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■ On becoming a good probation worker

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Joep Hanrath & Kimberly Verbaan

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Summary

The Confederation of European Probation detects a clear need for a central record of training and qualification requirements, standards or curricula for probation and community supervision practitioners in EU Member States.

Hogeschool Utrecht (UAS) has been commissioned to conduct a survey to collect an overview of qualification requirements and training of probation workers in order to set up a network to share knowledge, competencies and expertise among members' states.

The research question is:

What kind of formation precedes the start of a career of a probation worker in the various EU Member states and how does it develop throughout his or her career?

In order to answer this question, an online survey with closed and open questions has been send out among CEP members that provide or are responsible for probation services. Twenty of them filled out the questionnaire covering 18 different countries.

The survey addressed the following:

- the services delivered by the organisations and the level of education required for its performance;
- the admission procedures used and the required entry qualifications;
- required training prior to admission, as part of the introduction or as follow-up during employment;
- topics for future training.

Conclusions:

- Probation services cover four areas of which monitoring & report are the most important.
- The minimal entry level of education is tertiary level 5-6-7 ISCED/ (BA-MA).
- All organisations select and train new recruits. Introductory training is compulsory and different forms of on-the-job learning are offered.
- Contrary to the general tertiary level of education, the introduction training focuses on specific skills and knowledge aiming for general standards of effective probation work.
- Probation workers develop their skills over time through experience & training;
- Need for further training focuses on specific themes related to general standards for effective probation work as well as topics related to self-efficacy and protection from burn out.



1. Introduction

At present, there is no central record of training and qualification requirements, standards or curricula for probation and community supervision practitioners in the European Union. However with new policy developments in EU criminal justice there is a clear need for an overview.

The Confederation of European Probation (CEP) has appointed the research group Working with mandated clients of the University of Applied Sciences (UAS) Utrecht to conduct a survey on pre-employment and in-career training for probation and community supervision practitioners in the EU.

This report presents the results of the 18 participating EU-countries in this survey. It is a first inquiry to establish the baseline for pre-employment and in-career training in these countries.

2. Problem statement

The Confederation of European Probation (CEP) is a network that includes probation organisations within the 28 EU member states as well as the 47 members of the Council of Europe. The aim of the probation organisations within the CEP is to 'promote the social inclusion of offenders through community sanctions and measures such as probation, community service, mediation and conciliation' (CEP, 2019a). Probation in Europe (Kalmthout & Durnescu, 2014) covers activities ranging from non- custodial sanctions and protected supervision, to custodial interventions and pre and post release supervision. Its tasks can be classified in four areas (Pitts & Tigges, 2016):

2.1 Pre-Trial / Pre-Sentence advise

Pre-Trial / Pre-Sentence advise

- Information to assist the Court in decisions to avoid pre-trial detention (application of bail or suspension of pre-trial detention on condition)
- Provide Pre-Trial/Pre-Sentence Report

Non-custodial Options

- Community Order (e.g. Community Service, Supervision, Electronic Monitoring)
- Suspended Prison Sentence with conditions

Immediate Custody

- Parole Reports
- Support for preparation for release (including education and work)

(Early) Release

- Managing prisoner 'through the gate' and post release.

The four areas indicate that probation services cover a whole range of activities. However, not all the probation services provide the same services. The differences in services also reflects differences in the professionals employed. Due to their recent start as probation service, some Eastern European countries employ former prison guards or bailiffs as probation worker. Other countries, sometimes due to a longer history in the development of their practice, employ multiple job descriptions for probation workers. So, as a consequence of the variety of tasks and of the overall maturity of the organisation, differences in job descriptions and level of education are likely to occur.

In order to support probation workers in their professional development it is important to have an overview over the different pathways of formation of probation workers in Europe that concur with the tasks labeled in the four areas and the overall matureness of the organisation. What job descriptions, within this framework, are used? And do these job descriptions require different levels of education?

2.2 International qualification for education

The international qualifications for education programs (UNESCO, 2011) rates education in 8 levels. Primary education, up to level 2, is generally considered as compulsory and provided for at the age of 5 up to 10-12 years old.

Level 2, lower secondary education, is the foundation for lifelong learning and human development upon which education systems may then expand further educational opportunities. It ends 8-11 years after the start of primary education. Some education systems may offer vocational education programs at ISCED level 2 to provide individuals with skills relevant to employment.

Level 3, upper secondary education, and level 4 follow different pathways. Level 3 is designed to complete secondary education in preparation for tertiary education or to provide skills relevant to employment, or both. Level 4 is vocationally oriented. The programs may be referred to in many ways, for example: technician diploma or primary professional education.

Tertiary education builds on secondary education, providing learning activities in specialized fields of study. It aims at learning at a high level of complexity and specialization. Tertiary education includes what is commonly understood as academic education but also includes advanced vocational or professional education. It comprises ISCED levels 5 (short-cycle tertiary education), 6 (Bachelor), 7 (Master) and 8 (doctoral).

