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| Statutory Guidance: Core probation roles and qualification requirements |
|  |
| March 2022 |

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# Ministerial foreword

The Probation Service plays a critical role in public protection, reducing reoffending and offender management and rehabilitation. As Minister of State for the Criminal Justice System, my ambition is to ensure the Probation Service workforce has the necessary capability and expertise to fulfil its’ challenging remit.

Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is already undertaking significant work to equip staff with this capability. Most notably, we are increasing the numbers of people trained as Probation Officers (POs) to ensure we have a skilled cohort of staff to meet both current and future demand. Historically, we have recruited 600 trainee POs per year however, by the end of January 2021 we successfully recruited 1,007 trainee POs, and we are increasing our levels of recruitment even further this financial year (2021/2022) to 1,500 trainee POs. We are also improving the main, mandatory qualification for POs, the Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP), to ensure it provides a positive learner experience, attracts a representative and competent workforce, and does this in a way which is value for money and ensures the best outcomes for people on probation.

In addition to increasing the number of skilled people recruited to the organisation, we are also developing career pathways within the profession, so that we can develop and progress talented staff. For example, HMPPS is currently piloting an accelerated progression pathway enabling Probation Services Officers (PSOs) to progress to PO to address the fact that there are currently no internal progression routes for PSOs. The pilot is currently being evaluated, and findings will determine next steps. We are also committed to ensuring that the professional aspect of the qualification and of being a qualified PO has greater recognition and focus over the longer term, through our work around the Professionalisation Agenda.

This guidance document builds on these various strands of work by setting out the key minimum qualifications required to perform core probation roles, in line with my statutory powers and responsibilities under section 10 of the Offender Management Act 2007.

By providing clarity for probation leaders and staff on the minimum requirements in core roles, I aim to ensure we can continue to work collaboratively to build the profession’s capability to meet current and future challenges.



# Introduction

1. The Probation Service plays a critical, challenging role in public protection and reducing reoffending, managing a diverse offender cohort encompassing offenders assessed as posing a low risk of harm through to those who pose the highest risk to the public. Given the important, demanding nature of the organisation’s work, it is essential that staff in core Probation Service roles either directly managing offenders and the risk they pose, or directly supervising and signing off such work, are equipped with the necessary qualifications to fulfil their challenging remit.

2. Under section 10 (1) and (2) of the Offender Management Act 2007, the Secretary of State for Justice has both the power and responsibility to publish statutory guidance setting out qualifications, experience or training required to perform the work of an officer of a provider of probation services. This guidance sets out the key qualifications required by officers performing core roles in the unified Probation Service, as specified by the Secretary of State for Justice.

3. It should be emphasised that the qualification requirements outlined here do not place disproportionate burdens on staff or represent a significant departure from previous requirements in the profession. Rather, they largely reaffirm the basic qualifications that have long been recognised as necessary to practice key roles effectively.

4. Due to the complexity and diversity of probation work, there are various other sources of information highlighting recommended learning, qualifications and standards for probation staff engaging in different types of roles and activities. This statutory guidance is not intended to duplicate these sources, or provide an exhaustive list of all learning, experience and qualifications required to undertake different roles or activities in the Probation Service. Rather, it is focused on clarifying the essential minimum qualifications required to perform specific core roles either directly managing offenders and the risk they pose, or directly supervising and signing-off this key frontline work.

5. While there may be additional Probation Service roles where it is preferable to have some of the qualifications outlined here, the focus of this guidance is not to provide an extensive list of all roles where such qualifications are *preferable*, but rather to clarify in which roles such qualifications are an *essential requirement*. This document also supersedes all other previous statutory guidance issued on behalf of the Secretary of State for Justice in this area, setting out minimum qualification requirements in the unified Probation Service.

6. In addition to having the requisite qualifications, staff in core probation roles must also be *authorised* to perform their roles. Probation Service senior managers have long been responsible for authorising their staff and withdrawing or suspending this authorisation where necessary. In addition to being appropriately qualified, staff must also fulfil other broader requirements to secure their authorisation (i.e. having the appropriate level of security clearance). PI 31/2014 details these, along with the wider policy and procedures around authorisation, and this guidance also includes a brief section on this area to highlight key responsibilities. This work is critical in developing the Probation Service professionalisation agenda.

