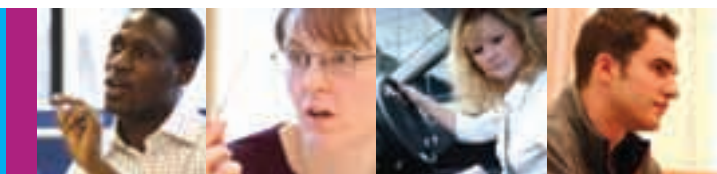




## Careers in Probation

An informative guide featuring careers information, interviews with Probation staff and an up-to-date look at Probation work





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# Introduction

Do you want a career that is worthwhile and will make a real difference to people's lives as well as protecting our communities?

Do you want to be part of an organisation that is at the centre of one of the finest Criminal Justice Systems in the world?

We can offer:

- rewarding work
- structured career development
- the opportunity to join a professional organisation that is committed to recruiting a workforce representative of Britain's vibrant, diverse society.

## The world of probation is changing

This is a very exciting time to be joining the National Probation Service. The changes that are taking place are making our work more effective and will have a growing impact on the people we are supervising.

The **National Probation Service (NPS)** and the Prison Service are working together under a new agency called the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). NOMS has been created to cut further the re-offending rates and increase rehabilitation.

The NPS also works in partnership with other criminal justice agencies as well as with local authorities, health, education, housing and a wide range of independent and voluntary organisations.

## An informative read

There is a range of exciting careers in the world of Probation to suit individual abilities and strengths. Join us and you join a team of professionals. This career guide gives an up-to-date review of our work, and describes three careers in Probation, those of the:

- Trainee Probation Officer
- Probation Service Officer
- Supervisor.

*Careers in Probation* has been produced to give you an informed view of our challenging work. It includes interviews with Probation staff and features anonymous case histories of men and women who have been supervised by the NPS.

## A few figures on the national picture

Each year the NPS begins the supervision of more than 170,000 offenders.

Male offenders make up nearly 90% of this figure.

The average age of those under court order supervision is 30, with 25% of all offenders supervised aged 23 or under.

About 9% of those on supervision are from minority ethnic groups.

# Understanding the work we do

Every offender is treated as an individual with the court sentence reflecting the need to protect the public and to ensure that the offender has been appropriately dealt with by the punishment.

A new sentencing structure was introduced in April 2005. The single Community Order replaced all previous community sentences and special orders, such as those to deal with drug misuse.

A Community Order can be for a maximum of three years and must contain at least one of 12 set requirements. These requirements range from:

- completing a special programme that will target an individual's offending behaviour
- residing in specified approved accommodation
- dealing with any substance misuse
- completing unpaid work for the good of local communities.

Further sentences are available to the courts including a Suspended Sentence Order also known as Custody Minus, which is a suspended period in prison of between 28 and 51 weeks, with community requirements set by the court from the same options as the Community Order. Custody Minus can be suspended for six to 24 months and can be activated if the offender breaks the conditions of the order, or is further convicted of another offence.

The new sentencing structure includes Intermittent Custody. This is an innovative approach to lower risk offenders, sentenced to less than 12 months, in which the custodial days are served intermittently, at weekends or on weekdays. During the intervening periods in the community, the offender is under Probation Service supervision. Intermittent Custody is designed to mitigate some of the negative aspects of even a short sentence of full-time custody, such as loss of employment and accommodation or family break-up.

The descriptions of the Community Order, Custody Minus and Intermittent Custody give a brief overview of the sentencing structure that underpins our work in the community and in prison.

There may be further changes to the sentencing options available to the judiciary, particularly for short prison sentences, but our aims remain the same.

## The aims of the NPS are:

Protecting the Public

Reducing re-offending

The proper punishment of offenders in the community

Ensuring offenders' awareness of the effects of crime on the victims of crime and the public

Rehabilitation of offenders

# Working together to reduce re-offending

## A Personal Message from Martin Narey, Chief Executive of the National Offender Management Service

The most rewarding occupations are those that change other people's lives for the better. Working with offenders in the Probation Service is one of those occupations.

I have seen at first-hand how the thoughtful and patient work of probation staff has turned around lives that other people would have thought hopeless. I have seen how the decisions of experienced officers have protected the public and potential victims. And, in the case of unpaid work by offenders, I have witnessed how offenders' unpaid work has improved buildings and community spaces to reduce the fear of crime and increase the pleasure people get from their locality.

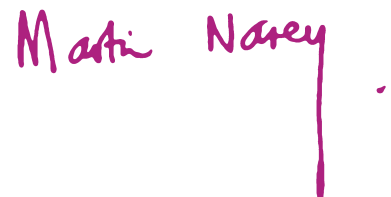
If you are thinking of a job in the Probation Service you will be joining an organisation that is well respected and where the training and investment in individual members of staff are recognised as key to its long-term success.

As a result of recent changes, you will also be joining a larger family and working within the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).

As a part of NOMS, you will cross boundaries which were once barriers. You will be able to call upon or co-ordinate with other professionals, like the prison staff and health or education professionals. You will be able to share information and innovations, for instance with the Police, that can improve the whole system's success and effectiveness in reducing re-offending.