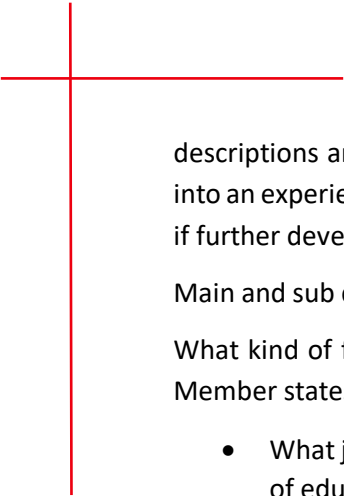
At present there is no overview of the minimal ISCED level required to become probation worker in one or more of the four areas. Nor is there an overview of whether the required level of education is either vocational education or academic at level (5), 6.7.

Education is provided for by many educational bodies and authorities established in EU Member States. These bodies may be Schools, Polytechnics, Universities as well as service organisations. The ISCED qualifications are based on generally recognized educational qualifications. In some EU countries these ISCED qualifications coincide with curricula for specific, targeted groups of professionals such as police academies or prison/probation academies. In other CE Member States ISCED qualifications are considered to be a more general education that is to be completed with specific training by professional organisations in order to start your career as a probation worker. Hence, it is important to establish the entry requirement for the probation worker on both the minimum ISCED level as well as additional training to start a career as probation worker.

Finally, once started, it is likely that further development of expertise is required as part of a career development from novice to expert or senior probation worker because they acquire more tacit knowledge during their work.

2.3 To summarize

Given the four areas of probation and the varying level of maturity, probation organisations will offer different services and it is likely that they employ different job descriptions for these services. Therefore, it is important to check job description(s), tasks linked to these job



descriptions and the initial and subsequent education and training to start and develop oneself into an experienced probation worker for the appropriate task. Finally, it will be important to know if further development to become an expert/senior professional requires additional training.

Main and sub questions in this survey are therefore:

What kind of formation precedes the start of a career of a probation worker in the various EU Member states and how does it develop throughout her or his career?

- What job descriptions, within the four areas, are used by the organisations and what level of education is required for their performance?
- What kind of admission procedure is used and how is this linked to education?
- Which educational topics are relevant at the start and which during the development of their career?
- Which kind of educational topics are important for the future?

3. Research method

The participants of this study are the probation services in the EU with CEP-membership. Managing directors of (head) offices were approached to fill out an online questionnaire. The questionnaires were filled out by them or by delegated staff members of their organization.

The software Qualtrics was used for the distribution of the questionnaire. It enables closed as well as open ended questions. A draft of 39, predominantly closed, questions was submitted for feedback to an advisory board of experts in probation services and adjusted after their feedback.

The answer categories for the following closed questions, *the type introduction period, the desired specific knowledge and training topics*, are based on an exploratory inventory among a number of stakeholders. However, respondents in this survey were invited to give their own additions to the given answer categories by means of the option 'other'.

The survey has been sent to 40 organizations that provide or are responsible for probation services. Of these organizations, 30 participants started the questionnaire and 20 questionnaires were completed.

The online survey enabled a real time monitoring on the progress of the response. Those who started but not yet completed the questionnaire were approached to inform if they experienced any difficulties. On three occasions a refresh - link (to prevent a double count) was sent to continue the questionnaire that already had been started, two of them replied and are included in the 20 completed questionnaires.

The questionnaire has been sent to the organizations that are members of CEP. An overview of the organizations is shown below.

	Name of the organization	Name of the country	Operational for
1	Kriminalvården - Swedish prison and probation service	Sweden	>20 years
2	National Probation Directorate	Romania	> 5 < 20 years
3	Ministry of Justice	Slovakia	> 20 years
4	Reclassering Nederland	The Netherlands	> 20 years
5	Ufficio III -formazione area penale esterna e giustizia minorile- -Ministero della Giustizia	Italy	> 20 years
6	Houses of Justice in Flanders	Belgium	> 20 years
7	National Probation Service	United Kingdom	> 20 years
8	SCAS (Service Central d'assistance sociale)	Luxembourg	> 20 years

