_EbFXVU



Apps, time and peer support

Straightline – Prison Radio Association (UK)

Free app, seven films and website for people, especially focused on supports tailored to people in the first week after leaving prison.

- Stories and audio-visual multi-media
- Peer support, belonging, peer communities and desistance and re/integration processes

Sources: <http://www.wearestraightline.com/> and <http://www.russellwebster.com/straightline-making-it-on-release-from-prison/>





Apps, rights and access to justice

Y-Stop – a free app and film by RELEASE and StopWatch (UK).

Created by young people for young people, the project addresses the problems experienced during police-led stop and searches. It aims to give young people the skills to handle stop and search, to inform their interactions with the police, and to provide tools for advice, empowerment, and the reporting of illegal or inappropriate police behaviour. By providing training and tools, the project increases confidence and skills to deal with stop and search.

Source: <https://www.release.org.uk/y-stop-project>





Apps, rights and access to justice

Legal Aide – a free app by RELEASE (UK).

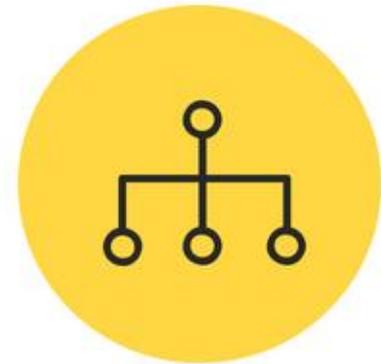
- Interactive step-by-step guide on how to deal with a drug possession offence, explaining process and rights;
- 'Aimed at people who accept that they are guilty of the offence of possession of a controlled drug and provides them with information on how to navigate the criminal justice system to get the least punitive penalty possible.'

Source: <https://www.release.org.uk/publications/self-representation-guide-for-drug-possession-offences>

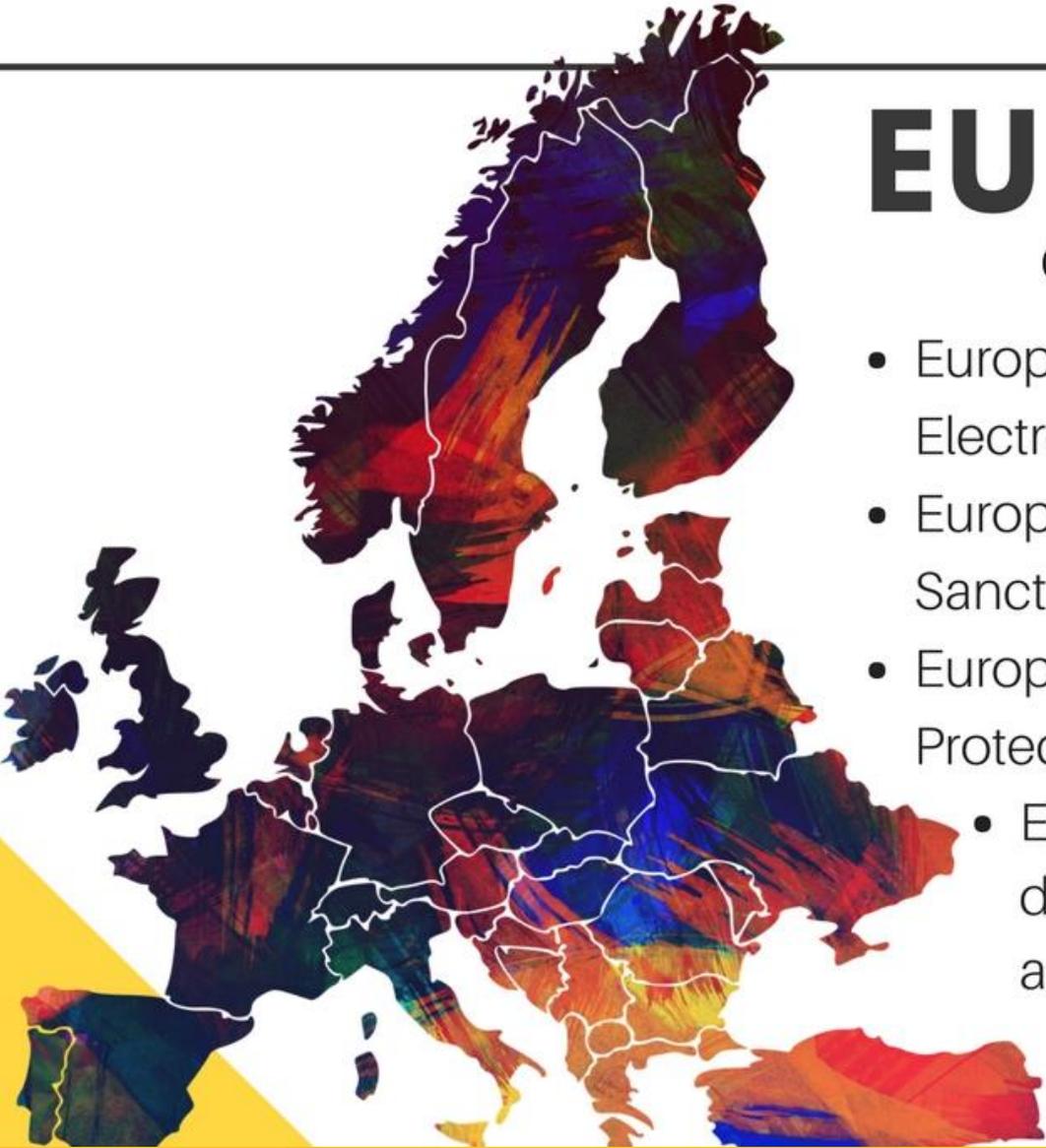




QUESTIONS



Some real world questions to consider
about using technology in Probation...



EUROPEAN

CONTEXT & CONSENSUS

- European Recommendation on Electronic Monitoring (2014).
- European Rules on Community Sanctions & Measures (2017).
- European General Data Protection Regulation.
 - EU Directive 2016/680 on data protection in the police and criminal justice sectors.

(See Graham, 2018)

How are technological innovations in probation and community justice coherent with existing laws and frameworks in Europe? (slow to change)



Questions:

- What are the key ethical considerations in innovating uses of technology in Probation? Innovation in probation is not always ethical (see Graham & White, 2016).
- Comms strategy about uses of technology?
- Co-production: how can we better involve and learn from clients and staff in designing and using tech in probation?
- How do increasing uses of technology affect Probation work and professional experiences? Insights from the sociology of work and the professions, and criminology (Susskind & Susskind, 2015; Philipps, 2017; Graham & McIvor, 2017).



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