7. The following sections detail the core probation roles and the qualifications required to perform them, while [Annex A](#_Annex_A:_Summary) provides background on the requisite qualifications.

# Core probation roles and qualification requirements

8. [Table One](#_Table_One:_Core) sets out the core probation roles and their associated qualification requirements, so that probation leaders and staff can swiftly identify requirements for individuals working in these roles and address any potential gaps.

9. Due to successive reforms in the Probation Service, qualification requirements have changed over time. For example, from the 1980s probation officers were required to hold a social work degree or post graduate social work qualification, whereas since 1998 they have been required to hold a specific probation qualification. This has been updated over the years from the Diploma in Probation Studies established in 1998, to the current Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP), which has been the requisite qualification since 2016. These changes are taken into account in [Table One](#_Table_One:_Core), which recognises relevant historical qualifications as appropriate.

10. As outlined in [Table One](#_Table_One:_Core), staff working in specified core roles, from Probation Officer to Head of Operations, must hold either the PQiP, or the recognised qualification for the date they qualified as a Probation Officer. Qualifications for different eras are outlined at [Annex B](#_Annex_B:_Timeline) so staff can quickly identify whether they have the recognised qualification for the date they qualified.

11. If staff do not hold the PQiP or recognised qualification for the date they qualified, they must complete the Qualification Alignment process as defined in the Qualification Alignment Process: Guidance and Support documents, published by the Probation Workforce Programme in January 2021, achieving one of the following two outcomes:

* 1. Formal sign-off as ‘professionally qualified’ from the Chief Probation Officer[[1]](#footnote-2).Staff who do not hold the PQiP or recognised qualification for the date they qualified, but have either over ten years’ experience in offender management or court roles, or are classified as ‘qualified others’ in qualification alignment guidance[[2]](#footnote-3), can be signed off as ‘professionally qualified’ by the Chief Probation Officer.
  2. The Alignment Qualification. Staff who do not hold the PQiP or recognised qualification for the date they qualified but have at least 21 months’ experience in offender management or court roles,[[3]](#footnote-4) can complete a shorter Alignment Qualification rather than undertaking the full PQiP. The Alignment Qualification provides key academic background on offender rehabilitation, along with essential vocational experience in assessing offenders and managing the risk they pose to the public, to supplement individuals’ experience and ensure they have the required capability.

12. Individuals’ suitability to undertake the Alignment Qualification or receive formal sign-off as ‘professionally qualified’ will be determined by a dedicated Senior Policy Manager from the Probation Workforce Programme. While staff should aim to complete the Qualification Alignment Process in 2021/22, in exceptional circumstances the maximum time taken to complete the Process can be extended to up to three years. Staff who do not secure formal sign-off or the Alignment Qualification during the 2021/22 Process must complete the PQiP. The 2021/22 Alignment Process is only open to staff currently working in the core roles specified in [Table One](#_Table_One:_Core), (from Probation Officer to Head of Operations), and it cannot be used to qualify staff working in any other Probation Service roles, such as Probation Services Officers (PSOs).

13. PSOs whose employment commenced on or after 1 April 2014 should complete the requisite Level 3 Diploma in Probation Practice, ideally in their first twelve months of their employment in the Probation Service. (PSOs whose employment commenced before 1 April 2014 are not currently required to hold the Diploma, although they are encouraged to complete the qualification when it is locally available, as it provides important background on key elements of probation practice).

14. Staff currently working in core probation roles with international qualifications must also ensure they meet statutory qualification requirements. As a first step, they must apply to the UK National Information Centre for the recognition of international qualifications, (UK ENIC), for a Statement of Comparability, providing the UK equivalency of their qualifications. If their international qualifications are not equivalent to those required in England and Wales, they must complete the requisite qualifications or processes outlined in [Table One](#_Table_One:_Core). This can be supported via the Qualification Alignment processes. Those staff will need to identify where this arises to their line manager and Head of HR to ensure they are considered as part of the Qualification Alignment processes.

15. As there may be some variation in job titles used in different Probation Service regions, a short descriptor of each core role is also included to ensure senior probation leaders and staff can identify relevant roles and their requirements swiftly and easily.