Working with offenders is all about working with people as individuals. From the first-hand accounts of recently recruited staff contained in this brochure, you will read that not only is an individual's background there to be respected, but that – when talking about members of staff – diversity strengthens the organisation and its overall work.

I hope that you will decide to apply to the Probation Service because you have something valuable to offer and that, in the not-too-distant future, I can welcome you to the Service.



**Martin Narey**

# Careers: want to be a probation officer?

A qualified Probation Officer has successfully gained the Diploma in Probation Studies (DipPS), which is a recognised professional qualification. The two-year training for the qualification is managed across England and Wales through nine consortia of Probation areas working with higher education institutions and NVQ assessment centres.

The Diploma in Probation Studies is an integrated award made up of a BA (Hons) degree in Community Justice and a National Vocational Qualification in Community Justice (NVQ) at Level 4.

## Entry requirements

To be appointed as a Probation Officer you must be 22 years old. This means that applicants for trainee posts must be 20 and over by the anticipated date of their appointment as a trainee. There is no upper age limit.

As general guidance only, the educational qualifications required are below, but details of requirements should be checked with the individual consortium for the relevant district. *(Details of the individual consortia are on page 28.)*

### Candidates under 21 years

2 passes at A level and 3 at GCSE or 3 at A level and 1 at GCSE.

### Candidates over 21 but under 25 years

5 passes at GCSE.

### Candidates over 25 years

no formal qualifications required but academic potential will be tested in a written exercise.

To meet the requirements of its work the NPS seeks to recruit people with the following skills and attributes.

Can you tick the following?

- Ability to relate to others
- Work as part of a team
- Knowledge and understanding of group and individual work
- Communication
- Planning and organising
- Self-management
- Motivation and commitment
- Values
- Openness to new ideas
- Problem-solving

## The training

The training programme is a mixture of academic work and experience in Probation practice that will equip the trainee with the necessary knowledge, skills, values and competences required by the degree and the NVQ that constitute the DipPS.

As the training progresses the learning at the university and at work are complementary. The practice experience informs learning at university and theoretical learning guides practice.

The supervised practice entails gaining gradual experience in a range of working environments. During this period the Trainee Probation Officer (TPO) is fully supported in his or her development through the supervision of a designated Practice Development Assessor (PDA) who will be an experienced Probation Officer.

The training will be in a variety of locations in the Probation Area, and occasionally TPOs may also be required to attend a venue in another Probation Area in their region.

## Salary

While studying, the salaries for TPOs range from £14,476 – £15,351. Trainees employed by a relevant Probation Board will receive additionally Inner or Outer London Allowance payments as appropriate. Trainees in fringe areas, i.e. London suburbs, will receive additional payments where these are normally paid by a Board.

The salaries for the main grade Probation Officers are on a range from £20,804 – £27,973. There is a pay spine covering more senior Probation Officer grades. London Allowance applies as above.

## Hours of work

The normal working week for trainees is 37 hours. Where trainees are required to undertake work-based training activities beyond the normal working week, compensatory time off in lieu will be given.

## Terms of service

Conditions of Service are set by the National Negotiating Council for the Probation Service, *Scheme of Terms and Conditions for Trainee Probation Officers*, together with local staffing policies and procedures. The period for which a trainee will be contracted will be the agreed length of the training programme.

A TPO is formally accountable to the Probation Board and to the Chief Officer through the supervision of the designated Senior Probation Officer and Assistant Chief Officer.

## How to apply

Selection usually takes place in the Spring and adverts are placed in national and regional newspapers. To find out more about the start of the recruitment procedure go on line to the 'Join us' section on the NPS website – [www.probation.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.probation.homeoffice.gov.uk)

## Selection process

### Stage one: the application form

The application form is a detailed document. The specially designed sections enable the assessors to evaluate how the applicant's life and work experiences relate to the role and skills required of a Probation Officer.

#### What if I have never worked with offenders?

Although experience gained whilst working with offenders is clearly relevant, such expertise is not an essential requirement. The assessors will be looking for candidates who show they have 'transferable skills', in other words, men and women who can show that they have the potential to work with people who are experiencing personal or social difficulties.

- The training process will require a certain amount of travelling. Applicants must be able to meet this requirement. The Probation Service will seek to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that successful candidates who consider themselves to have a disability within the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 can meet the requirements of the job, including travel.
- Having a record of previous convictions (or cautions) should not, in itself, disbar any candidate. All convictions, whether adult or juvenile, must be disclosed, and each case will be considered on its merits.

### Stage two: the assessment centre

Shortlisted candidates are invited to take part in an assessment centre process that has been designed to test applicants in a fair and accessible approach. Shortlisted candidates will be sent information notes that fully explain what happens and the exercises that will be undertaken.

