

2017/18 PBNI Stakeholder Survey: Sentencers

Background

A survey was issued to Sentencers during January 2018 in order to seek their views on the service provided to them by PBNI. Respondents provided feedback on the current format of PBNI Pre-Sentence, Magistrates' Court, Breach, and Addendum Reports as well as feedback on contact that Sentencers have had with PBNI staff. It is intended that the findings from this survey will help PBNI to continue to develop and refine practice in the preparation of reports, and continue to provide a responsive service to meet the needs of Courts and Sentencers. This report details the headline results from the survey. Verbatim responses to each commentary question can be found at Appendix 2.

Key Findings

- Respondents were generally satisfied with the quality of the reports and their contact with PBNI staff over the last 12 months and provided valuable qualitative feedback.
- The majority of respondents were satisfied with the usefulness of MCRs, and welcomed the concise format, but queried the conclusion appearing at the front of the report.
- Common themes emerging from respondents comments on what they valued about the work of PBNI are;
 - Depth of detail,
 - Clarity and Objectivity,
 - Local knowledge and social work element of reports,
 - Understanding of offender's background and lifestyle.
- Common themes emerging from respondents comments on what they would like PBNI to improve are;
 - Increased presence of Probation Officers at court.
 - Faster provision of reports.
 - Improved detail on underlying issues relevant to the assessment of risk

Methodology

Statistics and Research Branch worked with the Assistant Director who is responsible for policy in this area to develop a questionnaire (hard copy and online). A copy of the questions can be found at Appendix 1. The questionnaire was sent to 38 Sentencers in January 2018 and 18 Sentencers completed the questionnaire (a response rate of 47%). Eight of the respondents were Crown Court Judges, 9 were District Judges (Magistrates' Court), and one was unidentified. This is an increase of 3 respondents on the previous Sentencer Survey undertaken in October 2014, in which 8 Crown Court Judges and 7 District Judges responded.

One to one feedback sessions were also undertaken between several Sentencers and Area Managers, the anonymised feedback from these sessions can be found in Appendix 3.

Section A: Court Reports

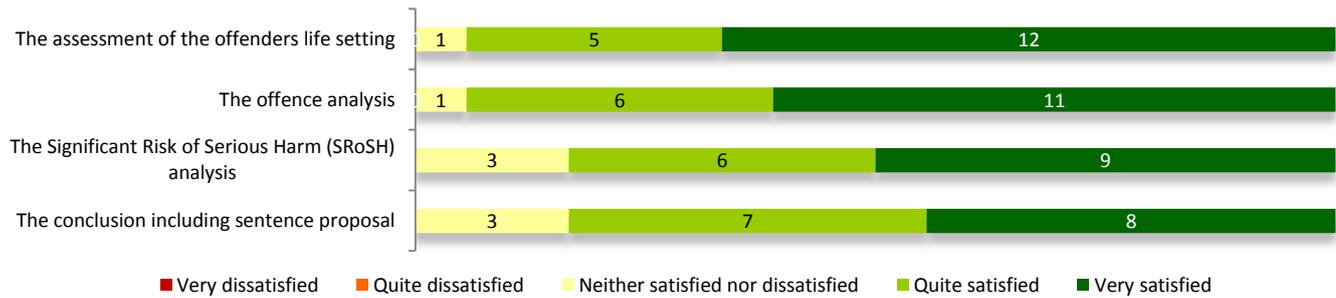
Pre-Sentence Reports (PSRs) (N=18)

The majority of the 18 respondents indicated that they were satisfied¹ (17 respondents, 94%) with the overall usefulness of the Pre-Sentence Reports (PSRs) in helping to reach a sentencing decision; no respondents indicated they were dissatisfied.

Figure 1 below sets out the respondents' level of satisfaction with the content of the various sections of the PSRs. The assessment of the offender's life setting section attracted the highest level of satisfaction (17 of the 18 respondents, 94%).

¹ Respondents selected either 'quite satisfied' or 'very satisfied'.

Figure 1: In general, over the last 12 months, how satisfied have you been with the content of PSRs in relation to the following?



