

PROBATION NEWS

Magazine of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland • Issue 21 • March 2026



WELCOME to the twenty-first edition of the Probation News Magazine. This magazine provides a biannual opportunity to engage through sharing of news, best practice and information to stakeholders, staff and the public. We hope you enjoy reading this edition.

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SUPPORTING THOSE WORKING IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE TO PROTECT THE PUBLIC



Chief Executive Amanda Stewart OBE along with Inspire Chief Executive Kerry Anthony MBE and the other speakers at the Lena By Inspire "Heart of Care" conference in Belfast

"At its heart, probation is about believing in people's capacity to change and creating safer communities. We do this by assessing and managing risk, and by working alongside individuals to address the root causes of offending behaviour."

Chief Executive Amanda Stewart delivered a presentation last month organised by 'LENA By Inspire' which considered how we can support those working in criminal justice and other front-line professions.

The Chief Executive outlined the challenging work carried out by Probation across communities in Northern Ireland and explained why it is so important that Probation staff are supported in that work:

"Probation has been on a journey to implement a trauma informed approach to our practice and culture which creates conditions where staff feel safe, valued and supported and where we can deliver the most effective services to keep communities safe. We know that a high proportion of people in the justice system have experienced trauma through childhood adversity, domestic abuse, neglect, or significant emotional distress.

We therefore need to recognise trauma and understand how to deal with it in order to reduce offending and reduce the number of victims."

Amanda Stewart added: "A trauma informed approach is the foundation of our corporate plan – it shapes every part of our vision, and the way we intend to deliver our work. A trauma informed organisational response is about dealing with difficult behaviour head-on, leaning into challenge and not stepping away from it. That is what we aim to do every day in order to make communities throughout NI safer."

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DIARY



At the heart of PBNI's work are people – those we support, those we partner with, and the colleagues who deliver our services with professionalism and care. In this 21st edition of Probation News, I am delighted to highlight the stories and partnerships that reflect our ongoing commitment to reduce reoffending, protect the public and support rehabilitation.

March marked World Social Work Day, an important opportunity to highlight the vital contribution that social workers make across the justice system. Every Probation Officer in Northern Ireland is a qualified social worker, bringing specialist expertise in risk assessment and risk management that helps keep people safe. We were delighted to welcome Tracy Reid, Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council, to our Portadown office to meet with colleagues and see the work we do in Probation firsthand.

This month we also celebrated International Women's Day. Within Probation, we remain committed to playing our part tackling all forms of violence and abuse against women and girls. A strategic priority for PBNI is addressing sexual and domestic violence in close partnership with our justice colleagues.

As part of this commitment, we have recently developed a new Women's Strategy, recognising the significant role that gender plays in shaping women's experiences and pathways to offending. Women involved in the Criminal Justice system are amongst the most vulnerable in society with evidence showing they frequently experience multiple and

complex traumas. Many have also been victims of crime themselves. In response, we are co-producing a healthy relationships intervention with women service users to increase awareness and support around domestic abuse. You can read more about [our Women's Strategy 2025-2029](#) on our website.

Elsewhere in this edition, you will read about the community sentences we supervise, enabling people who have offended to make reparation for the harm caused and take responsibility for their behaviour. BBC Northern Ireland recently highlighted the work carried out in Belfast to clean up the local community and provide structure and purpose through Community Service Orders. We know these orders are one of the most successful and impactful community sentences for reducing reoffending.

Our partnerships continue to be central to our work. I was delighted that the Public Protection Arrangements (PPANI) Threshold Panels received a Problem-Solving Policing Award in February. The supervision of some of the most dangerous sexual and violent individuals is exceptionally important work, and it was encouraging to see the dedication of staff and

the partnership work with Probation, Police, Prison Service, Health and Social Care Trusts, and Housing Executive recognised.