# Probation Staff Profile



**Rod Lashley** is in the second year of his Probation Officer training.

## In his own words

*"I heard about the work of the Probation Service from my partner who is a Probation Officer. I had a vague idea that I wanted to work with people and help them, and after finding out more about the job I decided it was the sort of career for me. I was attracted to being a Probation Officer because it seems a worthwhile job where I can make a real difference in people's lives."*

*"Before becoming a trainee Probation Officer, I worked in the private sector as a pub manager. My responsibilities centred on hitting sales and profit targets. I had been running pubs for about nine years and was ready for a change."*

## On training

*"So far the training has been pretty hard going for me. It's a bit of a roller coaster ride. Some days I feel like I am getting it, but others I feel overwhelmed with theory, facts and figures. There is a lot of theory to get your head around, but I feel we have been well looked after by our Practice Development Assessor and there is a good support network."*

*"I love the opportunity to work with offenders and now we are 'in practice' we are getting more opportunity to get stuck in. Time management is quite challenging. Although we have limited responsibilities, and workload, there is lots of university work to do. A three-year degree is basically squeezed into two years."*

## On Probation

*"I sometimes find the Probation Service frustrating because the way it does things can sometimes seem a little ad hoc. Lots of different systems for things and lots of paperwork!"*

# Probation Staff Profile



Thirty-one-year-old **Lyn Falconer** is in the second year of her Probation Officer training.

## In her own words

*"Before I became a TPO I had done all sorts of jobs. I had completed a degree in psychology but not really used it. I had worked in McDonalds, been a nanny and my last job was selling mobile phones over the telephone. I am a people's person."*

*"I heard about the Probation Service through a careers advisor. I told the advisor that I wanted a job that would give me a sense of purpose."*

## On selection

*"The selection process was the hardest thing I have ever done. The core tasks were the written exam, group interaction, formal interview, and the presentation that involved explaining the steps I would take to solve a certain problem."*

*"The exam was not so much about what you know but how you analyse information. Each candidate is given fact sheets and you have to read them and pick up the important points. The exam is looking at how you select key facts to back up your points of view."*

*"The best advice I could offer any applicant is to keep calm and be yourself. That's so important in the interview. The group session is about making a*

*contribution, and showing that you can listen to the views of others – an important element in Probation work."*

*"I am in my second year and my week is divided into two segments – three days are designated for practice and the remaining two for academic work."*

*"I am about to start working with offenders with substance misuse. I think this will be really interesting."*

## On working with offenders

*"Every person I work with has been different. I had such high expectations of my first case, and now I know that was wrong. I was 'gutted' when things went wrong. What I have learnt is that offenders have to take responsibility for their own actions. As Probation Officers we can assist them and facilitate that change, but they have to want to change in the first place."*

*"It's important to strike a balance in your life or otherwise you cannot do your job properly. I have had a few sleepless nights but, with experience, I have learnt to come home and concentrate on my life. When I am at work I know I am working to the best of my ability."*

# Probation Staff Profile



**Michael Johnson** is a Trainee Probation Officer. Before beginning his training as a TPO, he worked as a Probation volunteer and then with offenders doing unpaid work.

## In his own words

*"I write at a time of incredible pressure; an academic and practice deadline is approaching and I am also co-tutoring a Think First programme. On reflection, I definitely made the right career decision.*

*"In theory, 50% of my time is spent on study, 50% on practice (i.e. in the office). This is not, however, as neat a distinction in reality. In my previous career, I liked to plan my time as much as I could but there have been times as a TPO when this has not been possible. I have had to learn to be more adaptable.*

*"I have to admit that when I joined the Service I felt that, although I wouldn't 'know it all', I would hit the ground running due to my previous experience. Although this has undoubtedly helped in many ways, it has not helped to the extent that I thought it would. This has been difficult to accept. There has been plenty to learn and I have noticed that some of my peers, with even less experience of the Service than myself, have been just as quick to pick up on the critical issues. In my previous roles, I simply 'did' and did not consider 'why'. Being a TPO has meant a thorough re-examination of why I do what I do. This has necessitated me thinking about issues from a wider perspective than I have in the past."*

## On distance learning

*"Underpinning the practice work we carry out has been a curriculum of distance learning via the university. This has been hugely enjoyable although much more demanding than I had considered. At the end of the process, however, I feel that the course that I am currently on will not only have taught me the core subject areas but also how to study at a distance. This is something that I do not believe a traditional university-based degree would provide.*

*"Being a TPO has also meant that I have had to honestly 'get to know myself' in a way that I have not before. In former roles I intuitively developed my own value base as I progressed. As a TPO, however, I have had to focus on my values, on how they are aligned with those of the NPS, and on the behaviours and circumstances of offenders. The capacity of offenders to change is a paramount concept, as is the importance of ensuring that they are held accountable and responsible for their actions. As a Trainee, I have noticed the reluctance that some offenders do have for taking responsibility. Indeed their resistance has on occasions been quite striking.*

*"The journey that I have made from a volunteer to a TPO therefore has been much longer than I expected. I am confident that the 'pot of gold at the end of the rainbow' will be worth it."*

# Probation Staff Profile



Forty-three-year-old **Jasvir Gill** is a Trainee Probation Officer. Before beginning her training, she worked as a Probation Service Officer for a year with offenders doing unpaid work.