## Table One: Core probation roles and statutory qualification requirements

| **Probation Service Role** | **Descriptor** |
| --- | --- |
| Probation Services Officer  (Band 3) | Officers engaged in sentence management, responsible for managing low to medium risk offenders, assessing and managing the risk they pose to the public and victims of crime, and providing high quality advice to courts to inform sentencing decisions (i.e. pre-sentence reports). (Does *not* include Victim Liaison Officers who provide support to victims of crime, Approved Premises staff, and all those in non-frontline roles who are not responsible for directly managing offenders and the risk they pose to the public and victims). |

### Qualifications required

All Probation Services Officers (PSOs) whose **employment commenced on or after 1 April 2014***,* should either already hold, or be working towards completing, the **Level 3 Diploma in Probation Practice**as a minimum. (The only exceptions are those PSOs specifically employed to undertake the Professional Qualification in Probation). While ideally PSOs should be working towards completing their Diploma in the first 12 months of their employment in the Probation Service, in exceptional circumstances the maximum time taken to complete the qualification can be extended to up to three years (pro rata arrangements may also be made for part-time staff).

PSOs whose **employment commenced before 1 April 2014** are not currently required to hold the Level 3 Diploma in Probation Practice, as this was introduced as a statutory requirement subsequent to their employment, although they are encouraged to complete the qualification when locally available, as it provides important background on key elements of probation practice.

| **Probation Service Role** | **Descriptor** |
| --- | --- |
| Probation Officer  (Band 4) | Officers engaged in direct sentence management, responsible for managing low to high risk offenders, assessing and managing the risk they pose to the public and victims of crime, and providing high quality advice to courts to inform sentencing decisions (i.e. pre-sentence reports). (Does not include Programme Facilitators who deliver accredited programmes to offenders, or staff in Quality Development roles, who are not responsible for directly managing offenders and the risk they pose to the public and victims). |
| Polygraph Examiner (Band 5) | Officers undertaking polygraph tests on high risk offenders which form part of overarching assessments of the risks these offenders pose to the public, who also directly manage offenders and the risks they pose where required. |
| Senior Probation Officer (Band 5) | Senior officers responsible for leading a team of staff who directly manage offenders and the risk they pose (i.e. PSOs, POs), supervising, directing and signing-off their team’s offender management work and the provision of advice to courts to inform sentencing decisions, ensuring it meets required standards. (Does not include Programme/Treatment Managers who deliver accredited programmes, Victim Liaison Team Managers, or staff in Quality Development roles, who do not directly supervise or sign-off offender management work). |
| Approved Premises Manager (Band 5) | Managers responsible for managing an Approved Premises and ensuring the effective management of risks posed by resident offenders. Approved Premises Managers also participate in out of hours on call rotas, taking key decisions on the management of offenders, (including authorising the recall of offenders to prison), as needed. |
| Approved Premises Area Manager (Band 6) | Area Managers responsible for managing a cluster of Approved Premises and overseeing and directing work to manage the risks posed by offenders resident in premises in their areas. In addition to providing advice and making decisions on the management of high risk offenders where senior management authorisation or involvement is required, Area Managers also participate in out of hours on call rotas, taking key decisions on the management of offenders, (including authorising the recall of offenders to prison), as needed. |
| Senior Operational Support Manager  (Band 6) | Deputy Heads of Probation Delivery Units responsible for signing off staff’s work to manage offenders and the risk they pose and overseeing the provision of high-quality advice to courts to inform sentencing decisions. Senior Operational Support Managers also have delegated responsibility for making decisions and providing advice on the management of offenders where senior management authorisation or involvement is necessary (e.g. authorising the recall of offenders to prison). |
| Head of Operational Function (ACO C) | Heads of Probation Delivery Units responsible for signing off staff’s work to manage offenders and the risk they pose and overseeing the provision of high- quality advice to courts to inform sentencing decisions. Heads of Operational Functions are also responsible for making decisions and providing advice on the management of offenders where senior management authorisation or involvement is necessary (e.g. authorising the recall of offenders to prison). These roles include Heads of Public Protection, who are responsible for ensuring the Probation Service effectively manages the risks presented by offenders assessed as critical public protection cases. (However, they do *not* include Heads of Unpaid Work and Heads of Interventions who oversee the delivery of Unpaid Work and programmes/interventions for offenders). |
| Head of Operations (ACO D) | Heads of Operations manage Heads of Probation Delivery Units and Heads of Public Protection who are responsible for operational delivery and public protection, and provide advice and make ultimate decisions on the management of offenders where senior management authorisation/involvement is necessary. Where required, Heads of Operations also participate in out of hours on call rotas, taking key decisions on the management of offenders, (including authorising the recall of offenders to prison), as needed. |

