

Social Work: The Core Qualification of Probation Officers in Northern Ireland

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Summary: The Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) employs approximately 150 probation officers and 25 area/senior managers who are all social work qualified. Although work undertaken by probation officers is offence and offender focused, it is not limited to the analysis of offending behaviour; holistic assessments of individuals and interventions are required. In this article we assess the requirements for probation work in Northern Ireland in 2008 against six key social work roles and make the argument that probation officers with a background in social work bring added value to criminal justice and public service in Northern Ireland. New legislation and the PBNI's Corporate Plan 2008–2011 will undoubtedly necessitate new bodies of knowledge and expertise, and the organisation will be increasingly required to work in multi-agency and multi-disciplinary settings. However, we believe that social work remains the most appropriate qualification to enable probation officers in the PBNI to meet the demands of their role.

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