Finally, I was pleased to share PBNI's trauma informed approach at the Lena by Inspire "Heart of Care" conference. Probation is built on hope, accountability and belief that change is possible. My theme, 'Hope grows where care is given' captured the passion, skill and humanity shown daily by probation staff and partners. Change happens when people are supported with compassion and challenged with care. Small acts of care can change the direction of a life and this lies at the heart of everything that we do.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Probation News. You can access [previous issues on our website](#).

Amanda Stewart OBE
Chief Executive

CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION



It is just over a year since I was appointed to the role of Board Chair. It has been a fascinating and engaging twelve months getting to know my fellow Board Members, engaging with the Senior Leadership Team, and meeting our dedicated staff and several of Probation's key partners. An extensive programme of visits and other events has given the Board members valuable opportunities to meet teams across offices, including within the three prisons, enabling a deeper understanding of the work of PBNI.

The new year has brought two notable changes to the Board, and I am delighted that Naomi Long MLA, Minister for Justice, has appointed Bria Mongan OBE as the new Deputy Chair. On behalf of the Board, I would like to congratulate Bria on her well deserved appointment. Congratulations are also extended to Dr Brian Payne who was recently appointed to the Board by the Minister. Brian is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Social Work and Social Policy Research at Ulster University and is subject lead for Criminology and Criminal Justice. Brian is a welcome addition to the Board.

One of the key tasks for the Board during the autumn and winter was to develop the new Corporate Plan 2026-29. An extensive consultation programme was undertaken to ensure we generated a plan that was stretching but realistic. We appreciate the many responses we received from staff, service users, statutory partners, community and voluntary sector partners and from the wider public. We have set ourselves an ambitious programme of work. The Board is deeply aware of the financial constraints impacting on the public sector and will endeavour to ensure that we have the

necessary resources and capacity to deliver on our business objectives. The Corporate Plan has been approved by the Board and presented to the Department of Justice for consideration. We will continue to work closely with the Minister and the Department in taking forward specific initiatives aimed at speeding up justice, ending violence against women and girls and in making communities safer.

We aspire to be a trauma informed organisation and will continue to be aware of the impact of trauma as a causal factor in offending. We will remain focused on the impact of trauma on people who use our services, including victims of crime and their families. We must think creatively and do things differently if we are to continue to have a meaningful impact in preventing harm and in reducing offending and reoffending.

The Board has held two workshops so far this year. The first event, in January, focused on PBNI's Work in Prisons. The inputs from staff working in each of the three prisons was excellent. Niall Small, Acting Deputy Chief Parole Commissioner presented on the role of PCNI and the interface with Probation.

This workshop provided Members with a deeper insight into Probation's involvement in the prison system and the day-to-day challenges faced by staff in each location. The more recent workshop, in March, focused on PBNI's Strategic Priorities and Business Planning 2026-27. This was timely and allowed Members to consider performance measures to demonstrate progress against the strategic priorities and financial implications. Our series of Board visits continued into 2026, with a visit to the Ormeau Road offices in February and to the Ballymena offices in March. I also had the opportunity to visit the Black Mountain Community Services Project and met with members of the Substance Misuse Court Team and the inter-agency Public Protection Team based in Antrim Road Police Station.

The Board looks forward to working collectively to strengthen governance, champion innovation, and ensure that PBNI continues to deliver high quality services that reduce reoffending and support safer communities during the next year.

Glenn Houston
Board Chair

INTERNATIONAL WOMENS DAY

Probation marked International Women's Day which was on 8 March. Assistant Director Melissa Spence and Women's Champion, Area Manager Clare Osborne marked International Women's Day by holding an Inspire Forum to discuss the PBNI Women's Strategy and the Year 1 action plan. The Inspire model of practice is gender responsive, recognising and responding to the role that gender has in shaping a woman's experience and how this influences the pathway to offending.



Chief Executive Amanda Stewart with Assistant Director Melissa Spence, Area Manager Clare Osborne and Inspire staff marking International Women's Day.

