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Probation Qualifying Framework

This Position Statement has been produced to enable the interests of local Probation Boards and Trusts to be represented by the Probation Association in the NOMS Probation Qualifying Framework Project.

PROBATION
association

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Overview

The NOMS Agency and the employers – the local Probation Boards and Trusts in England and Wales, work together as equal partners in the collective interest: to establish and sustain a level of professional practitioner qualifying training which maintains the confidence of the courts, partners and the public and enables all practitioners to contribute to a sustained reduction in re-offending.

NOMS resources the qualifying framework, drawing from other government funding streams where possible, and commissions the providers of qualification programmes in consultation with the employers. The employers identify and express their qualifying training business needs to NOMS and determine the delivery of programmes at local level. In practice, this is likely to involve regionally managed arrangements so as to secure good value for money.

NOMS establishes appropriate arrangements for the quality assurance of programmes and the maintenance of professional standards by practitioners.

Background

In 2007, NOMS commissioned the development of a model set of new qualifying training arrangements for probation practitioners and an accompanying curriculum. Such arrangements were envisaged to encompass both Offender Management and Interventions Practitioners and also Case Administrators working directly with offenders. This work took place within the context of a review by NOMS of the Diploma in Probation Studies – the professional qualification for Probation Officers - and the arrangements surrounding its resourcing and delivery. This review appeared to conclude that the Diploma was deemed to be no longer fit for purpose.

The work undertaken on the development of a model set of new qualifying training arrangements for practitioners was subsequently suspended by NOMS in early 2008. The Probation Association's understanding is that this decision was taken primarily because the emerging new arrangements were uncoded. However, there were also concerns about the lack of detailed and consistent information in relation to the knowledge and skills of existing Probation Services Officers. Without such information, it would not be possible to map the position of each Probation Service Officer against the emerging new framework.

The Project's Business Case, Project Initiation Document and governance arrangements were revised later in 2008. The new Project Board's membership comprises:

Robin Wilkinson, Director of NOMS HR – Chair and SRO

Suzy Dymond-White, NOMS HR - Project Lead

Roger Hill, Director of Probation

Richard Cullen, Head of Probation Area Co-ordination Unit (PACU)

Mike Caldwell, Governance Services Manager, Probation Association
Elaine Lumley, Probation Chiefs Association (PCA)
Liz Hill, Regional Offender Manager (ROM) for the South West.

A Project Reference Group has also been maintained as part of these arrangements which includes Probation Association membership.

In September 2008 the revised NOMS Probation Qualifications Framework (PQF) Project commenced with the aim of arriving at a new set of probation practitioner qualification training arrangements for implementation by October 2009. This date signals the ending of the current arrangements based on the Diploma in Probation Studies. As a result of the first meeting of the Project Board in September 2008, it was agreed in principle that:

- future training will be modular
- future training will integrate academic study and operational experience
- the full qualification will be at Honours Degree level
- it will be possible for Probation Officers and Probation Service Officers to undertake different levels of training based on ability, career choice and business need¹.

The Employers' Position

As the local employers of probation practitioners, Boards and Trusts clearly have a fundamental interest in the development of any new qualifying training arrangements for those practitioners. The Probation Association welcomes its membership of the Project Board, as well as its continuing membership of the Project Reference Group, and is in agreement with the principles outlined above.

In addition to these principles, we believe that in working towards a new set of arrangements the following key considerations should also apply:

- a national framework of integrated, externally-validated qualifications applicable to all 42 Probation Areas and, ultimately, all providers of probation services
- qualifications that maintain the credibility of advice given to sentencers and the viability of non-custodial solutions to reduce re-offending
- a project scope that includes all practitioners who work directly with offenders, including Case Administrators where such work is undertaken by them in Areas
- a framework whereby Boards and Trusts, as the local employers, determine their practitioner qualifying training needs for both new entrants and existing practitioners
- qualifications which comprise core modules and specialist options that are role specific

¹ Probation Qualifications Framework NOMS Gateway Notice, 18 September 2008.

- a framework which has clear qualification pathways and provides for the assessment and accreditation of prior learning
- the gathering and analysis of valid and reliable data on Areas' workforce development needs i.e. a national skills audit of Probation Services Officers
- a framework which is affordable within the current probation training investment envelope and supported by other government funding sources such as the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) in Wales
- qualifications which are transferable, both to the wider criminal justice sector and the other parts of the UK, and which meet the requirements of the Government's new Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF).

Regarding the Diploma in Probation Studies, it is important to highlight the successful nature of this unique qualification for the probation service since its inception in 1998. However, it is also apparent that the Diploma could not have been sustained in its current form given (i) the level of investment required relative to that for Probation Service Officers and (ii) the lack of any link with Probation Services Officer progression.

Regarding the Regional Training Consortia (RTC), we believe they should be seen as valuable assets in the potential delivery of any new arrangements and should therefore be retained in some form. For example, vocational qualifications require a delivery infrastructure which would be difficult to establish quickly and this could represent a significant risk to the Project's outcomes. The RTC already have such an infrastructure in place.

Date for review: January 2009