

Heli Niskanen
Education Planner
The Training Institute for Prison and Probation Services

EDUCATION OF PROBATION OFFICERS IN FINLAND

The Organization of Probation

The Finnish Probation system is subject to the Ministry of Justice and managed by the Criminal Sanctions Agency. The amount of the personnel is 265. The daily amount of the customers was approximately 4700 in the year 2008.

In the beginning of this year the administration of probation services and prison services were united.

At the present the organisation of probation includes 15 regional offices and local units. However, next year there will be radical changes in the organisation of probation and the planning of the structure and functions of the new organisation is still going on. The idea is, that the functions of probation and prison services will be united.

System of Recruitment of Probation Officers

In Finland we don't have specific education for probation officers. Furthermore, at the present there are no formal qualification for the post of probation officer, except those of the leading positions. However, this situation is going to change next year, and the required qualification for the post in probation service is the degree at the University of applied sciences. In practise, the degree at the University of applied sciences in the field of social sciences has actually been the recommendation for the positions of probation already for a long time.

All those who have graduated from upper secondary school or vocational school are able to apply for the degree programme.

System of Education: Universities of Applied Sciences

Universities of applied sciences are authorised by the government. The authorisation determines their educational mission, fields of education, student numbers and location. Universities of applied sciences have autonomy in their internal affairs. This is a remarkable advantage when we think of the reforming of the curriculum; the rapidly changing labour market demands changes in contents and objectives of the training to be done nearly every year.

The Target and Performance Management by the State

Universities of applied sciences have three tasks set by law: research and development, regional development, and pedagogy. These tasks promotes the emergence of the regional network and productive cooperation among the various actors from the industry, business, public sector, universities and universities

of applied sciences. For instance, in some region of the country this has enabled productive cooperation between probation, the University and the University of applied sciences.

Additionally, through target and performance management the government and the ministries steer agencies and institutions in their administrative sectors towards the goals desired.

For instance, the functional changes in the field of criminal sanctions attained through performance management create new requirements for the competences of the personnel. On the other hand, the universities of the applied sciences pursue to respond with efficiency to these demands due to their target performance set in the negotiation with the ministry of education.

Description of the Degree Programme in Universities of Applied Sciences

The scope of the Degree Programme in University of applied sciences is 210 credits and the duration of the degree is 3.5 years. Studies progress in accordance with each student's personal study plan, and this enables to use transfercredits from prior studies .

The degree includes 45 credits of practical studies. Job placements are central learning environments when becoming familiar with the practices of the field. The aim of the Degree Programmes is to train professionally competent people to fill management and expertise positions in there own field and people who are investigative developers of their work and of the workplace

In the year 2002 one of our universities of applied sciences started the Degree Programme in Correctional Sciences. This is the only national degree programme in the branch. From this Degree Programme graduates annually 25 – 50 students and some of them are placed in probation, especially in the offices of southern Finland.

Relations between Systems of Recruitment and Education

Usually, there are dozens of applicants for the open posts in the units of the probation. As mentioned earlier, in many cases, the person recruited to the position has graduated from the University of applied sciences in the field of social services. Furthermore, the employees are more likely to be recruited among those who have had their job placements in probation offices after they have firstly have their job placements in other municipal service units. This kind of background provides probation officers with good competence to encounter the customer. However, due to the rapidly changing working life the demands to have employees with stronger theoretical background and broad-based competence is increasing . At the present this kind of competence is achieved best by the University degree.

What is also characteristics to the personnel of probation field, is that it is mainly the young females who apply for the education and after that for the field. This is the situation with the whole field of social sciences. However, the hope is, that more men and immigrants would be among probation officers.