

Have you got what it takes?

Working with probation services

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Important facts

Probation trusts play a central role in protecting the public, reducing reoffending and providing specialist support for victims, while delivering the orders and sentences of the court.

The Secretary of State for Justice is responsible, under the Offender Management Act 2007, for providing probation services in England and Wales. The National Offender Management Service (NOMS), an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice, carries out this responsibility on his behalf. NOMS is responsible for commissioning (contracting) all offender management services, including probation trusts and prisons.

There are currently 35 probation trusts in England and Wales, who are responsible for supervising around 234,000 offenders in the community. Probation trusts are delivering their services using local delivery units, which are closely linked to local authorities. Trusts deliver services both direct and through locally commissioned providers, as well as through a wide range of partnership arrangements – including multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA), local safeguarding children's boards, substance misuse joint commissioning groups and community safety partnerships.

Background

Probation services are provided by 35 probation trusts across England and Wales. Trusts are commissioned by NOMS, on behalf of the Secretary of State for Justice, and answer to NOMS for their performance and delivering services. Trusts prepare pre-sentence reports for judges and magistrates, so courts can choose the most appropriate sentence.

Trusts are responsible for managing offenders who are serving community orders, as well as many offenders released from prison on licence. Community orders account for about 80% of the national caseload. The other 20% includes offenders released from prison on licence (in other words, all offenders aged under 21 and those aged 21 and over who have received a custodial sentence of 12 months or more). Probation does not have legal responsibility for adult offenders sentenced to less than 12 months in prison.

Probation works with victims of crimes where the offender has committed a sexual or violent offence and has been given a prison sentence of 12 months or longer.

Probation professionals also work in prisons, where their work includes preparing reports for the Parole Board.

Probation trusts have a range of sources of local information and these support work to reduce reoffending and cut crime. This information

includes patterns of offending and risks associated with reoffending – such as particular problems with alcohol or in getting accommodation. It also includes information on what has been learnt in terms of effective practice in tackling offending behaviour, protecting the public and reducing reoffending.

Recent developments: consultations

'Punishment and reform: Effective probation services'

This consultation paper provides an opportunity to comment on the future provision of probation services in England and Wales and how those services can be improved.

<https://consult.justice.gov.uk/digital-communications/effective-probation-services>

'Punishment and reform: Effective community sentences'

This document sets out proposed reforms to sentences served in the community. Victims and society have a right to expect that wrongdoing will result in punishment and that they will be protected from further reoffending. The aim is to reduce crime and have fewer victims.

<https://consult.justice.gov.uk/digital-communications/effective-community-services-1>

More information

For what reasons can an offender be put on probation?

An offender can be put on probation for one of three reasons.

- 1 As part of a community sentence**
An offender may be given a court sentence to serve in the community, rather than going to prison.
- 2 If the offender is released from prison on licence**
If the prison sentence is for one year or more, at the end of the custodial period, the offender is released from prison on licence (in other words, supervised by a probation officer).
- 3 If the offender is released from prison on parole**
If the offender is released from prison on parole (in other words, released early), they will be supervised by a probation officer during the rest of their sentence.

What happens if an offender breaks the terms of their probation?

If an offender breaks the rules of their probation – for example, by not going to meetings or by committing another crime – they may, depending on the circumstances, receive a warning or they can be taken back to court. The offender manager lets the court know if the offender is not keeping to the terms of probation.

What happens if an offender is convicted of a violent or sexual crime?

If an offender has been convicted of a violent or sexual crime and is sent to prison, when they are released they may be under multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA). These arrangements bring together the police, probation and prison services to manage the risk posed by the most serious sexual and violent offenders in the community. Information about MAPPA offenders may be shared with other organisations, including:

- children's services;
- adult social care services;
- local education services;
- health trusts and authorities; and
- Jobcentre Plus.

How does a probation trust involve those with an interest in their work?

Protecting the public and reducing reoffending cannot be done by probation trusts acting alone. They need to work with a wide range of partners. Trusts commission some specialist services, co-commission others and give offenders details of mainstream services, including those paid for by other government departments, such as the Department of Health, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and the Department for Education. In Wales, it also includes those devolved to the Welsh Assembly Government. Trusts also work closely with a wide range of local businesses, local authorities and voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations (who apply business principles to make the most profit possible for their cause).

As well as being a responsible authority in multi-agency public protection arrangements and community safety partnerships, trusts also play a central role in local safeguarding children boards, substance-misuse joint commissioning groups, youth-offending teams and local criminal justice boards.