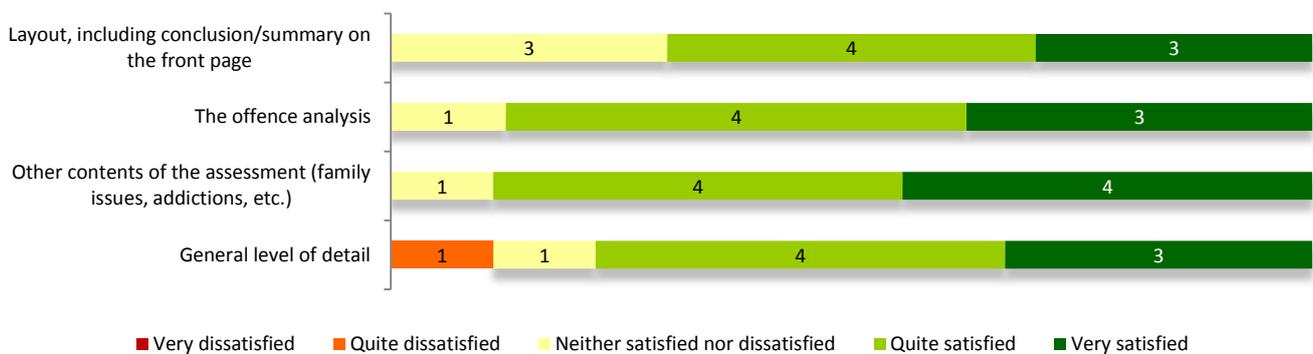
In regards to the time taken to provide a PSR, three in five respondents were satisfied (11 of 18 respondents, 61%); with one respondent indicating that they were dissatisfied.

Magistrates’ Court Reports (MCRs) (N=10)

Ten respondents indicated that they had requested or sentenced on foot of a Magistrates’ Court Report (MCR) within the previous 12 months. Eight of the respondents indicated they were satisfied with the overall usefulness of the MCRs in reaching a sentencing decision and one respondent indicated they were dissatisfied.

Figure 2 below sets out the respondents’ level of satisfaction with the various sections of the MCRs. The other contents of the assessment attracted the highest level of satisfaction (8 of 9 respondents). Respondents welcomed the “shorter, more concise format” of the MCRs.

Figure 2: How satisfied have you been with the content of MCRs in relation to the following?



Half of the respondents were satisfied with the time taken to provide a MCR (5 of the 10 respondents), with one respondent dissatisfied.

Breach Reports (N=17)

Fifteen of the 17 respondents indicated they were satisfied with the overall usefulness of the Breach Reports in reaching a sentencing decision. None of the respondents indicated their dissatisfaction, with some exemplary feedback given; “Comprehensible content”, “salient”, and “sensible recommendations”.

Addendum Reports (N=17)

Fourteen of the 17 respondents indicated they were satisfied with the overall usefulness of Addendum Reports in reaching a sentencing decision. None of the respondents indicated their dissatisfaction.

Section B: Contact with PBNI Staff

This section of the survey was comprised of questions concerning the contact the Sentencers had with PBNI staff during the preceding 12 months.

Fifteen respondents indicated that a Probation Officer had attended their court to provide evidence on a case within the last 12 months. The vast majority indicated they were satisfied (14 of 15 respondents, 93%) with the feedback provided by Probation Officers on individual cases at court. None of the respondents indicated their dissatisfaction.

In terms of contact with Probation Managers (either Senior Manager or Local Area Manager), 8 respondents had contact with a Probation Manager over the course of the last year, with the majority expressing satisfaction with the contact (7 of the 8 respondents, 88%). None of the respondents indicated their dissatisfaction.

The majority of respondents indicated they were well informed about the work of PBNI (15 of the 17 respondents, 88%), while one respondent indicated they were not, but did not explain why.

Section C: Overall Service

In terms of the overall service provided by PBNI during the last 12 months, 16 of the 18 respondents indicated that they were satisfied. Respondents were also asked to provide feedback on what they particularly valued about the work of PBNI as well as any areas for improvement – this is provided below.

What do you particularly value about the work of PBNI?

