

An Interview with the Chief Executive of the CJNTO

Peter Francis talks to Helen Schofield, Chief Executive of the Community Justice National Training Organisation (CJNTO).

Peter Francis **I would be grateful if you just tell me a little about the CJNTO. When was it set up? What is its purpose?**

Helen Schofield The CJNTO was established at the end of 1998. Prior to this there was an extensive process of submission to the DfEE, which took 12 to 18 months. This involved bringing together many organisations across the community justice occupational sector. We were approved as an NTO in June 1998 and I was appointed in October 1998. We have now grown to a staff of eight. The central office is based in London, and we also have small offices in Cardiff and Belfast. We now have a development manager in Wales and in Northern Ireland and we are in the process of establishing a post in Scotland.

Each of the NTOs was set up with an explicit purpose - the development and maintenance of national occupational standards and vocational qualifications. The NTOs quickly became involved in collecting labour market information, workforce development planning and the skills foresight surveys. The role also expanded quickly because the Qualifications Curriculum Authority introduced the concept of vocationally related awards of NVQs, which are a reflection of the recognition that most of the NVQs and SVQs do need some formal underpinning knowledge. A good deal of activity in NTO has been also to encourage, commission and promote learning material to support the NVQs. Community Justice is a new occupational sector, in which we have brought together for the first time the organisations working with offending behaviour and victims, survivors and witnesses and community safety.

The development of NTOs also coincided with the decision by the government that the Diploma in Social Work was no longer the appropriate qualification for probation officers - and the development of a new qualification which embeds a level 4 NVQ into the Degree/Diploma in Probation Studies. The CJNTO became the body which holds the license to develop the national occupational standards which make up the NVQ and to accredit the NVQs. At the Home Secretary's invitation, the CJNTO became the approval panel for the diploma, which means that we had to approve the initial nine programmes and subsequently to inspect them.

Peter Francis **What is the annual turnover of the CJNTO and how does that compare with other NTOs?**

Helen Schofield Last year's turnover was about £750,000 -medium-sized.

Peter Francis **What is the CJNTO's approach to training? Also what would you see as the core aims of training within the community justice field?**

Helen Schofield We tend to use the term learning rather than training, and that's quite deliberate. One of our aims is to support work-based learning, wherever it takes place. It doesn't necessarily need to take place as formal training, although much will take place through learning systems of one kind or another. Another aim is to try to bring about a more level playing field in terms of learning, to ensure that it is more accessible across the Community Justice sector and across the different grades and levels of staff groups.

Peter Francis **Do you have a view on how that training or learning should best be delivered?**

Helen Schofield I don't think we have a single view on how learning should be best delivered or accessed. I think for the NTOs its important to put the employer and the learner first, to identify the most appropriate ways for the employer and the learner to access learning. This varies. When you put the learner first you see the need for a range of different methods of delivery - from taught programmes, to being able to work on modules at home on the computer at the weekend.

Peter Francis **One of the interesting aspects for me about the recent CJNTO 'Skills and Knowledge to Reduce Crime' report was the point about the CJNTO making a difference. How is success measured by the CJNTO?**

Helen Schofield Some of the measures used by the CJNTO are quite simple, such as the number of registrations and the number of completions of SVQs and NVQs. Other measures are agreed between awarding bodies and ourselves regarding the implementation of our assessment strategy. Success in vocational qualifications is also measured in ensuring the quality of assessment and the rigour of assessment. Beyond this is the challenge of measuring success in terms of making a difference in the organisations themselves.

Peter Francis **Is it possible to say how many people are being trained at the moment?**

Helen Schofield We can say how many registrations there are and completions there are. There's something in the region of 500 completions now at level 4, and less at level 3. The level 3 completions are more interesting in one sense, because the level 4 completions are largely driven by probation. Level 3 completions are more difficult. They were very slow in the early years, but they are picking up now. We have a series of targets for registration for the S/NVQs and for the Certificate in Community Justice.

