

Career in Probation

The Work

Probation Officers work with offenders and their families in courts, prison establishments and in the community.

As a Probation Officer you would be involved in the following core areas of work:–

- **Court work** – providing “pre-sentence reports” on people appearing before youth, magistrates or crown courts to assist the court in determining the most suitable sentence. To prepare these reports probation officers will interview the offender and gather information from a range of sources e.g. family, employer, school, psychologist, police and others. The report is an assessment of the factors that have contributed to the person’s offending, and of the likelihood of their re-offending and risk of harm to others. The report will also identify any actions that may be taken to reduce the likelihood of re-offending
- **Probation supervision** – supervising those subject to probation supervision. Probation officers work with offenders helping them to identify, acknowledge and resolve issues and problems which may have contributed to their offending behaviour. Probation Officers try to identify with offenders the personal, social, situational and other factors contributing to their offending and to agree a work plan to address these factors. They are also responsible for holding an individual accountable for keeping to the conditions of their court order, for completing agreed work plans and maintaining the agreed level of contact. This can mean returning a person to court where there has been a failure to comply with the court order.
- **Community service work** – Probation Officers supervise offenders who are sentenced to perform unpaid work (up to 240 hours) in the community, in reparation for their offence.
- **Work with prisoners and released prisoners** – Probation Officers can be seconded to work in prisons to assist with problems which may arise as a result of imprisonment and to help with resettlement of prisoners. They may be involved in programmes to address offending behaviour and to help prisoners make positive changes prior to their release. A significant number of prisoners are subject to statutory probation supervision on release from custody.

As well as the direct contact with offenders, probation officers spend time writing reports, completing case management records, attending case

conferences, risk management and other meetings. Part of each week may be spent attending court and undertaking office duty.

Probation Officers

Probation Officers **must** hold a recognised professional qualification in social work to practise in Northern Ireland. From September 2004, the Degree in Social Work (the Degree) became the recognised professional qualification for all social workers throughout the UK, as well as for Probation Officers in Northern Ireland and Criminal Justice Social Workers in Scotland. This Degree replaced the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) and previous social work qualifications awarded in the UK by the Central Council for Education and Training (CCETSW). The DipSW and all its predecessor equivalents will continue to be recognised by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) and employers, as an appropriate qualification for social work and probation in Northern Ireland.

A recognised qualification refers to a qualification that has been approved by one of the four social care councils within the UK as follows;

- England - General Social Care Council - www.gsc.org.uk
- Northern Ireland - Northern Ireland Social Care Council - www.niscc.info
- Scotland - Scottish Social Services Council - www.sssc.uk.com
- Wales - Care Council for Wales - www.ccwales.org.uk

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) is responsible for approving social work education and training courses in Northern Ireland. NISCC is also responsible for regulating standards of conduct and practice for the Northern Ireland Social Care Workforce. It regulates these standards through registration of social care staff, including social work students.

From 1st June 2005, all social workers including probation officers must be registered with the NISCC in order to practise. For more details about registration, contact the NISCC registration department at registration@nisocialcarecouncil.org.uk or 028 9041 7633 or log on to the website www.niscc.info

Where can I study for the Degree in Social Work in Northern Ireland?

The following universities were approved by NISCC in August 2004 to deliver and award the Degree in Social Work

Bachelor in Social Work (BSW) – The Queen’s University of Belfast (QUB)

Contact:

QUB, Social Work Department
6 College Park
Belfast

BT7 1LP
Telephone: (028) 9097 4175/5117
Website: www.qub.ac.uk

BSc (Hons) in Social Work – University of Ulster at Magee Campus (UUM)

Contact:
UUM, School of Sociology & Applied Social Studies
Magee Campus,
Northland Road,
Londonderry
BT48 7JL
Telephone: (028) 7137 5229/5434
Website: www.ulster.ac.uk

The University of Ulster also normally offers the Degree in Social Work in partnership with four Institutes of Further and Higher Education (F&HE) as follows:

BSc (Hons) in Social Work – Belfast Metropolitan College

Contact:
Department of Continuing Education
Millfield Building
Belfast
BT1 1HS
Tel: 028 9026 5000/5482/5318
Website: www.belfastmet.ac.uk