- *Information on the defendants background and current lifestyle setting which need not be overly detailed*
- *Sentencing options and proposals which probation considers to be workable.*
- *The summary and conclusions of the report.*
- *provision of insight into Defendants personal circumstances and corresponding evaluation of appropriate community disposals*
- *The depth of analysis and understanding of the offender*
- *The analysis of an offenders attitude to the facts of his offending at the time of the interview after the plea of guilty/conviction giving an insight not always reflecting his/her instructions to counsel*
- *The risk assessment*
- *Honesty and fairness to the defendant and committing effort to address issues to prevent reoffending*
- *The social work element of the reports is much appreciated*
- *Information about the accused's lifestyle*
- *Detailed background and offence analysis*
- *The account of the offender in his or her life setting and the dependencies, illnesses or historic trauma experienced.*
- *Their local knowledge and the effort and work they put into a report so that I receive a complete picture as soon as possible.*
- *I get to know background and genuine attitude to the offences.*

What would you like to see PBNI improve in relation to the service they provide to you?

- *Short sharp focused reports not 'epistles'*
- *Shorter more concise reports with reduced turn-around times. More attention paid to risk of harm and reoffending and detailed reasons given for any conclusions reached.*
- *More use of SSRs.*
- *Closer liaison with defence experts e.g. psychiatrists on issues such as dangerousness*
- *Speed up the preparation of the report*
- *Where the risk management meeting determines that an offender poses a serious risk of serious harm and the defence provide a report from psychiatrist etc. which challenges the finding then as a Sentencer I would require additional information re the risk management meeting, its make-up and discussions resulting in the recommendation.*
- *Original thinking and problem solving*
- *As stated above a more focussed and detailed approach to the underlying issues relevant to the assessment of risk in cases where 'dangerousness' is a real possibility would be of immeasurable assistance to the court.*
- *A move towards the English model- reports within days based on having probation officers in courts (I know it is a question of resources!!)*
- *Faster, fuller reports which showed due regard for the status of a court verdict and took proper account of the evidence it accepted, as opposed to restating the offender's false account as though PBNI acted on that in assessing appropriate sentencing options. Equally, a more direct treatment of the consequences of a prison sentence on the offender. Too many instances (though still few) of authors treating only their favoured option, disregarding the professional requirement to state suitability or otherwise for both probation and CSO. I challenged that recently, where I thought probation was in fact appropriate. I got a decidedly arch email only in reply, grudgingly confirming the statutory gateway. Not good PR.*
- *Attendance at every court so that they can speak to a defendant at the court which has requested the report. This reduces the incidences of defendants not turning up for appointments.*
- *I would prefer to have probation officers available in court but realise this is not possible.*

Appendix 1: Survey Questions

SECTION A: COURT REPORTS

PRE-SENTENCE REPORTS (PSR)

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) provide a range of reports to assist Sentencers in making sentencing decisions. The following questions seek your views in relation to these reports.

In general, over the last 12 months, how satisfied have you been with the content of PSRs in relation to the following;	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
The assessment of the offender's life setting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The offence analysis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Significant Risk of Serious Harm (SRoSH) analysis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The conclusion, including sentence proposal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If you have indicated that you are quite/very satisfied or dissatisfied, please state why this is (indicating the report section to which it refers)					

	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
How satisfied have you been with the overall usefulness of PSRs in reaching a sentencing decision?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please tell us why you are satisfied / dissatisfied.					

	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
How satisfied are you with the time taken to provide a PSR?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If relevant, please tell us why you are satisfied / dissatisfied.					

MAGISTRATES' COURT REPORTS (MCR)

PBNI has taken on board feedback from previous surveys and developed a new report template for Magistrates' Courts. This was piloted in five Courts since November 2016, namely Laganside, Magherafelt, Armagh, Dungannon and Enniskillen.

In the last 12 months have you requested, or sentenced on foot of, a Magistrates Court Report (MCR)?	Tick one only
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

How satisfied have you been with the content of MCRs in relation to the following?	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Layout, including conclusion/summary on the front page	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The offence analysis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other contents of the assessment (family issues, Addictions etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
General level of detail	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If you have indicated that you are quite/very satisfied or dissatisfied, please state why this is (indicating the report section to which it refers)					

	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
How satisfied have you been with the overall usefulness of MCRs in reaching a sentencing decision?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please tell us why you are satisfied / dissatisfied.					

	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
How satisfied are you with the time taken to provide an MCR?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please tell us why you are satisfied / dissatisfied.					