## In her own words

*"I saw an advert for Probation work in the Asian newspaper, Eastern Eye, and it interested me. I vaguely knew that Probation was connected to Prisons and the Police.*

*"I had been previously running the family manufacturing business for 20 years. It was a varied role, practical and very hands-on. After we decided to close the company, I realised that it was my opportunity to do work in a field that was of interest to me. I have always enjoyed working with people and I felt that Probation could fulfil my requirements."*

## On training

*"The deciding factor was that the training was about going back into education while gaining practical working experience. (Being paid for it was important too!) It was also helpful that no formal qualifications were required. Probation provided me with a great opportunity. I had been in a secluded workplace for so long that I was not sure if I could re-train.*

*"The downside for me has been sitting around and feeling that I am not 'working' even though I know that research and reflection are a major part of our work. I need to be able to enjoy this.*

*It is better now that we are in practice, and do not feel that we are here, there and everywhere. I really enjoy the training when I am learning new things – and when I can see the relevance of the training to the work we are doing. The refresher sessions are useful as not everything is grasped first time round."*

## On offenders

*"I find the work challenging, interesting and I am fascinated about how extensive Probation work really is. I do not think that our public image does it justice. I enjoy meeting people from all walks of life. The work with offenders makes you realise that circumstances can play a big part in why someone offends. I am trying to understand what causes re-offending, and be aware that my contribution could make a difference to the community. At the same time I am very much aware that we cannot change the world overnight, but have the satisfaction of knowing that we are trying.*

*"For me, personally, my development is a great achievement and I am proud to represent my community. Issues of sensitivity have to be handled carefully. It is important that people are aware that you are a good practitioner who respects differences and diversity."*

# Probation Staff Profile



Twenty-five-year-old **David Nadin** is a Trainee Probation Officer in the second year of his training.

## In his own words

*“Lifting my head from the grindstone for long enough to take stock, I realise just how much I have accomplished in the past year. I have completed nine 2000-word essays, bashing them out at a rate of about one every five or six weeks. I have written three progress reports, where I have attempted to reflect on my work experiences and consider how I can improve my practice. After six months in the job, I put together a Foundation Practice Portfolio: a thumping great folder that contained evidence to show that I had been working with offenders and probably had been doing something right. Recently I have completed two Level-4 National Vocational Qualification units. These demonstrate a high level of competency in practical aspects of the job. One followed my successful delivery of a 22-session cognitive-behavioural group programme to offenders. (Annoyingly, with NVQs, doing the work is not enough: you have to put together folders to evidence your work.) The second tested my skills in coping with aggression and violence: happily, this was based largely on simulated exercises and theory!”*

## On essay writing

*“This mix of academic study with the development of practice skills is at the heart of the traineeship. The distance learning I undertake for the BA in Criminal Justice Studies provides theory and ideas to apply on the job. Colleagues, though busy, are friendly and keen to share experience. Crucially, I have an assigned Practice Development Assessor – an experienced officer who is manager, mentor, confidante and friend.*

*“In the next year I have to produce three more 2000-word essays, two 4000-word essays, a presentation, a work-based project, three more progress reports, and 10 NVQ units.*

*“Is there time for offenders? Well yes – there has to be. My caseload is currently expanding beyond the seven I supervised during my first year. One quickly realises that, for many, change away from offending (desistence in the jargon) is a slow and punctuated process.”*

# Careers: want to be a probation service officer?

Probation Service Officers work with and are accountable to Case Managers (Probation Officers) in a wide range of settings. The general duties of a Probation Service Officer (PSO) may involve:

- supervising offenders individually
- working within a group setting
- supporting volunteers in their work with men and women on supervision
- maintaining proper case files
- helping to prepare court reports on individual defendants
- working with offenders in custody and following their release from prison
- working with victims of crime.

## Entry requirements

There are no specific age limits but the expertise and skills required are usually more evident in an applicant who is aged 20 plus. Educational requirements are 5 GCSEs or the equivalent work experience.

Can you tick the following?

- Ability to record information accurately
- Ability to communicate effectively with people including court staff and offenders
- Able to write and present reports in an effective and appropriate style
- Numeracy and literacy skills
- Familiarity with IT equipment
- The ability to develop good relationships with offenders, staff and the public
- Initiative in performance of duties

## The training

The Probation Service regularly offers in-house training to equip PSOs with the relevant skills to develop their work and to keep up with new technology changes.

## Salary

The salary for PSOs begins at around £17,785. This may vary between different Probation Boards. The relevant Probation Board is the employer. Where applicable, employees will receive additionally Inner or Outer London Allowance payments as appropriate.

## Hours of work

The normal working week for a PSO is 37 hours. Where a PSO is required to undertake work-based training activities beyond the normal working week, compensatory time off in lieu will be given. In some teams evening and/or weekend work may be required.

## How to apply

Look for adverts in your local newspapers or on the local Probation Area's website.

## Selection process

The selection involves a:

- semi-structured interview that is based on 18 questions to test and identify an applicant's thinking ability
- scripted interview to assess if the applicant is likely to meet the requirements of the PSO's role
- a short presentation to reflect a problem-solving exercise.

# Probation Staff Profile



Twenty-three-year-old **Laura Ross-Myring** has worked as a Probation Service Officer for six months. Before she applied for her current role she was working in a Probation office as a clerical officer.