Information on our Women's Strategy is available on our website



PROBATION DEVELOPING TOOLS TO TACKLE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & GIRLS

Ending Violence Against Women and Girls is a strategic priority for the Northern Ireland Executive as set out in the Programme for Government. Probation has a key role to play both strategically and operationally in working with partners to tackle this abhorrent crime.



Area Manager Anne Weir speaking at the recent Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council "It's in Your Hands" conference on ending violence against women and girls. Anne spoke about the importance of the work undertaken by Probation to keep women and children safe.

We know that there is no easy fix to the endemic rise of violence against women and girls. There is a need for a comprehensive approach including more education about what constitutes healthy relationships, more support for those in abusive relationships, and more work to prevent people becoming victims.

In this vein, PBNI deliver two behaviour change programmes, Respectful Relationships Intervention+, and Promoting Positive Relationships Programme, a Respect accredited group programme. PPRP is an important example of early intervention and preventative work which provides men who have demonstrated the potential to be abusive towards their partners with the opportunity to engage in an intervention programme aimed at developing knowledge and skills in which to develop healthy, non-abusive relationships. These men have not yet come before the courts and been convicted of a crime, so this is an example of early intervention in the truest sense.

PBNI has also recently published a **Women's strategy** to ensure we have a gender responsive service to help justice involved women end the cycle of victimisation and crime. This includes the development of a Healthy Relationships intervention for female service users to rebuild an understanding of what 'healthy relationships' look like, and support recovery from trauma. We know that a significant proportion of female service users have experienced domestic abuse and therefore we need to address the complex needs of those women. Research also shows there are strong links between women's experience of domestic and sexual abuse and coercive relationships, and their offending. It is therefore critical that we work to break this cycle of harm.

Probation is also continuing to train colleagues in domestic abuse awareness and 'Safe place for employees' training (tier 1 and 2) has been rolled out alongside domestic abuse assessment training.

We hope to soon be harnessing virtual reality technology through the 'Mental Abuse Matters Virtual Reality Project,' a creative, immersive, and impactful training tool. We continue to deliver practitioner forums to support our people in the delivery of individual and group behaviour change interventions and offer personal impact counselling sessions to those who deliver domestic abuse interventions. We work directly with victims of domestic abuse through our **Victim Information Scheme**.

Sadly, in the last week the numbers of women killed in their own homes in Northern Ireland since 2020 has risen from 29 to 30 and another family is going through unspeakable pain. It is precisely because of losses like these that we continue to work with those who perpetrate abuse, not to excuse or minimise their actions, but to prevent further harm, reduce future victimisation, and do everything in our power to stop another family facing the same devastating reality.

SAFER COMMUNITIES THROUGH EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY SENTENCING

Community sentences are a key sentencing option. They can address the rehabilitative needs of people who have offended, reduce reoffending and protect the public. The [Probation Board for Northern Ireland](#) supervises people given a community sentence supporting them to change and holding them to account for their actions.

Research indicates that community sentences are effective in reducing reoffending. Short custodial sentences are often disruptive and provide limited opportunity for meaningful rehabilitation. Community sentences enable individuals to remain engaged with key support networks and services that can address the underlying factors contributing to their offending behaviour.

Community-based disposals allow individuals to maintain family relationships, employment (if applicable), and accommodation, all of which are recognised as protective factors in reducing the risk of reoffending. By supporting stability and continuity in these areas, community sentences provide a constructive framework for rehabilitation while maintaining public protection.

Community sentences are also demanding, having different requirements that must be satisfied and involve both positive reinforcement and prohibitions, all while being supervised within a community setting. Probation Officers, Probation Service Officers, Community Service Supervisors along with other probation colleagues provide robust challenging supervision. Such sentences include [Probation Orders](#), [Community Service Orders](#), [Combination Orders](#) and [Enhanced Combination Orders](#) which all have an element of community payback through unpaid work lasting between 40 hours and 240 hours. Three out of four people sentenced to complete community service do not reoffend within one year.