OTHER REPORTS

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) provide a range of other reports to assist Sentencers in making decisions. Please let us know your opinion on two such reports, i.e. Breach and Addendum Reports.

A **Breach Report** is provided to courts to provide an account of the circumstances leading to the breach, details of the offender's noncompliance, an outline of actions taken by the supervising officer, and a proposal in respect of options available to the court.

	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
In general, over the last 12 months, how satisfied have you been with the overall usefulness of Breach Reports in reaching a sentencing decision?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please tell us why you are satisfied / dissatisfied.					

An **Addendum Report** is provided to courts to supplement information contained within the original Pre-Sentence report where one has been completed within the previous (max) 12 month period.

	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
In general, over the last 12 months, how satisfied have you been with the overall usefulness of Addendum Reports in reaching a sentencing decision?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please tell us why you are satisfied / dissatisfied.					

SECTION B: CONTACT WITH PBNI STAFF

In the last 12 months has a member of Probation staff attended your court to provide information/evidence relating to a case?	Tick one only
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
In general, over the last 12 months, how satisfied have you been with the evidence provided by Probation staff on individual cases at court?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please tell us why you are satisfied / dissatisfied.					

In the last 12 months have you had contact with a Probation Manager (either senior manager or local Area Manager)?	Tick one only
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
In general, over the last 12 months, how satisfied have you been with the contact you have had with Probation Managers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please tell us why you are satisfied / dissatisfied.					

Do you feel sufficiently informed about the work of PBNI?	Tick one only
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please use the space below to explain your response.	

SECTION C: OVERALL SERVICE

Thinking now about the **overall service** provided by PBNI over the last 12 months...

	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
How satisfied have you been with the overall service provided to you by PBNI during the last 12 months?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please tell us why you are satisfied / dissatisfied.					

What do you particularly value about PBNI's work during the sentencing process?

What would you like to see PBNI improve in relation to the service they provide to you during sentencing?

What is your current judicial status?	Tick one only
Crown Court Judge	<input type="checkbox"/>
County Court Judge	<input type="checkbox"/>
District Judge (Magistrates' Court)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other, please specify below	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please use the space below for any additional comments you would like to make.

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Thank you for your time.

Appendix 2: Verbatim Responses to Qualitative Questions

In general, over the last 12 months, how satisfied have you been with the content of PSRs in relation to the following;	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
The assessment of the offender's life setting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The offence analysis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Significant Risk of Serious Harm (SRoSH) analysis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The conclusion, including sentence proposal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If you have indicated that you are quite/very satisfied or dissatisfied, please state why this is (indicating the report section to which it refers)					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>The life setting section is often far too detailed</i> ▪ <i>Assessment of life setting always useful and sets out a helpful background to the offender. Offence analysis could sometimes be improved. At times I do not accept the recommendation.</i> ▪ <i>My general view is that the reports are adequate, thus I am quite satisfied</i> ▪ <i>Reports are thorough and well considered</i> ▪ <i>The report contains all the information objectively set out in concise terms to help with sentencing</i> ▪ <i>The sentence proposal could be more definite</i> ▪ <i>Risk of serious harm forms a key part of the determination of dangerousness. There are relatively few cases in reality where this comes into play but where it does it would be helpful to have a more detailed summary of what actually took place at the RMM and the basis for the conclusions reached.</i> ▪ <i>This is always related to previous offending and is very useful</i> ▪ <i>Too often, authors take the offender's account of the incident, disregarding the fact that the Court has found that version false, in a contested hearing. I find the Risk of Serious Harm analysis quite misleading and ill-informed in the particular instance of domestic violence; disturbingly complacent.</i> 					

	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
How satisfied have you been with the overall usefulness of PSRs in reaching a sentencing decision?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please tell us why you are satisfied / dissatisfied.					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Generally PSR is very helpful in reaching decision but at times I would like more information as to what courses probation can offer as part of the probation order or what type of CSO work may be relevant/ useful.</i> ▪ <i>in general the content is comprehensive and the author is well versed in the potential forms of disposal</i> ▪ <i>The recommendations are constructive and realistic</i> ▪ <i>All necessary information is within the report</i> ▪ <i>Generally the reports are very focussed and the path to the recommendation is clear.</i> ▪ <i>I feel that the information provided could be improved.</i> ▪ <i>It is both helpful and important to have the offender's background and current issues set out, especially when verified. Too often, though, the author's failure to grasp sentencing precepts (re suspended sentences, for example), or disregard of sentencing guidelines mean that the tilt of the report has to be disregarded.</i> ▪ <i>Decisions are based on a thorough examination of the background of defendants. The reports are concisely set out and the conclusions generally realistic.</i> 					

