

# Should Northern Irish Probation Learn from NOMS?

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**Summary:** The Probation Service in England and Wales is undergoing a process of significant change. The Offender Management Bill is proceeding through parliament and a new regime for supervising offenders is taking shape within the National Offender Management Service. This article outlines these changes. It suggests that this new model should be of interest to Northern Ireland, but that caution should be taken before simply replicating what is being introduced in England and Wales.

Until recently, there were strong similarities between probation practice in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and England and Wales. Probation officers had the same, or similar, training, and the legislative and organisational contexts were broadly similar. There was regular movement of staff between the three jurisdictions. This situation is now changing. The Committee on the Programme for Government has agreed that probation matters in Northern Ireland will be the responsibility of the devolved Assembly, and this provides an opportunity to consider how probation in Northern Ireland should be organised in the future. In this context, it is worth considering the fundamental changes, and the controversy surrounding them, to probation practice in England and Wales.

The reorganisation of the Probation Service in England and Wales is one of the most radical in its history. Proposals in the Offender Management Bill include the introduction of end-to-end management for offenders, and allowing private and voluntary bodies to bid to provide probation services. The government argues that these reforms will reduce reoffending and address some of the perceived shortcomings of the present probation regime. Opponents of the proposals contend that the changes amount to the destruction of the Probation Service. This article outlines the development of these changes and some of the arguments in favour of and against them.

**Keywords:** National Offender Management Service (NOMS), end-to-end management, contestability, Offender Management Bill.

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