[Read about all the sentences we supervise](#)

[Read how Probation can contribute to reducing reoffending](#)



AWARD RECOGNISES PARTNERSHIP WORK PROTECTING THE PUBLIC

At the recent Problem Solving Awards 2026, hosted by Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Policing Board in Belfast, the PPANI Threshold Panels won the overall Chenery Award. This award recognises the important partnership work carried out by Probation, PSNI, NI Prison Service, HSC Trusts, NI Housing Executive and other organisations to protect the public. Assistant Director Liz Arthur was delighted to represent Probation when accepting the award.

[Public Protection Arrangements NI \(PPANI\)](#) provides effective assessment and management of the risks posed by certain sexual and violent individuals.

PROBATION ATTENDS NI VICTIM SUMMIT



Probation Board Chair Glenn Houston and Assistant Director Aideen McLaughlin were at the recent Commissioner for Victims of Crime NI Victim Summit in Belfast to hear about victims' lived experiences, victim centred justice in Quebec, child centred justice in Scotland, domestic abuse reforms in England and Wales, and victim's rights in the Canadian parole process.

They also had a chance to meet Justice Minister Naomi Long MLA at the conference and discuss the work Probation does with victims through the [Victim Information Scheme](#).



COMMUNITY SERVICE HIGHLIGHTED BY BBC

Community service can be a community sentence or part of a community sentence that provides the opportunity for people under Probation supervision to pay back to their community and redress the harm they caused through crime.

[You can read the full article online](#)



SINEAD CURTIS
Probation Service Officer



AIDEEN MCLAUGHLIN
Assistant Director



GLEN DEVINE-CALDWELL
Community Service Supervisor

BBC journalist Mark Simpson recently produced a feature on community service for BBC NI news, including coverage on Good Morning Ulster and the full feature on BBC Newsline. The article which also featured on the BBC NI News website is titled "Community service 'keeps us off the streets'".

The feature on community service, where service users were carrying out unpaid work for the people in Poleglass in West Belfast, followed three service users as they cleared alleyways and undergrowth in a residential area. The work was done through a request from Belfast City Councillor Caoimhín McCann.

"It's good for the area and it's good for us," said Michael, not his real name, who says he is trying to turn away from crime. Critics of community service orders might see it as a soft option for offenders. It is a sentence which does not involve prison but instead requires between 40 and 240 hours of unpaid community work. The people who spoke to BBC News NI received community orders, including community service, for assault or drug offences. Victims of crime can have a say in the type of work which perpetrators carry out, if they register with the Probation Victim Information Scheme. They can also specify if they do not want to see an offender working in a specific place or area.

Probation Service Officer Sinead Curtis said about the work, "Community service gets service users into a routine, up in the morning, going and completing a piece of work. It gives them a sense of responsibility for their own actions and achievement."

Community Service Supervisor Glen Devine-Caldwell said about the service users he was supervising, "They've done silly things in the past and they've had enough with living that type of life." He added "I've even had guys who have come and said, 'look Glen, after community service, am I allowed to volunteer?'"

Assistant Director Aideen McLaughlin underlined, "There will always be people who offend so seriously that they need a period in custody – both to protect the public and hopefully prevent re-offending. But for others, there are opportunities through a community sentence."

The BBC NI feature was an opportunity to raise awareness of the effectiveness of community sentences generally, and community service in particular. It highlighted positive community partnerships, and the impact of the community service sentence on re-offending rates and individual outcomes.

PROBATION CASELOAD AND TRENDS

Probation supervises a range of community-based disposals, including Probation Orders, Community Service Orders, Combination Orders and Enhanced Combination Orders, as well as licences for individuals released from custody. Evidence indicates that crime and reoffending can be reduced through robust and well-managed sentences served in the community. In addition to improving public protection outcomes, community-based supervision can also help to alleviate pressure on the prison estate.