	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
How satisfied are you with the time taken to provide a PSR?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If relevant, please tell us why you are satisfied / dissatisfied.					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>I would prefer shorter reports but with the court much quicker.</i> ▪ <i>I would ideally like to see reports available within 2 weeks.</i> ▪ <i>In England and Wales PSRs are available to the Crown Court within a day or two, and sentencing can take place on this basis. We need to consider moving to an identical provision of reports.</i> ▪ <i>It's never the fault of Probation for any delay providing the report</i> ▪ <i>I appreciate that probation staff are under considerable pressure with the preparation of reports. Nevertheless it should be possible in several of the less serious cases for a shorter form of report, similar to that used in the Magistrates' Court, which would allow for a quicker turn around between the date of plea and sentence.</i> ▪ <i>Currently, PBNi claim to be unable to produce a Report - short or full - in less than 6 weeks and no longer offer Specific Sentence Reports on the same day (though this was a valued service for a number of years).</i> ▪ <i>I do not like to exceed 4 weeks and the reports are always available in time.</i> ▪ <i>I like to get short SRs within 2 weeks and request only an addendum when a report has already been prepared within the past 12 months.</i> 					

How satisfied have you been with the content of MCRs in relation to the following?	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Layout, including conclusion/summary on the front page	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The offence analysis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other contents of the assessment (family issues, Addictions etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
General level of detail	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If you have indicated that you are quite/very satisfied or dissatisfied, please state why this is (indicating the report section to which it refers)					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>The 'shorter' more concise reports are much preferable rather than 4/5 page reports which are often repetitive.</i> ▪ <i>I deal with these in PS Appeals and they are very good. If it can achieve a better turnaround they should be considered in all cases.</i> ▪ <i>I regularly use these reports in Appeals and find they are of a high standard</i> ▪ <i>I welcomed the detailed social work analysis of the old style reports</i> ▪ <i>I would deal with appeals from magistrates courts - the level of detail is more than adequate as far as I am concerned</i> ▪ <i>I just don't feel much engaged by these MCRs. They strike me as more pro forma, more complacent. In one way they are a victim of the Board's decision to accept somebody's recommendation to put the conclusions first. That merely increased the impression of a scant treatment.</i> ▪ <i>I am used to a little more detail. I do not understand why the conclusion is on the front. I have to read from the end. Conclusion is surely there for judges who do not read the full report.</i> 					

	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
How satisfied have you been with the overall usefulness of MCRs in reaching a sentencing decision?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please tell us why you are satisfied / dissatisfied.					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Shorter , more concise reports are much preferred</i> ▪ <i>The reports are invaluable</i> ▪ <i>Again, the offender's background remains useful; all else has less impact than in a full report.</i> 					

	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
How satisfied are you with the time taken to provide an MCR?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please tell us why you are satisfied / dissatisfied.					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>I have no experience of delay in receipt of these reports</i> ▪ <i>The reduced labour involved for PBNI in these MCRs ought to have seen a reduction of the 4 weeks previously required. The opposite has been my experience. The withdrawal of on-the-day Specific Sentence Reports is especially regrettable. SSRs now seem to have been withdrawn.</i> 					

	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
In general, over the last 12 months, how satisfied have you been with the overall usefulness of Breach Reports in reaching a sentencing decision?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please tell us why you are satisfied / dissatisfied.					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Often they lack detail in relation to the offence 'grounding' the initial report</i> ▪ <i>Comprehensive content; presentation of sufficient information</i> ▪ <i>The reports are salient and the recommendations are sensible</i> ▪ <i>All the information is detailed to justify the application for Breach</i> ▪ <i>My only observation is that too many defendants are given too many chances. Whilst appreciating the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of many defendants they must appreciate that a combination order in particular is a direct alternative to immediate custody. Therefore if they breach the terms of the order then, save in exceptional circumstances. The case should be referred straight back to the court to be revoked and the defendant re-sentenced. I firmly believe that probation officers time could be better spent than in making repeat visits to the court in an effort to coax a reluctant or unwilling defendant.</i> ▪ <i>Sets out matters factually which is all that is really needed</i> ▪ <i>PBNI are understandably very specific and detailed when it is they who have been abused.</i> ▪ <i>The breach reports set out sequentially and clearly all steps taken since the making of an order.</i> 					