### Qualifications required

All staff working in roles from Probation Officer to Head of Operations must either hold the Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) or the recognised probation qualification for the date they qualified as a Probation Officer (as outlined at Annex B), or have completed the 2021 Qualification Alignment Process, successfully achieving one of the following two outcomes:

1. Formal sign-off as ‘professionally qualified’ from the Chief Probation Officer.
2. The Alignment Qualification.

Staff should aim to complete the Qualification Alignment Process in 2021/22, however in exceptional circumstances the maximum time taken to complete the Process can be extended to up to three years. Staff who have not achieved formal written sign-off from the Chief Probation Officer or secured the Alignment Qualification, must complete the PQiP qualifciation.

16. The following sections provide further context as to why the above roles have been identified, while [Annex A](#_Annex_A:_Summary) provides further information on the requisite qualifications.

## Roles directly managing offenders

17. A range of staff working in the Probation Service play a key role in offender management by delivering interventions to offenders directly themselves, or by helping to develop the quality of offender management work overall. However, though it may be preferable for staff in these roles to have the qualifications outlined in [Table One](#_Table_One:_Core) it is not essential, for while these staff contribute significantly to the effective management of offenders, they do not have direct responsibility for managing these individuals and the risk they pose to the public.

18. However, it is imperative that staff who not only work directly with offenders, but also have responsibility for managing them and the risk they pose, have the requisite qualifications to ensure they have the necessary capability to discharge their public protection responsibilities effectively. **PSOs** and **Probation Officers (POs)** undertake these responsibilities with offenders, therefore [Table One](#_Table_One:_Core) highlights the essential basic qualifications they require to fulfil their significant responsibilities. As POs manage offenders assessed as posing a high risk of harm as well as those assessed as posing a low and medium risk, they require a higher level of qualification than PSOs, as reflected in the table.

19. While **Polygraph Examiners** generally contribute to assessments of the risk offenders pose to the public by undertaking polygraph tests on high risk offenders, they also sometimes directly manage offenders themselves, hence they also require the qualifications outlined in [Table One](#_Table_One:_Core). Furthermore, given the serious, technical nature of the tests they administer, the Ministry of Justice has committed to Parliament that Polygraph Examiners will also hold the requisite probation qualifications, as well as complying with American Polygraph Association requirements, to ensure tests meet required standards. (All polygraph examiners must have also successfully completed the American Polygraph Association approved training to become an accredited examiner).

## Roles supervising or signing off direct work with offenders

20. A range of senior staff in the Probation Service provide important leadership, management and oversight for the organisation, enabling it to fulfil its remit under challenging circumstances. Staff working in these roles are highly skilled, and often have considerable experience in offender management and public protection. While many staff in these roles will have the qualifications highlighted in [Table One](#_Table_One:_Core), (and indeed this may be of great benefit), it is not an essential requirement, unless they are directly signing off, and overseeing delivery of, frontline activity to manage offenders and the risks they pose to the public and victims of crime.

21. However, as staff working as **Senior Probation Officers (SPOs), Senior Operational Support Managers, Heads of Operational Functions** and **Heads of Operations** provide this oversight and sign-off, it is essential that they possess the requisite qualifications outlined in [Table One](#_Table_One:_Core). This also applies to **Approved Premises Managers** and **Approved Premises Area Managers**, who are responsible for ensuring the effective management of risks posed by offenders resident in their premises.