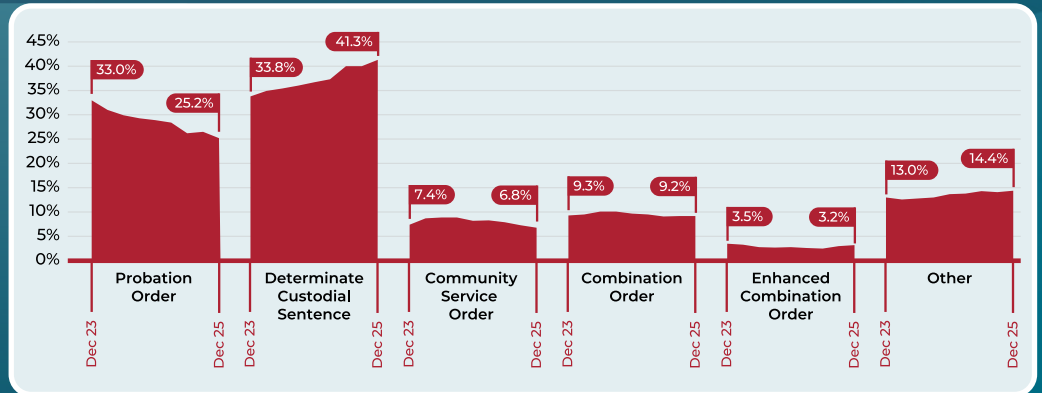
Recent caseload data indicate a notable shift in the age profile of those supervised by Probation. Individuals aged 30–39 now account for over one third of the caseload, while those aged 40–49 represent more than 20 per cent. This changing demographic requires an adjustment in practice to ensure that supervision approaches remain effective for this age group and are responsive to the factors associated with their offending. Population projections suggest that this trend will continue, with older individuals likely to constitute an increasing proportion of both victims and perpetrators of crime.

A further significant change in the composition of the Probation caseload relates to the growth in Determinate Custodial Sentences (DCS), which now represent the largest proportion of cases supervised by PBNI. DCSs are fixed-term sentences imposed by the courts, under which an individual serves a period of custody (up to half of the sentence) followed by release on licence and supervision in the community. Licence conditions are enforced by Probation Officers, with the potential for recall to custody should risks become unmanageable in the community.

The increase in licence supervision cases has meant that our staff are increasingly working with individuals who present as less compliant, have more complex and interrelated needs, and require significant support to achieve successful resettlement in the community. Many individuals supervised under licence also experience persistent challenges in accessing suitable accommodation and mental health services, further increasing the demands placed on Probation staff.