## In her own words

*"I am a tutor with the Enhanced Thinking Skills Programme that works with offenders to help them with their problem-solving skills. I was given the opportunity to train for this role. Probation offers lots of training opportunities so we can improve our work. You are encouraged and supported if you want to take part in any of the training."*

## On job satisfaction

*"I enjoy my work and I like interacting with the different people who attend the programme. The best way to describe my work is we are giving offenders the 'thinking tools' that will help them solve their problems. We do exercises that will improve their social skills. The programme tutors show them how it can be useful in their lives. We get them coming back and telling us it has helped them. That's when you can see you are making progress."*

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# Probation Staff Profile



**Chris Barney** has worked as a Probation Service Officer for two years. Before his appointment he worked with offenders as a volunteer.

## In his own words

*"Before I joined the Probation Service I had worked as a management consultant in the hosiery industry."*

*"I made a decision that I wanted to work with people in my local community. I wanted something that would be fulfilling. Life in general had gone pretty well, and when things hadn't, someone had been there for me. Not everyone has that support when events turn bad."*

## On the work

*"My work is very varied and I see the whole spectrum of Probation work. I attend court every week, and you see people at the start of their orders, and who have been returned because they have broken the conditions of their sentence. This is called breaching an order."*

*"I also act as a Case Manager for offenders on a certain type of order and who require resettlement work as they adjust to living in the community."*

*"As a Case Manager you need to be a fairly outgoing personality. Being a Case Manager involves liaising with other agencies to secure a variety of services that may be required by a particular offender. It is so important to build up your own contacts and database."*

*"Although the Probation Service is governed by National Standards and targets, there are opportunities to bring your own experiences into play. I have also found that being part of Probation is being part of a team. My colleagues are a good lot and are always there to give advice when you need it."*

# Careers: want to be a supervisor?

The aim of compulsory unpaid work is that offenders have the opportunity to 'pay back' their communities by working on projects that will benefit local people. Supervisors manage this work and encourage offenders to learn new practical skills that they can use to find a job or in their everyday lives.

The Supervisor's role has been further extended so that staff use the practical setting of compulsory unpaid work to become a 'learning environment.' This approach develops the Supervisor's role in a very positive way. The offender is encouraged to look at how learning to solve problems in one area of life can be transferred to deal with other issues.

## Entry requirements

There are no age limits. Applicants are expected to have certain practical experiences that can be used in the work environment. There are no specific educational requirements but the role requires practical and supervision skills.

Can you tick the following?

- Organisational skills to run work sessions
- Ability to communicate effectively
- Experience relevant to motivating individuals
- Ability to assert and maintain control in the working environment
- Ability to make assessments and contribute to the recording of an individual offender's progress
- Initiative in performance of duties

## The training

New Supervisors are trained to ensure that the working environment adheres to all health and safety requirements, and for their role in challenging anti-social attitudes, behaviour and feelings.

## Salary

The salary for a full-time Supervisor starts at around £16,290. This may vary between different Probation Boards. The relevant Probation Board is the employer. Where applicable, employees will receive additionally Inner or Outer London Allowance payments as appropriate.

## Hours of work

Supervisors can either work sessionally (part-time) or full-time. The normal working week for a full-time supervisor is 37 hours. Evening and/or weekend work may be required.

## How to apply

Look for adverts in your local newspapers or on the local Probation Area's website.

## Selection process

The selection involves a:

- semi-structured interview to test and identify an applicant's thinking ability
- scripted interview to assess if applicants are likely to meet the requirements of the Supervisor's role.

# Probation Staff Profile



**Jim Hammonds** began working as a sessional supervisor before he became full-time. He has been a Supervisor for seven years.

## In his own words

*“Community Punishment or compulsory unpaid work, at it is now known, is about paying something back to the community. At the very least we make sure offenders turn up on time and complete the work as part of their punishment. We get them to think about health and safety issues. This is all very important when you are working with tools and machines.”*

## Approach to work

*“My philosophy is to treat people with respect and, in return, I expect to be treated with the same regard. I teach new skills in the workshop and it's nice to see people's confidence begin to grow as they take a pride in their work. I try and encourage their enthusiasm if they ask to work on a certain type of project.*

*“I treat the people in my work parties as people. My role is to engage and talk with them as we are working together.”*



# Probation Staff Profile



**Sue Brown** has three children and works as a full-time Supervisor. Sue has an engineering background.

## In her own words

*“To be honest I was initially attracted by the part-time hours because I have three young children. I have always been a fairly hands-on person and I enjoy DIY work and gardening etc.”*

*“Compulsory unpaid work can be challenging and rewarding. At the start of the work you may meet one or two people with challenging attitudes because they don’t know what to expect or how we are going to treat them. After a few sessions they begin to settle down as they see what we are trying to do.”*

## Training

*“Probation gives you the right training to do the job. We have all been trained in how to behave as an example to offenders of how to behave. I think a Supervisor needs to have some relevant life experiences to do the job well. You have got to be open-minded and non-judgemental.”*

# A take on probation

## Understanding the work of the court teams

Members of a court team prepare reports for the criminal courts that inform the sentencing decisions of magistrates and judges. An average-sized Probation Area calculated that during a 12-month period its court staff had prepared more than 6,000 reports for the criminal courts. Nationally, Probation staff compile around 250,000 Pre-Sentence Reports.

A full Pre-Sentence Report offers an analysis of the offence and gives an insight into the offender's circumstances and background, and proposes the sentence most likely to reduce risk and prevent further crimes.