## Authorisation

22. It is imperative that staff working in core roles not only have the requisite qualifications, but also the necessary authorisation, to perform their roles. Probation Service senior managers have long been responsible for authorising their staff and withdrawing or suspending this authorisation under certain circumstances. These include a staff member:

* Leaving the Probation Service and no longer working as a paid member of staff.
* Being dismissed from the Probation Service.
* Committing, or being under investigation for, misconduct.
* Failing to demonstrate the required level of capability and performance.
* Not having the required level of enhanced security vetting.

23. Probation Service senior managers must continue to fulfil their responsibilities and, where a member of staff’s authorisation is temporarily suspended or withdrawn, they must communicate this immediately to the MoJ Shared Services Centre (SSC) via their Human Resources Business Partner, and to the staff member and other relevant agencies. MoJ Shared Services will then add the names of staff whose authorisation has been withdrawn to a centrally held Loss of Authorisation Register, to ensure staff cannot be re-employed in different areas of the Probation Service without those areas being aware that their authorisation has been previously withdrawn. PI 31/2014 details the policy and procedures around authorisation. (To note, there are some additional roles requiring authorisation beyond the core roles specified in this guidance and these are covered in the PI).

# Annex A: Summary of Requisite Qualifications

## Level 3 Diploma in Probation Practice

24. The Level 3 Diploma in Probation Practice is the mandatory qualification for all PSOs whose employment commenced on or after 1 April 2014. The Diploma has been designed to enable PSOs to demonstrate occupational competence in the delivery of appropriate outcomes when working with offenders. Overall, it comprises a programme of directed, work-based learning and development, combined with supervised and assessed practice.

25. The Diploma consists of twelve units designed to encapsulate the knowledge and skills required for probation roles, and to be awarded the qualification learners must achieve three mandatory units and three optional units, achieving one unit from Optional Group One and two units from Optional Group Two. The three mandatory units all learners must achieve are, ‘professional ethics, values and practices’, ‘safeguard individuals’, and ‘working with own and other organisations’.

26. Optional Group One comprises two units, ‘assess the risk, needs and strengths of offenders’, and, ‘assess the risks to, and needs of, victims’, and learners must complete one of these as well. Finally, learners must complete two of the following seven units in Optional Group Two: ‘engage and motivate offenders to promote change’; ‘manage risk of harm’; ‘produce and present formal reports’; ‘deliver rehabilitation programmes’; ‘represent the organisation at formal meetings’; ‘support victims throughout the custody and release of offenders’; and ‘support offenders with resettlement into the community’. While there are no prescribed combinations of optional units, some units are applicable to specific probation roles and different areas of the Probation Service will select unit combinations which reflect the roles of, and are achievable by, their staff.

## Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP)

27. The PQiP has been the required qualification in probation since 2016 and has been designed to enable learners to demonstrate occupational competence in the delivery of appropriate probation outcomes when working with offenders who are assessed as posing a risk of serious harm to others. The qualification comprises both academic and vocational components and has two routes of either 15- or 21-months’ duration.

28. The 15-month PQiP is a level 6 qualification, equivalent to the final year of an Honours Degree, comprising 120 academic credits integrated with a vocational qualification and probation practice. The academic component is delivered and assessed by approved contracted Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), while the vocational qualification is delivered and assessed by Practice Tutor Assessors. While undertaking the qualification, learners are employed as PSOs. The first six months are known as Part 1, and the final nine months as Part 2, and Part 1 must be successfully completed to commence Part 2.

29. The 21-month PQiP route consists of the above but in addition learners are expected to complete outstanding required knowledge modules in the first six months of the programme prior to commencing Part 1, (this is known as the Extended PQiP). The knowledge modules are delivered by contracted HEIs, via distance learning.

30. Applicants’ eligibility to undertake the 15- or 21-month PQiP is determined after they have passed an initial Assessment Centre assessing their suitability for the PQiP, and HEIs assess successful candidates’ qualifications to determine which route they should take. Candidates who have completed three or four of the required Level 5 knowledge modulesare eligible to undertake the 15-month PQiP Programme. Those with only three of the modules are required to complete the fourth module within the first six months of the programme. The modules are Criminology, Community Justice, Penology and Rehabilitation of Offenders. All others will undertake the 21-month PQiP Programme.

