

On 13th March 2019, Dr Andrew Watson (Sheffield Hallam University) and Professor Taichi Yoshikai (Kokushikan University) gave a talk at the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation on the topic of the prevention of recidivism.

Dr Andrew Watson gave a brief overview of the UK probation system following the 2014 *Transforming Rehabilitation* paper and subsequent reforms. The results of these reforms have not been great, and Dr Watson noted the extensive privatisation which put commercial pressures on the probation system. Should rehabilitation be an object of profit?

He then looked at rehabilitation services in Japan, in particular the 48,000 Volunteer Probation Officers who meet with former offenders, often in the home, to help them find accommodation and employment. The average age of these volunteers is 64.3 years old. While there are a diverse range of issues behind offending, such as drug and alcohol addiction or mental illness which VPOs may not be so equipped to handle, being geographically close to offenders to provide continued and personalised support has proved to be a sustainable model, seriously influencing probation systems in many other countries.

Japan has mobilised a community to assist offenders. Dr Watson concluded that for the UK, with a strong tradition of volunteering, a similar system could be put in place.

Following on from Dr Watson, Professor Taichi Yoshikai gave us an overview on the Japanese criminal justice system and preventing reoffending. The current aim of the Japanese criminal justice system is to reduce the number of repeat offenders, who make up around half of all perpetrators. Japan has an incredibly low arrest rate of 0.093%, but the conviction rate is the highest in the world at 99.9%. The aim of the Japanese system is to be precise and humble in who they arrest and how they prosecute.

While foreign media might suggest that Japanese police force confessions or destroy evidence, this is a misrepresentation. In fact, court proceedings do not depend on confessions, and the domestic media are harsh on perceived miscarriages of justice.

When it comes to reoffending, there are few preventative measures such as extended custodial sentences. The 2016 Act to Promote Prevention of Recidivism has been put into place, and has a strong social focus, aiming to promote smooth re-integration of offenders into society by looking at their needs.

Professor Yoshikai concluded that the precision and humility of the Japanese justice system has helped produce good results, although it is by no means a perfect system. Changes are being made to better support socially vulnerable offenders.

The presentations were followed by a Q&A session from the audience. There were many interesting questions regarding the importance of elderly volunteers in Japanese society, psychological support for offenders, the individual versus the group in the UK versus Japan, and the potential inevitability of reoffending.