***Peter Francis* I am familiar with the probation training programme in terms of the relationship between higher education, NVQ and occupational standards. Do you think probation has lost anything or gained anything by the movement towards a different type of learning provision?**

Helen Schofield I think it has gained a lot. It has gained a much clearer focus than before on work with offending behaviour. I think it's also gained a better ability to look at victim issues and crime reduction issues. I think that is quite significant. I think it has also gained some confidence from the service. Certainly I think there is a stronger commitment from the employers that if we haven't got the content right that at least we can do something about it. I think the losses are in the breadth of learning. There is a risk of keeping the curriculum narrower than it needs to be. This is partly about the size of the qualification and the length of time available.

***Peter Francis* What has been the response of NAPO to the changes in probation training?**

Helen Schofield The response has been positive, although they have concerns about a range of issues mainly affecting the trainees. I think there is still nervousness in the Probation Directorate that the diploma is still taking a lot of resources. We may see an attempt to realign resourcing, hopefully without impacting negatively on the diploma - to try to develop opportunities to achieve the early stages of the DipPS in the field. This accompanies a long overdue move to increase access to learning and qualification to staff at level 3. I think what is also clear is that the level of investment in the DipPS can only be sustained if we are able to build a wider base of learners and earlier access. Otherwise it may not survive. Many of these developments converge and NAPO recognizes this. Developing the Certificate in partnership with NAPO has been about protecting the Diploma and providing wider access.

***Peter Francis* What about the CJNTO's relationship with Higher Education?**

Helen Schofield Our relationship with HE has different facets. One of the relationships is through the diploma and the nine programmes which we inspect and approve. There are some inevitable tensions, but we have strengthened the process of inspection as we have grown and this has helped to formalise the relationships. We consistently aim to demonstrate that the use of vocational qualifications and occupational standards in this sector needs to be in a partnership with Higher Education.

***Peter Francis* What about the relationship with other NTOs? I've heard that there is talk of some kind of rationalisation across the NTO structure?**

Helen Schofield It is the intention of the new department, the DfES, that there should be less than 73 NTOs. We believe that we are aiming for somewhere between 15 and 30 as a maximum. We are in a process of consultation about rationalisation. This is partly driven by the relationship between NTOs and the new Learning and Skills Councils. There are 73 NTOs and 42 Learning and Skills Councils. We need an effective interface between the two if we are to make the best use of these new structures

***Peter Francis* Is it possible to rationalise without losing focus?**

Helen Schofield It depends how you approach it. We work closely with a lot of NTOs. We work with local government, social care, custodial care, health, housing and the new police NTO. We see the strongest links in future almost inevitably will be with the police and custodial care. However, this must not be to the exclusion of continuing partnerships with social care and health in particular. We are essentially located between the two. We are members of the skills dialogue groups for both health and social care and public services. I think in the first instance, the existing national training organisation structures would remain in place under the wider aegis of sector skills councils.

***Peter Francis* What about the future of CJNTO? Is its future trapped within the rationalisation of the NTO structure?**

Helen Schofield It's an interesting question really. If the consultation wasn't taking place we would be looking at consolidating in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and probably looking at the four units becoming more autonomous. I think an NTO needs to determine its optimum size and structure for effectiveness and should not continue to grow indefinitely. Whilst we are not at this point yet, we are approaching it. We need to establish some boundaries around the range of activity we can and should undertake. We also want to consolidate some regional structures. We are trying to encourage a stronger community justice presence in the English Regions. There is a growing regional emphasis which includes the probation training consortia, the regional crime reduction directors, regional YOT directors, learning and skills councils, various other regional groups. We hope to consolidate regional employer learning networks, which will be able to access regional and local funding and identify and provide for training needs across the region.

Previously Helen Schofield was the Assistant General Secretary of NAPO. Prior to that she was a full-time trade union officer for the National Association of Probation Officers, having worked in the probation service since 1975.

Peter Francis is a senior lecturer in the Sociology and Criminology subject group, University of Northumbria at Newcastle.