	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
In general, over the last 12 months, how satisfied have you been with the overall usefulness of Addendum Reports in reaching a sentencing decision?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please tell us why you are satisfied / dissatisfied.					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Concise updates have proven helpful.</i> ▪ <i>Information is generally sufficient</i> ▪ <i>These provide an indication if the original proposals are being addresses and maintained by the defendant to assist proper disposal of case</i> ▪ <i>I set out why I would want an addendum report and I find that the matters in question are dealt with</i> ▪ <i>I can't remember an Addendum Report which significantly changes the treatment of potential disposals in light of intervening events. Nonetheless such Reports are useful in providing an objective account of the offender's recent behaviour.</i> ▪ <i>The addendum reports are generally succinct and concentrate on the relevant issue outstanding.</i> 					

	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
In general, over the last 12 months, how satisfied have you been with the evidence provided by Probation staff on individual cases at court?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please tell us why you are satisfied / dissatisfied.

- *Evidence in respect of assessment of dangerousness tends to be vague on occasions because the witness has not been the lead in the assessment. Disclosure in advance of hearing was slow.*
- *Normally attendance relates to breach and is very helpful*
- *POs know why they are in court and have the answers to questions of the court*
- *Generally the officer has direct and personal involvement with the defendant and can speak with knowledge borne of that relationship. This is helpful to both the court and defendant in dealing with the issues for determination.*
- *This relates to 'significant harm' cases and POs are moving towards a view similar to that set out by the Court of Appeal*
- *The staff in my court are very well informed and familiar with a large portion of defendants appearing before me. They have their fingers, on the pulse, so to speak, and I have always found their contribution to be reliable and invaluable.*

	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
In general, over the last 12 months, how satisfied have you been with the contact you have had with Probation Managers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please tell us why you are satisfied / dissatisfied.

- *I am kept informed of developments to improve the service to the court*
- *They are knowledgeable and contact has only been to try and resolve difficult or unusual issue*
- *If Managers want to call periodically and check on things, that's fine.*

Do you feel sufficiently informed about the work of PBNI?	Tick one only
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please use the space below to explain your response.

Answer='Yes'

- *Have worked in criminal justice for over 30 years.*
- *Generally well informed and have benefitted from hearing G O'Hare speak twice at JSB and Problem solving court event recently.*
- *I get regular visits and updates*
- *In general I feel I am sufficiently informed about the work that is done by PBNI but I also believe it would be beneficial to both the judge and the PBNI to meet at least once a year in a formal setting to discuss issues of mutual concern and interest.*
- *I have close contact with the probation officers in my court who keep me up to date and the publications of the Board are always informative.*

	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
How satisfied have you been with the overall service provided to you by PBNI during the last 12 months?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please tell us why you are satisfied / dissatisfied.

- *It is frustrating that some defendants try to 'abuse' the system and valuable PBNI time and resources is wasted*
- *Content of reports is consistently high. Perhaps reports are too long and cover matters defence and prosecution counsel should cover. Shorter reports would enable quicker turn-around of reports and a speedier sentencing process.*
- *I miss having the knowledge of Probation available at Court.*
- *consistently positive efforts are made by PBNI to inform the court and provide comprehensive reports*
- *PBNI provides a vital service in respect of the provision of information, assessment and rehabilitation*
- *With the resources available the service is excellent*
- *I have covered most of this in earlier responses but in short form I am impressed by the dedication of reporting officers and their ability to summarise the key points relevant to the individual case. This is of immense assistance to any sentencing judge.*
- *No real complaint - a timely professional service*
- *The value of PBNI to me has declined in the last 12 months. Reliable availability in court withdrawn. Longer waits for any kind of Report. More superficiality introduced by the new MCR. Continued, if discrete, special pleading for soft options in disregard of sentencing guidelines or law.*
- *I would like to have a probation officer available at every criminal court but realise that resources are such that this is not possible.*

Please use this space for any additional comments you would like to make.