BSc (Hons) in Social Work – South West College, Dugannon Campus

Contact:
Department of Academic Health and General Studies
Circular Road
Dugannon
BT71 6BQ
Tel: 028 8772 2323
Website: www.swc.ac.uk

BSc (Hons) in Social Work – South Eastern Regional College

Contact:
Faculty of Health and Social Care
Victoria Avenue
Newtownards
BT23 7ED
Tel: 028 9127 6600
Website: www.serc.ac.uk

BSc (Hons) in Social Work - North West Regional College

Contact: Department of Care and Health
19 City Factory

Derry
BT48 7ES
Tel: 028 7127 6000
Website: www.nwrc.ac.uk

The Degree in Social Work in Northern Ireland can be undertaken as a full-time course or a part-time pathway.

Full-time Degree in Social Work Courses

There are 3 year undergraduate courses and 2 year undergraduate courses available. The 3 year full-time courses are normally available at all 6 locations. The 2 year Relevant Graduate Route (RGR) is only available at QUB or UUM.

Applications to the full-time courses are through the UCAS system, which opens every September. The closing date is usually mid January (15 January of each year). UCAS applications are available from the UCAS website and can be completed on-line at www.ucas.com

Path-time Pathway to the Degree in Social Work

A new part-time pathway to the Degree in Social Work will be available from September 2010. This will be available at undergraduate level at QUB and UUM only. Applications to the part-time pathway will be made by direct application to the universities.

Degree in Social Work Interviews

All applicants being considered for a place on all the Degree courses in Northern Ireland will be interviewed to assess their potential to train to be a social worker at degree level. It is necessary to have some relevant experience when applying to the Degree in Social Work courses

Financial support for the Degree in Social Work

Social work students who are from Northern Ireland and obtain a place on a Degree course in Northern Ireland may apply for funding from the Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPSNI) – Student Incentive Scheme.

They can also apply for additional undergraduate funding through their local education and library boards.

More Information about the Degree in Social Work

More information about the Degree in Social Work courses including entry qualifications, relevant experience and funding is available from the universities/institutions direct. The NISCC Information Services also provides

information on training for a career in social work. (See page 6 for contact details.)

Probation Services' Officers (PSOs)

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland employs a limited number of staff to perform tasks which do not require a social work qualification. PSOs are employed to carry out the following tasks

- Community service scheme - contributing to the organisation of work placements, assigning offenders to suitable work, monitoring and ensuring work completed to required standard.
- Programme delivery - delivering a range of offence focused programmes
- Court duty - providing a service to courts
- Assist with specific and agreed tasks in the supervision of offenders

New entrants to the role are required to attain a NVQ level three in work with offending behaviour.

Entrance requirements – consideration is given to candidates who have voluntary or community experience and experience of supervising the work of others.

The Probation Service in Great Britain

Probation Officers in England and Wales are no longer required to hold the Diploma in Social Work. Details of the new arrangements for training are available from Skills for Justice. (See page 6 for contact details).

In Scotland, local authorities have a responsibility to provide social work services, including social work with offenders. There is no separate probation service.

Further Information

Probation Board for Northern Ireland,
80-90 North Street, Belfast
BT1 1LD.
Tel: 028 9026 2400.
Email: info@pbni.org.uk
Web: www.pbni.org.uk

Skills for Justice in Northern Ireland:
Floor 14, Great Victoria Street, Belfast
BT2 7BA
Tel 028 90 258028
Email: Judith.thompson@skillsforjustice.com
Web: www.skillsforjustice.com

Northern Ireland Social Care Council,
7th Floor, Millennium House,
Great Victoria Street, Belfast
BT2 7AQ.
Tel: 028 9041 7600.
Email: info@niscc.n-i.nhs.uk
Web: www.niscc.info

This information was produced and updated in conjunction with the PBNI, Careers Services, DELNI and NISCC.

Careers information and vocational qualifications change rapidly. The information in this careers note was accurate at the time of going to print, but readers should check it with professional bodies or careers advisers before making decisions.

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