Sentencers want to see that the report addresses two key issues:

- the public is going to be protected by the proposed measure and
- the offender will be appropriately dealt with by this punishment.

For many offenders the Probation court staff are their first contact with the Probation Service. Members of the court team are often seconded to the team for a number of years to allow them to build up a level of expertise in court report writing.



Court staff are also asked to provide simpler reports that are produced on the same day as the hearing. This report gives an immediate assessment and sentencing advice, enabling the courts to deal quickly with less serious matters.

## Understanding how we *Protect the Public*

### Prolific offenders

The Home Office has estimated that there are on average 5,000 – 7,500 active 'prolific' offenders at any one time who are responsible for about 9% of all crimes. Individual offenders are identified as prolific by local Police and Probation according to:

- the nature and volume of crimes being committed,
- the nature and volume of harm being caused,
- and other local criteria based on the impact of the offender's behaviour on the local community.

The focus tends to be on violent offenders and those who have committed crimes such as burglary, theft and car crime but can be on offenders of any crime, depending on the priorities of the local community.

Probation work involves intensive management of these offenders to provide rehabilitation to reduce their re-offending. Activities can include:

- work on drug or alcohol misuse
- undertaking a programme, e.g. to address aggressive behaviour
- a focus on the impact of the crime on the victim
- compulsory unpaid work
- seeking employment, training or education.

Supervision is reinforced with control measures; for example, offenders may have a curfew order as well as being subject to a range of surveillance measures by the Police. There are strict penalties for non-compliance and when offenders are released on licence from prison and they do not comply, procedures are in place to enforce their rapid recall to prison.

Partnership work is key to the way the Criminal Justice System targets prolific offenders. Probation and Police staff have confidence in this approach because it is the most effective way to increase public protection.

### Gaining a perspective on probation

#### **Prolific offender case file:**

The offender was a heroin addict who was regularly stealing from shops to fund his drug habit. He was in a cycle of receiving prison sentences and then coming out to re-offend almost immediately. He lost his courier business and his home. He returned to live with his family.

A turning point was when he overdosed on heroin and his mother found him in his bedroom. The strange noise she heard was her son choking. He was rushed to hospital and was stabilised. Instead of a further prison sentence, he was placed on an order with a drug rehabilitation requirement that involved supervision, support and testing.

The intensive package enabled him to make progress and he is gradually reducing his intake of methadone. He has moved from a hostel and now has a one-bedroom flat. His re-offending stopped and as part of his rehabilitation work, the offender went back to a shop that he had previously stolen from – and apologised to the shop owner. He also prepared a security plan for the owner to show him where he could improve security to reduce the opportunities for shoplifters.

### Dangerous offenders

The management of dangerous offenders is also handled by key statutory and non-statutory agencies working together. These arrangements are working nationwide and are referred to as the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). The MAPPA bring together the Probation Service, the Police, and the Prison Service who work with representatives from Social Services, Housing, and Health.

The MAPPA currently cover three categories of offenders:

- all registered sex offenders
- all offenders who receive a custodial sentence of 12 months or more for a violent offence or for one of the small number of sexual offences which does not require the offender to be included on the Sex Offender Register
- any offender whose previous offending and current behaviour suggests that he or she may pose a serious risk of harm to others.



The Arrangements provide a framework for the exchange of information and the pooling of knowledge and expertise between agencies in assessing and agreeing how best to manage dangerous offenders. The very fact that agencies share information means that assessments of risk and how to deal with this are likely to be more comprehensive and accurate.

### Gaining a perspective on probation

#### **Dangerous offender case file:**

The offender was released on a 'non-parole licence' from a nine-year prison sentence imposed for an offence of burglary with intent to rape. He also had serious previous convictions including rape and wounding.

The key elements of the risk management plan included the offender being required to reside in supervised accommodation. His behaviour was monitored by a team of professionals including his supervising Probation Officer, hostel staff and the Police, whose involvement was managed and co-ordinated by the specialist officers of the Public Protection Unit.

Initially, his resettlement into the community appeared to be going well. He obtained voluntary work and developed a relationship with a local woman. However, after a crisis in his personal relationship, he was accused of sending indecent text messages to female colleagues. Following Police investigations, Probation recommended to the Home Office that he be recalled to prison and he was subsequently detained.

## Understanding the work of approved premises

Most Probation Areas run approved premises (formerly known as probation hostels). These provide enhanced residential supervision in order to protect the public from those who pose the most serious risk of harm. Approved premises are primarily intended for offenders on post-custodial licences, offenders serving a community order with a condition to reside in specified accommodation, and defendants on bail in criminal proceedings.

Approved premises provide a structured environment, within which residents can take full advantage of community facilities for work, education, training, treatment and recreation. There are firm boundaries of behaviour and residents are expected to conform to some strict house rules, including a night-time curfew. Those who break the rules may be recalled to prison or taken back to court for their sentence to be reviewed.

The stability and positive ethos of approved premises can often provide offenders with that extra support needed to motivate them towards crime-free lives.

## Understanding the work of the resettlement teams

Resettlement is a crucial aspect of Probation work and is usually carried out by designated teams of Probation Officers and Probation Service Officers. As the name suggests, resettlement involves working with partner agencies and offenders to make sure that an offender's return to living in the community is well planned, supported and minimises any potential risk to the public.