- *Keep up the good work but keep the reports short sharp simple and focussed*
- *As PBNI continue to withdraw services to the Magistrates' Courts, stage-by-stage, I wonder if we are reaching the point where the legal necessity to obtain the document should be reconsidered. Not infrequently, I feel that to wait 6 weeks for a highly standardised sheet serves no particular purpose. For example, I hand down a suspended prison sentence for a first conviction for driving while disqualified: nothing else works as well. Why wait 6 weeks for a Report telling me that the offender is suitable for a probation order or a community service order and would consent to either? Probation authors show no knowledge of The Sentencing Guidelines, frequently commending lesser outcomes which would only encourage the very inconsistency which the Guidelines were intended at the highest level to obviate. I was very surprised to be sent the PBNI's magazine recently, reporting that the pilot scheme for MCRs had been completed and had been welcomed by all judges concerned. That is false. I was not consulted, upon completion of the pilot. I would have had many criticisms of it. That kind of bare propaganda has had me reconsider my appraisal of the modern PBNI.*
- *I value the input of probation officers who have a one to one relationship with defendants. I need their advice and assistance to impose the best orders to keep defendants out of trouble. They make it easier for me to assess defendants. I believe that the rehabilitation of offenders is key for a successful, functioning criminal justice system and probation is key to this.*

Appendix 3

Anonymised Feedback from Area Manager One to One Sessions with Sentencers

- *Very happy with PBNI service. Likes the new MCR's and was delighted that they will be rolled out. Keen that the same day option is retained. Praised the work of PSO's in Court and felt their representation was always very helpful. Only two points would like re-enforced to PSR writers: ensure that breach of suspended sentence by the commission of the index offence is highlighted (even if suspended sentence is now expired) and clear assessment regarding CS/PO - some reports have not mentioned these options (possibly considered but not alluded to).*
- *Very encouraging and receptive to our role, gets reports in a timely manner and they include the info required to assist with sentencing, also stated for any breach proceeding its extremely helpful to have a PBNI rep in Court.*
- *Was very encouraging about our work and stated the only area would tend to not agree with us has been in relation to SRoSH, but it is likely this will not be such an issue moving forward. Also advised would be VERY keen to see ECOs rolled out to the North West.*
- *Happy with PSRs and Probation input, is aware of new MCRs and raises no objections.*
- *Was very complimentary of the service provided by Probation.*
- *There was a recognition that whilst cuts in budget were being felt throughout the public sector, he felt that probation continued to provide a professional, helpful and courteous service in his Court.*
- *In sentencing matters he outlined that the input from probation was a crucial part of assessment and subsequent judgements.*
- *We discussed the importance of clients understanding the elements of ECO and commitment required prior to order being made. I highlighted the success of these orders and supplied her with copy of the Evaluation report. was positive about ECOs and PBNI generally*
- *Feedback was positive and highlighted their importance placed on the input of PBNI in supporting to make sentencing decisions overall. In particular would like to have PBNI attendance in Court as frequently as possible - feels that she benefits greatly from our input with general Court assistance regarding breach matters, queries etc. She was satisfied with either PO/ PSO attendance in this regard. Still wanted an option for short adjournments of 2 weeks*
- *Commented on the analytical detail within PSRs and felt this was necessary to take into account the offenders background circumstances, was concerned that an MCR may miss this detail.*
- *Advised it would be beneficial for PBNI to provide an information/feedback session to the judiciary on the feedback from the recent pilots and the positive outcomes noted. Had limited knowledge of the MCR's however discussed short reports (SPSR's) and felt it would be more beneficial if they could be completed for the following day, especially where the Court lists are quite long. However welcomed the MCR's on further discussion of this, especially if considering Community Service. Had limited knowledge on ECOs but welcomed the information on these and the problem solving courts.*
- *Advised that the MCR's lacked some of the information he felt he required that solicitors don't always provide. Expressed concern that his feedback was irrelevant as the MCR's were being rolled out despite his views. However advised that he had forwarded the questionnaire providing feedback. He raised an issue with his view of the quality of assessment in some cases, Probation not recommending a Community Order when he feels it is required. Noted that he would appreciate a more timely process - there appeared to have been an issue with long adjournments being requested.*