## 2021 Qualification Alignment Process

31. A minority of staff in core probation roles, (from Probation Officer to Head of Operations), do not have the PQiP or recognised qualification for the date they qualified as a Probation Officer. While this is a longstanding issue, stemming partly from changing qualification requirements in probation, it is imperative that all staff working in these roles have certain basic levels of qualification, given the challenging, complex work they undertake with offenders.

32. However, HMPPS recognises that despite not having the requisite qualifications, many staff in core roles will have built up considerable experience and expertise in working with offenders. Therefore, to take this experience into account, and enable experienced staff to meet qualification requirements without unnecessary burdens on their time, HMPPS has developed the 2021 Qualification Alignment Process.

33. Under the Process, all staff working in specified core roles, (from Probation Officer to Head of Operations), who do not hold the PQiP or recognised qualification for the date they qualified, will be assessed by a dedicated Senior Policy Manager from the Probation Workforce Programme to determine whether they are sufficiently experienced to either receive formal sign-off as ‘professionally qualified’ from the HMPPS Chief Probation Officer, or undertake the Alignment Qualification.

34. To be signed off as ‘professionally qualified’ by the Chief Probation Officer, staff must have over ten years’ experience in offender management or court roles, or be classified as ‘qualified others’ in qualification alignment guidance [[4]](#footnote-5). Staff who have less than ten years’ experience, but at least 21 months’ experience in offender management or court roles[[5]](#footnote-6) can complete the shorter, four to six month Alignment Qualification rather than undertaking the full PQiP. The Alignment Qualification provides key academic background on offender rehabilitation, along with essential vocational experience in assessing offenders and managing the risk they pose to the public, to supplement individuals’ experience and ensure they have the required knowledge and capability. Staff who do not secure written sign-off or the Alignment Qualification during the 2021 Process must complete the PQiP.

35. It should be noted that the 2021 Alignment Process is only open to staff currently working in the core roles specified in [Table One](#_Table_One:_Core), (from Probation Officer to Head of Operations), and it cannot be used to qualify staff working in any other Probation Service roles (e.g. Probation Services Officers etc).

# Annex B: Timeline of recognised qualifications in probation

* **Pre 1996:** The required qualification for Probation Officers was a social work degree or post graduate social work qualification, introduced in the 1980s.
* **1996 to 1998:** The then Home Secretary mandated that Probation Officers should complete a specific probation qualification. During this period, while the probation qualification was being developed, the required qualification for Probation Officers was a social work degree with a probation component.
* **1998 to 2010:** The social work degree/post graduate social work qualification was no longer the required qualification. Instead, it was mandated that from 1998 all Probation Officers should complete the, ‘Diploma in Probation Studies’, as per the guidance, ‘Regulatory Framework for Diploma in Probation Studies’. The first cohort qualified in 2001.
* **2010 to 2016:** TheProbation Qualification Framework (PQF) replaced the Diploma in Probation Studies as the requisite qualification.
* **2016 to the present:** TheProfessional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) replaced the PQF and continues to be used.



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1. Each HMPPS region is headed by a Regional Probation Director (RPD), and in England RPDs report to the HMPPS Chief Probation Officer, as outlined in, [HMPPS\_The\_Target\_Operating\_Model\_for\_the\_Future\_of\_Probation\_Services\_in\_England\_\_\_Wales\_-\_\_English\_\_-\_09-02-2021.pdf (publishing.service.gov.uk)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/959745/HMPPS_-_The_Target_Operating_Model_for_the_Future_of_Probation_Services_in_England___Wales_-__English__-_09-02-2021.pdf). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Staff classified as ‘qualified others’, and the specific types of experience required for sign-off, are detailed in, ‘Qualification Alignment Process: Guidance and support documents’, published by the Probation Workforce Programme in January 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. The specific types of experience required are detailed in, ‘Qualification Alignment Process: Guidance and support documents’, published by the Probation Workforce Programme in January 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Staff defined as ‘qualified others’, and the specific types of experience required for sign-off, are detailed in, ‘Qualification Alignment Process: Guidance and support documents’, published by the Probation Workforce Programme in January 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. The specific types of experience required are detailed in, ‘Qualification Alignment Process: Guidance and support documents’, published by the Probation Workforce Programme in January 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)