Resettlement work is varied and can involve undertaking a range of assessments for prisons such as if a prisoner is suitable for a home detention curfew, 'tagging', or to assess a prisoner's suitability for parole.

The Resettlement Teams are also involved in preparing offenders for release and then supervising them on licence. While an offender is on licence, assessments are regularly made on an offender's needs and risk of re-offending and harm.

This range of work supports the aims to try to ensure successful reintegration into the community and compliance with the licence conditions that protect the public.

A number of the offenders supervised will be assessed as posing a high risk of harm. Partnership work with statutory and non-statutory agencies is paramount to working successfully with this priority group of offenders.

The resettlement teams will deal with a wide range of issues such as acquiring stable accommodation, addressing drug/alcohol problems, helping offenders to re-establish contact with family, sustain meaningful relationships, and find suitable employment or training.

## Gaining a perspective on probation

### Resettlement case file:

The offender was assessed as high risk. He was released into the community into supervised accommodation. After a significant period of time, and when the level of risk was considered manageable, Probation liaised with the local Police and housing department in order to resettle him back into independent accommodation. A contract was drawn up with the local housing provider that prevented him taking part in certain activities.

Further specialist workers also assisted the offender to settle into his accommodation and maintain his tenancy. He received guidance in getting the utilities set up, budgeting and obtaining furniture, as well as monitoring any signs of potential problems. He was also given help to find a job by the local employment partnership – and he found full-time work.

## Unpaid work by offenders

In a recent 12-month period five million hours of compulsory unpaid work were completed across England and Wales by offenders undertaking community punishment projects.

Men and women work on a variety of work projects ranging from gardening, small landscaping projects, painting and decorating, and graffiti removal. Suitable offenders are sometimes offered the opportunity to undertake individual placements with a local charity or at a residential home for elderly people.

There will be some offenders who are assigned to the workshops that are usually based at Probation sites. The workshops are fully equipped to enable the offenders to make wooden gardening furniture as well as bird nesting boxes etc.



## Gaining a perspective on probation

**Unpaid work case file:** comments from work party participants.

*"You have to turn up on time or you get breached. It's an incentive to get out of bed. I am helping to lay a concrete path around a football pitch. It will help people in wheelchairs. When this has finished I might try and get a job on a building site. At least I can show that I can be on time."*

*"We spent ages painting these seats in a park. When we went back the next day somebody had written on the seats. We were so mad, but it made you think how other people must feel about graffiti where they live. We painted them again."*

*"These gardens were overgrown and we tidied them up. The old people were very grateful. They were scared they might trip up on the paths. It looked really nice."*

*"The group worked on a scouts' hut that was looking 'tatty'. The supervisor taught us how to make the wood and walls ready before we started covering them. I might do some painting at home now I know what to do. I like to know how to decorate properly."*

## Understanding the work of accredited programme teams

As part of their sentence, many offenders are ordered to attend an offending behaviour programme that has been researched and accredited as having an effect on criminal behaviour.

Many of the cognitive behavioural programmes have been developed to boost the thinking skills of offenders and improve their social interaction and reduce anti-social attitudes. Teaching participants to stop – and think first, before acting – can have a significant effect on lowering reconviction rates.

The findings on the effectiveness of accredited cognitive skills programmes suggests a 10-15% lower reconviction rate compared to similar offenders who did not attend such programmes.

### Think First programme

This programme is for men and women who are repeatedly re-offending. The programme is completed in stages in group sessions and teaches specific problem-solving skills and there are opportunities to practice.

## Gaining a perspective on probation

### Think First case file:

The offender was a single parent with two school age children. She had run up substantial debts and was being supervised by the Probation Service for one year. She was ordered to attend the Think First programme.

*She said: "I didn't know what to expect. I had lots of worries at home and then we started getting racial abuse. Probation helped get me re-housed. That really helped. They told me I had to keep going and I did, but it was hard work. They keep going over things for you. I began to see what they meant. They told me to look at what I was learning and look at how I had been handling my problems.*

*"I would buy things and bills would come in, and then there were bills for the house. I wasn't doing anything about the money I owed. It was no wonder I got into trouble. I completed the course and I felt better. I was offered the chance to finish my order early, but I didn't want to. Probation showed me how to deal with things and I felt better being in contact with them."*

## Drink impaired drivers' programme

This programme is for men and women whose current offences involve drink-driving where there are aggravating features including driving whilst unfit or over the prescribed limit, being drunk in charge of a vehicle or failing to provide a specimen.

### Gaining a perspective on probation

#### **Drink Impaired Drivers' Programme case file:**

The offender was aged 21 when he was banned from driving for three years. He was ordered to attend the Drink Impaired Drivers' Programme after he was found to be driving having consumed twice the legal alcohol limit. He was also driving whilst serving a previous driving ban.

He said: *"I had drunk about four to five pints of lager at lunchtime and then had something to eat. At the end of the afternoon, I thought I would be all right to drive. I ran into the back of someone's car. She wasn't hurt."*

*"I haven't been on a programme like this before and it has made me think about a lot of things. The other people in the group seem friendly and we all listen to each other. No-one is judging the person sitting next to them. We have all done something. The course has given me a greater understanding of the risk of alcohol, and how much I was actually drinking. I realise that when I got into a car, I wasn't thinking about anyone but myself. There are pedestrians to consider. There are other drivers to consider."*

## Domestic violence programme

The programme is for male perpetrators of domestic violence. They are challenged to take full responsibility for their behaviour and learn how to develop non-abusive ways of behaving in relationships.

