Public Perceptions of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland September 2009

Summary Report based on the Probation Board for Northern Ireland Module of the September 2009 Omnibus Survey
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Rationale for Conducting a Public Perceptions Survey

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBN) has, since its inception in 1982, conducted its mandatory functions in, with and through the community. Increasingly, public services are expected to be open and transparent in how they conduct themselves, this requirement is also reflected in Public Service Agreement targets (confidence in the fairness and effectiveness of the Criminal Justice System).

In PBN’s 2009/2010 Business Plan an objective was included directly related to increasing public confidence through enhancing public understanding of the work conducted by PBN. This objective has also been included in the 2010/2011 Business Plan highlighting PBN’s continued drive to increase public confidence in the Criminal Justice System.

Other criminal justice organisations such as the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the Northern Ireland Policing Board have conducted research into public confidence. PBN recognises that in order to promote public confidence, it must first identify the level of public awareness and understanding of the organisations’ work and legislative mandate. In order to obtain this baseline information PBN, via the Omnibus Survey, conducted a survey of public perceptions of PBN.
September 2009 Omnibus Survey

The Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey is a multi-purpose survey capturing information on the lifestyles, behaviours and opinions of a representative sample of people in Northern Ireland. The survey is conducted by the Central Survey Unit of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency every two to three months, depending on client demand.

An Omnibus Survey was conducted in September 2009, and for the first time included a module of questions relating to PBNI. As with all previous surveys, the September sample was selected at random from the Land and Property Services Agency list of private addresses. In total an eligible sample of 1,924 addresses was selected for inclusion in the sample. At each address one person aged 16 and over was selected to take part in the survey, with the full survey taking approximately 30-40 minutes to complete. The fieldwork for this survey took place between 1 September 2009 and 30 September 2009; during which time 1,201 interviews were completed; a response rate of 62%.

Central Survey Unit analysed this information and produced a report for PBNI. This report provides the response to each question broken down by a series of demographic variables. The following report provides a summary of the key findings from this lengthy report. The full report examining overall results by age, gender, religion and location is available on request.
Key Findings

Knowledge of PBNI
➢ Of the 1,201 people surveyed, 777 (65%) had heard of PBNI. The remaining questions were asked of only those 777 people who had knowledge of PBNI as an organisation.

Contact with PBNI
➢ Of the 777 people who had heard of PBNI, 106 people (14%) had direct contact with the service.
➢ Only those who had not been employed by PBNI were asked to rate satisfaction with this contact. In total 99 respondents were asked. Seventy-six percent were satisfied to very satisfied with the service they received during this contact, 5% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, 18% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 2% could not answer.

Work conducted by PBNI
Of the 777 respondents:
➢ 74% thought it was true that PBNI provides reports when courts are sentencing people.
➢ 83% thought it was true that PBNI supervises offenders in the community on court orders.
➢ 75% thought it was true that PBNI works with other agencies to supervise people who have committed sexual offences.
➢ 32% thought it was true that PBNI provides a service for victims of crime.
➢ 78% thought it was true that PBNI works in prisons in Northern Ireland.
➢ 66% thought it was true that PBNI makes a positive contribution to local communities.
Effectiveness of PBNI

➢ 39% thought that PBNI was fairly to very effective in its supervision of offenders and 19% stated that PBNI was fairly or very ineffective in its supervision of offenders. Two fifths were undecided in their views; stating that PBNI was neither effective nor ineffective (28%) or that they did not know (15%).
Conclusion

The inability to make a response in relation to the effectiveness of PBNI in the work it does by over two fifths of the sample indicates that there is a lack of knowledge about what PBNI does, why it is done and the impact it has. Even amongst those who have had contact with PBNI, almost a quarter (24%) could not answer this question.

Overall, with just under two thirds of the sample having actual knowledge of PBNI as an organisation and an incomplete knowledge of the work conducted, this report has revealed a deficit in public awareness of PBNI and the work it does to reduce crime and the harm that it does.
Technical Notes

Weighting

As only one individual was selected for interview at each sampled address there is a probability that selection for the survey is inversely related to the size of the household. In other words individuals living in large households have a lower chance of being included in the sample than individuals in small households. Information was therefore weighted to adjust for this bias allowing the results to reflect findings as if the sample had been drawn as a random sample of adults rather than of addresses.