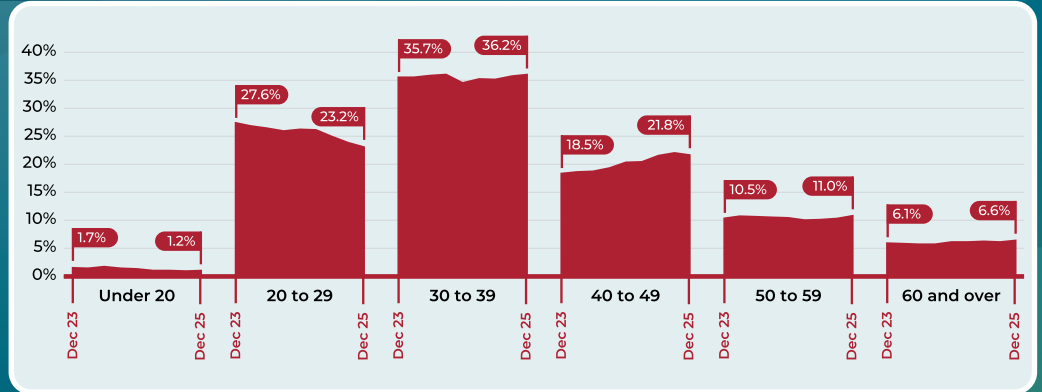
CASELOAD UNDER PBNI SUPERVISION BY TYPE OF ORDER/LICENCE

31 December 2023 to 31 December 2025



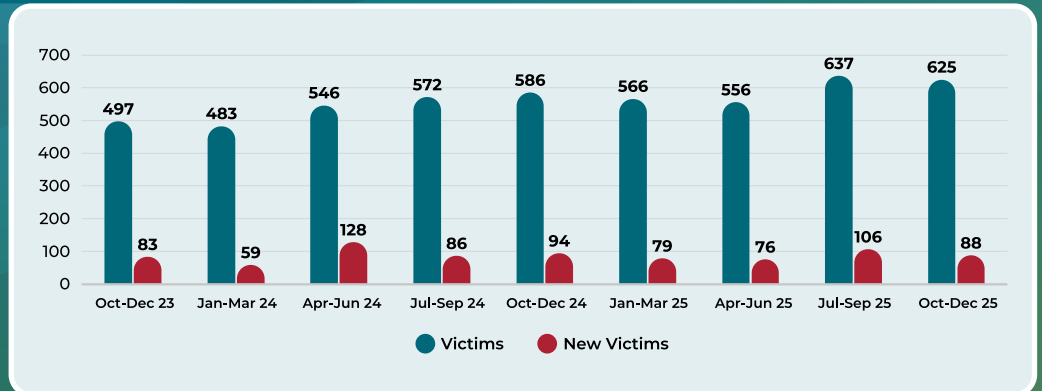
PEOPLE UNDER PBNI SUPERVISION BY AGE GROUP

31 December 2023 to 31 December 2025



NUMBER OF VICTIMS OF CRIME REGISTERED WITH PBNI

Quarter 3 2023/24 to Quarter 3 2025/26



You can find our caseload statistics online



ON 31 DECEMBER 2025:



4,043 SERVICE USERS

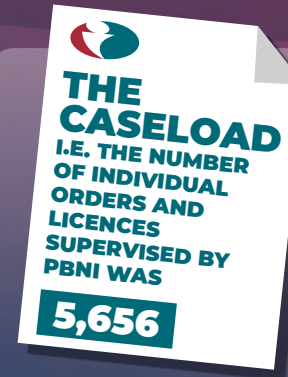
were supervised by PBNI



Determinate Custodial Sentences accounted for

THE LARGEST PROPORTION OF CASELOAD (41.3%)

supervised by PBNI, followed by Probation Orders (25.2%).

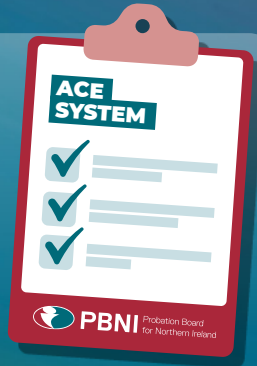


702 SERVICE USERS

(17.4% of all service users supervised by PBNI)

were categorised under the Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland (PPANI).

OF THE SERVICE USERS BEING SUPERVISED BY PBNI, **29.6% WERE IDENTIFIED AS HIGH RISK UNDER THE ASSESSMENT, CASE MANAGEMENT & EVALUATION SYSTEM (ACE).**



Over one-third (36.2%) of service users supervised by PBNI were

AGED 30 TO 39



5.1% OF SERVICE USERS

supervised by PBNI (207 service users) were assessed as Significant Risk of Serious Harm to Others (SROSH).



BETWEEN 1 OCTOBER 2025 AND 31 DECEMBER 2025:



PBNI commenced supervision of

859 NEW ORDERS AND LICENCES

This is an increase (7.9%) on the equivalent figure for Quarter 3 2024/25 (796). This new caseload involved 682 service users.



1,671 REPORTS

were completed by PBNI staff (excluding letters); the corresponding figure for 2024/25 was **1,572**.



THE NUMBER OF NEW VICTIMS REGISTERED WITH PBNI WAS 88, A 6.4% DECREASE ON THE FIGURE FOR 1 OCTOBER 2024 TO 31 DECEMBER 2024 (94).