### Gaining a perspective on probation

#### **Domestic Violence Programme case file:**

The offender had been violent to his wife and his children were taken into care.

He said: *"I attended all the sessions and in the first place it was difficult. People in this group are in similar circumstances. The starting point is to acknowledge that you have a problem. I have learnt that you can change."*

*"The hardest part of the programme was the impact of domestic violence on the children. I hadn't really understood what I had put my children through."*

*"You can't keep things locked up. Sometimes you have to go back into your past. I opened up. I talked about my mum and dad. My dad was violent to both my mum and me. I was abused for 11 years. I went into care for a long time, and back then I promised myself that I would be the perfect dad. I would never be abusive to my wife."*

*"I am learning to talk things through and not deal with things with my fists. My wife and I are going to counselling. She never dared argue with me in the past, but now she is prepared to put her point of view forward. She knows that she doesn't have to fear repercussions. I am not going to hit her. She is gaining in confidence and I am building up her trust in me. We are also going to Relate and I am planning to go on another course to find out more about why I behaved the way I did."*

## Understanding the work of the victim contact teams

Victim Contact Teams work exclusively with the victims of crime. Probation staff who are based within these specialist teams build up a level of expertise in this often sensitive but rewarding area of work.

Probation staff work with victims of offenders sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment or more for sexual or other violent offences. Some Probation Areas also offer a contact service to victims of families in cases that have resulted in death such as through a traffic accident.

A Victim Contact Team provides information to victims or their families about the criminal justice process, and the progress of the offender through his or her sentence.

Victims can comment on and influence the conditions of release through the team. They have the right to be contacted when important changes take place such as in the event of an appeal against sentence or conviction.



## Gaining a perspective on probation

### Victim contact case file:

The offender was sentenced to 18 months' custody for an attack on his former partner.

The Victim Contact Team visited his ex-partner at her home and established she would request additional licence conditions to prevent contact with both herself and her daughter. There would also be an additional exclusion zone around her home village.

There were justified fears at the time that the offender would attempt to either contact or visit his ex-partner after release. The team was also able to give her approximate dates when he would be released and established that the local Police were fully informed.

On his release, the offender was recalled twice for non-compliance with his licence conditions. His ex-partner was kept informed by the Probation Service at all stages of the recall process, as were the local Police.

Prior to the offender's sentence expiry date, liaison took place between the Victim Contact Officer and the Supervising Probation Officer, the former partner, the local Police Constable, and the Domestic Violence Officer to ensure all precautionary steps were taken to provide a measure of security for her and her daughter.

# Consortia

To find out more about becoming a Trainee Probation Officer please contact the appropriate Regional Training Consortium:

## **East of England Probation Training & Development Consortium**

Crowland House  
Withersfield Road  
Haverhill  
Suffolk  
CB9 9LA

Tel: 01440 705875  
Fax: 01440 761399

*For Bedfordshire,  
Cambridgeshire, Essex,  
Hertfordshire, Norfolk & Suffolk*

## **London Probation Area Human Resources Development**

Mitre House  
223 – 237 Borough High Street  
London  
SE1 1JD

*For London only*

## **Midlands Consortium**

Stowe Court  
Stowe Street  
Lichfield  
Staffordshire  
WS13 6AQ

*For Derbyshire, Leicestershire &  
Rutland, Lincolnshire,  
Northamptonshire,  
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[www.probationtraining-midlandsconsortium.org.uk](http://www.probationtraining-midlandsconsortium.org.uk)

## **North East Probation Training & Development Consortium**

C/O Northumbria Probation Area  
Dene House  
Durham Road  
Low Fell  
Gateshead  
NE9 5AE

Tel: 0191 491 1693  
Fax: 0191 491 3726

*For Durham, Northumbria and  
Teesside*

## **North West Training Consortium**

Sefton House  
1 Molyneux Way  
Old Roan  
Liverpool  
L10 2JA

*For Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater  
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Merseyside*

[www.probation-northwest.co.uk](http://www.probation-northwest.co.uk)

## **South East Regional Probation Training Consortium**

College House  
Woodbridge Road  
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GU1 4RS

Tel: 01483 304963  
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*For Hampshire, Kent, Surrey,  
Sussex & Thames Valley*

[www.serptc-probation.gov.uk](http://www.serptc-probation.gov.uk)

## **South West Training & Development Consortium**

C/O Gloucestershire Probation Area  
Bewick House  
1 Denmark Road  
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*For Avon & Somerset, Devon &  
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## **Yorkshire and Humberside Consortium**

2nd Floor, Devonshire House  
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LS1 2ED

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*For Humberside, North Yorkshire,  
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[www.yhpc.co.uk](http://www.yhpc.co.uk)

## **Wales Training Consortium**

4 – 7 The Broadway  
Pontypridd  
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[www.probation.walestraining.gov.uk](http://www.probation.walestraining.gov.uk)



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