

Creating Practice Standards for Probation Board for Northern Ireland

Following a decade as a member of the PBNI Senior Management Group, I was appointed as Inspector of Criminal Justice Services. On completion of my 4-year tenure as Inspector, I took up my full-time post as Director of the Secure Juvenile Justice Training Centre at Lisnevin. On retirement three years later, I was invited to provide an information and development service on a consultancy basis. It was in this role that I accepted the task of assisting PBNI to put in place a code of practice covering all of its responsibilities.

When I commenced work in Criminal Justice, I carried with me principles and skills from my time in the RAF.

Two related principles were:

1. A leader must lead not drive.
2. An inclusive approach is essential if desired change is to be successfully achieved.

These were the bedrock of the process applied in pursuit of the task.

A two-phase process was decided upon. Phase 1 enumerated the practical responsibilities of practitioners and their managers, including how practice should be recorded and monitored. Included in these responsibilities was a disciplinary procedure to be applied if an offender failed to comply with the requirements of the Order s/he was subject to.

Only when external monitoring showed that the foregoing was firmly established in daily practice was a move made to the second phase.

In Phase 2 additional requirements were added to reveal the level of quality staff were achieving in relation to their practical responsibilities.

When external monitoring showed that a high level of quality requirements was being met a draft code of practice was circulated for comment and agreement.

At the end of a three-year journey, it was recommended that the Board make public its newly formed code of practice. It had only been possible to reach this point because staff at all levels had been fully involved at all stages of the process. In short, they owned it.

On 1st June 2006, the PBNI Northern Ireland Standards for the assessment, management and supervision by PBNI staff of people who had been made subject to Community Sentences, Custody Probation Orders and Statutory Licences, or on whom reports are provided to the Courts or Life Sentence Review Commissioners was published.

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