PROBATION COULD BE THE CAREER FOR YOU

Probation employs people in a wide variety of positions and a variety of teams across Northern Ireland. There are many roles available within Probation you can choose from that help the community and assist people who have committed crime to take responsibility and change their lives around.

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland is a key part of the criminal justice system and working for Probation means you will be helping people to change their lives for the better, reduce reoffending and decrease the number of victims of crime. You will change lives. You will make communities safer.

Working for Probation can be challenging as the people being supervised can have very complex and chaotic lives. They can have mental health issues, drug and alcohol addictions, not have a stable family network, or not have accommodation. But it is also extremely rewarding. There are very few jobs where you can see the direct impact you have on someone's life and help them to change for the better.

For a list of all the roles in Probation, visit our website

Could you lead a team to deliver probation services in the community?

In April this year, Probation will be seeking a number of Area Managers to lead teams delivering probation services within communities. Could it be you?

As an Area Manager you would be managing a variety of responsibilities to deliver effective probation services in your office area. You will also manage a range of staff and are responsible for monitoring and overseeing the quality of operational work and ensuring the performance of your team. You must be social work qualified and registered with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council, just like the Probation Officers in your team.

You will be a leader within the organisation and will be responsible for implementing the organisational business plan within your specified area. You will be a change manager, playing a critical role in cascading information to team members as well as being responsible for ensuring the team you supervise are compliant with all organisational policies and procedures.

You will also be a local ambassador for Probation and will carry out a range of engagement events to ensure that stakeholders understand and are aware of the work of Probation. You may be required to attend local Policing and Community Safety Partnerships and represent Probation in other settings.

Read career information on our website:

Candidate Booklet

Recruitment policy

Starting pay on Appointment

As an equal opportunities employer Probation aims to recruit and develop the very best talent available across a wide range of disciplines.

Keep a look out for the recruitment campaign in April.

CONTACT PROBATION AT

PROBATION HEADQUARTERS

80/90 North St, Belfast BT1 1LD
Communications Unit

028 9052 2522
028 9052 2522

AREA TEAMS

West Belfast and Lisburn

Glenshane House, 202a Andersonstown Road, Belfast, BT11 9EA
Unit 4, Wallace Studios, 27 Wallace Avenue, Lisburn, BT27 4AE

028 9030 6630
028 9262 3456

North Belfast and South East Antrim

171 – 179 Duncairn Gardens, Belfast, BT15 2GE

028 9034 7474

South and East Belfast

297 Newtownards Road, Belfast, BT4 1AG
330 Ormeau Road, Belfast, BT7 2GE

028 9052 6655
028 9054 1444

Down and Ards

15 Castle Street, Newtownards, BT23 3PA
Downshire Civic Centre, Ardglass Road, Downpatrick, BT30 6RA

028 9185 8282
028 4461 8281

North West

25 Shipquay Street, Londonderry, BT48 6DL

028 7131 9670

VICTIM INFORMATION UNIT

80/90 North St, Belfast BT1 1LD

0300 123 3269

North Antrim

3 Wellington Court, Ballymena, BT43 6EQ
19/20 The Diamond, Coleraine, BT52 2DN

028 2566 2345
028 7034 6880

Rural South

1d Monaghan Street, Newry, BT35 6BB
12 Church Street, Portadown, BT62 3LQ

028 3025 3030
028 3839 7575

Rural West

Sperrin Centre, 1 Market Street, Omagh, BT78 1EE
Cathcart Square, 14 Dublin Road, Enniskillen, BT74 6HH

028 8225 4872
028 6634 3345

Rural Mid Ulster

9 Kirk Avenue, Magherafelt, BT45 6BT
25 College Street, Armagh, BT61 9BT

028 7930 2115
028 3752 9876



PROBATION MATTERS PODCAST

Probation publish Podcasts to raise awareness and understanding of the work we do supervising community sentences to change lives for safer communities.

Each podcast examines different areas of our work in Courts, Communities, Custody and with Victims of Crime.