

Book Review*

Probation and Parole in Ireland: Law and Practice†

Vivian Geiran and Shane McCarthy

Reviewed by Tara Kane‡

As a practitioner, I was inspired by this book's rationale to provide a single comprehensive, accessible reference guide – one that clearly details Irish probation and parole systems and includes tables on relevant legislation and case law.

As outlined in the review, this book should be of interest to practitioners working within the fields of probation, parole, legal practice and law enforcement. Where I believe it really comes into its own is as an invaluable resource and reference guide to students of social work, law, psychology and criminology. It should also be useful to practitioners engaged in working in addiction/mental health service delivery, as well as community-based organisations. Personally, I enjoyed the book's accessibility – its use of plain language, and its ability to contextualise broad concepts while seamlessly interweaving professional practice with legal/statutory obligations.

Book reviews in the *Irish Probation Journal* can, I believe, provide encouragement, acting as a catalyst in triggering interest to read the full publication. In this instance, I hope that my commentary on *Probation and Parole in Ireland: Law and Practice* encourages others to read what Professor Shane Kilcommins refers to in his Foreword as 'an excellent contribution to criminal justice knowledge in Ireland'.



* This book review appeared in vol. 19 of the *Irish Probation Journal* (2022).

† Dublin: Clarus Press Ltd, 2022, ISBN: 978-1-911611-60-8, 380 pages, paperback, €45

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The Preface to this recent publication sets the scene by reflecting on the complexities of working within probation and parole. The authors outline how practitioners bring a range of values, knowledge and skills to their work, in an effort to foster public safety and facilitate offender rehabilitation through implementing court orders, while recognising the rights and autonomy of the individual and their inherent potential. Simultaneously, professional practice is underpinned by principles of human rights and the rule of law, and is informed through research findings and practice methods.

The rationale for this text is to provide a single comprehensive, accessible reference guide – one that clearly details Irish probation and parole systems and includes tables on relevant legislation and case law. This book will be of interest to practitioners working within the fields of probation, parole, legal practice and law enforcement. Where it really comes into its own is as an invaluable resource and reference guide to students of social work, law, psychology and criminology. It will also be useful to practitioners engaged with criminal-justice-involved people as part of addiction/mental health service delivery and in community-based organisations.

Probation and Parole in Ireland contextualises the complexities of both probation and parole by utilising clear and accessible language that facilitates the reader's learning. The structure and flow of the text is well thought out, and the sequencing enables the reader to follow the journey of the service-user while also dipping in and out of standalone chapters of interest.

As a practitioner with a working knowledge of the offender's journey and the nuances of current professional practice, this reviewer was particularly drawn to the initial historical overview and the account of the evolution of probation and parole in the modern criminal justice system. The late nineteenth century saw a shift away from harsh deterrence towards offender correction, culminating in a rehabilitative model which proved influential for the twentieth century. Crofton's model of post-release supervision, developed in 1854 and utilised until the late nineteenth century, influenced modern penal policy, and we are indebted to James P. Organ whose work is acknowledged as the forerunner to current supervision practice

Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive overview of offender assessment. Beginning by contextualising offender assessments from a macro-perspective in terms of how they inform sentencing and case-management decisions, it then moves to the micro by reviewing international standards, the definition of risk, and specific risk-assessment instruments used in Ireland. The conclusion highlights the potential pitfalls, the authors stating that 'it is vital

for all key stakeholders to understand not only the role and purpose of these instruments but also their limitations' (p. 79).

This reviewer particularly enjoyed Chapter 4: Probation Work, in which probation is usefully conceptualised in three ways, namely (i) Court-imposed sanction of a probation bond; (ii) Probation practice – what probation officers do; and (iii) the organisational probation system. The authors subsequently discuss probation work from the perspective of these three categories, detailing how social work – values, principles and practice methods – underpins probation work, and the evolution of the Probation Service and probation practice in Ireland. Taking account of the partnership with community-based organisations, this section reviews the breadth of probation practice, including models, principles, statutory measures and approaches such as:

- RNR – Risk, Need and Responsivity model and what works
- Desistance and the good lives model
- Core correctional practices
- International standards
- The law on probation
- Other legislation
- Supervision during deferment of penalty
- Suspended sentences with probation supervision and other measures
- Low-intensity supervision
- Non-mandated supervision

With a focus on community service in Chapter 5, there is reference to Guilfoyle's research which summarised that, at its core, the Community Service Order had three functions: (i) as an alternative to imprisonment; (ii) as punishment; and (iii) reparative. The authors track the impact of 'value for money' and strategic reviews on the expansion of practice and the development of post-release community service (known as 'Community Return') and conclude with discussion on challenges and dilemmas, both nationally and internationally.

Restorative justice and victim engagement as emerging areas of work are the focus of Chapter 6. As with Chapters 3 and 4, the reader is provided with a comprehensive overview of the development of restorative justice and its potential for integration in probation practice. Following a discussion on the key stakeholders and models, the authors place restorative justice within the broader context of international standards and European developments.

What was important for this reviewer were the concluding comments referencing the Council of Europe guidelines on training probation and prison staff, which indicated that 'the core components of specialist training for probation officers should include mediation, restorative justice and work with victims' (p. 190).

Chapter 7 discusses the history of parole in Ireland, with an interesting focus on parole as a component of rehabilitative policy, 'offering prisoners hope as well as an opportunity to change' (p. 193). Given the enactment of the 2019 Parole Act and its commencement on 30 July 2021, significant consideration is given to the principal functions of the Interim Parole Board (advisory), the introduction of the Parole Act placing the Parole Board on a statutory basis, and the related changes in both legislation and practice. The authors review the supervisory role of the Probation Service in relation to parole, as well as the role and purpose of parole conditions in Ireland, before detailing breaches of parole and the recall process.

Chapter 8 commences with an overview of temporary release before moving to focus on court-ordered post-release supervision – where legislation, prison and probation interact. The authors take the opportunity to highlight the challenges for reintegration post release.

The focus of the last three chapters of the book is on specific categories of service-users, the issues, trends and challenges. For those working with children and young people, Chapter 9 is an important resource. Definitions and terminology are initially addressed before the authors review international standards, legislation, current policies and the Probation Service's organisational response to working with this group.

The history and development of Electronic Monitoring (EM) receives considerable attention in Chapter 10. This was quite a demanding chapter to get through, but important in highlighting how technology can enhance and effectively interface with the supervisory relationship.

The final chapter attempts to capture a number of issues that impact on probation and parole, some of which are external to probation, parole and the criminal justice system. This reviewer agrees that the criminal justice system in itself cannot address offending and victimisation and foster social justice without interagency collaboration and engagement with local communities. A number of key areas that require cross-sectoral partnerships are discussed in brief, including substance misuse, homelessness, mental health, diversity, women who offend, and emerging trends such as extremism and cybercrime.

Probation and Parole in Ireland aimed to provide a single, comprehensive, accessible reference guide to the Irish probation and parole systems. It has achieved its objective. A familiar thread throughout this book is its accessibility, its use of plain language and its ability to contextualise broad concepts while seamlessly interweaving professional practice with legal/statutory obligations. Not only is this a well-researched scholarly piece of literature, but the reader also gets a sense of the authors' extensive practice experience and wisdom. Finally, as noted by Professor Shane Kilcommins in his Foreword, the book 'will be an excellent contribution to criminal justice knowledge in Ireland'.