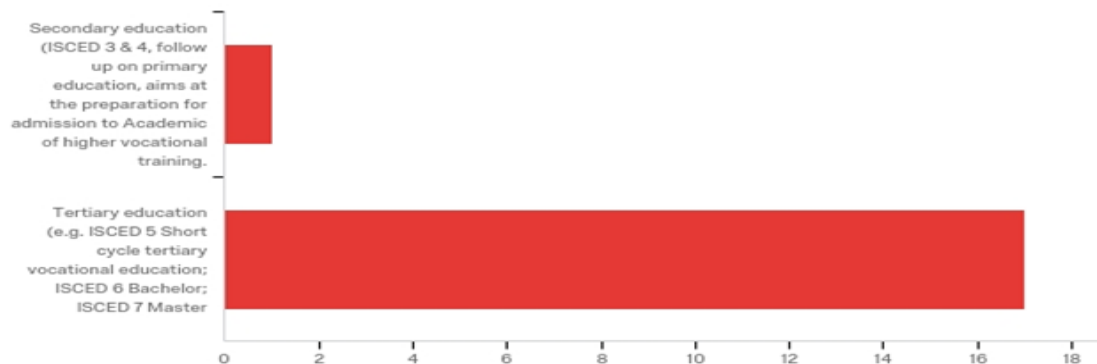
9	Fundation IReS	Spain/ Cataluna	> 20 years
10	Department of Justice	Spain/ Cataluna	> 20 years
11	Fundacio Apip Acam	Spain/Cataluna	
12	Criminal Sanctions Agency	Finland	> 20 years
13	Department of Probation and Parole	Malta	> 20 years
14	Directorate-General of Reintegration and Prison Services	Portugal	> 20 years
15	The Probation Service	Ireland	> 20 years
16	Probacijski ured Bjelovar	Croatia	> 5 < 20 years
17	State Probation Service	Latvia	> 5 < 20 years
18	Ecole Nationale d'Administration Pénitentiaire	France	> 20 years
19	Ministry of Justice, Probation Department	Slovenia	< 5 years
20	Ambulanter Justizsozialdienst Niedersachsen	Germany	>20 years

Almost all these organisations haven been providing probation services for more than twenty years. Three of them have a more recent start and one of them started as a national service only in April 2018, but before that, their probation duties were carried out by local social services.

4. Results

4.1 Admission qualification of the probation workers

The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) is used as a cross-nationally comparable measure of education (Schneider; Kogan, 1997, p.14). Almost every organisation requires tertiary education (ISCED 5,6 or 7) to become a probation worker at their organisation. Only one organisation requires a secondary vocational education (ISCED 3 or 4).



4.2 Classification in the four areas

In accordance with the classification of probation services in four areas (Pitts & Tigges, 2016):

Pre-Trial / Pre-Sentence advise

- Information to assist the Court in decisions to avoid pre-trial detention (application of bail or suspension of pre-trial detention on condition)
- Provide Pre-Trial/Pre-Sentence Report

Non-custodial Options

- Community Order (e.g. Community Service, Supervision, Electronic Monitoring)
- Suspended Prison Sentence with conditions

Assistance Immediate Custody

- Parole Reports
- Support for preparation for release (including education and work)

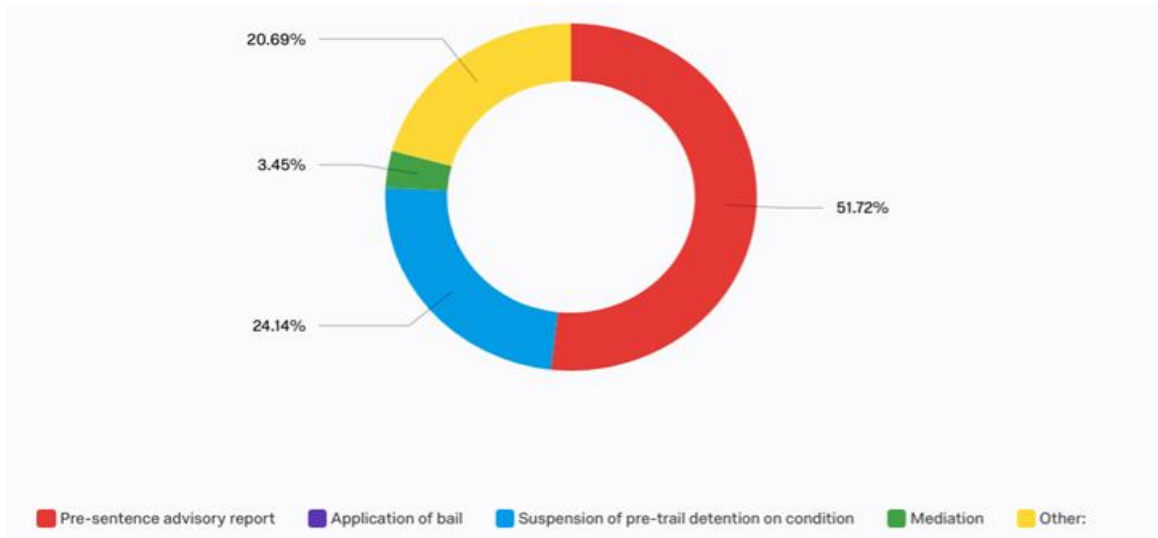
(Early) Release

- Managing prisoner 'through the gate' and post release.

Respondents were asked if their probation service engages in the areas mentioned and what entry level of education is required for every of these four areas.

4.2.1 Area 1 Pre-Trial / Pre-Sentence advise

To provide pre-trial / pre-sentence information and advice to judicial and other deciding authorities to help them reach informed and just decisions.



The participating respondents (N=20) emphasize the activities on Pre-sentence advisory report (15 countries) and Suspension of pre-trial detention on condition (8 countries). Mediation is mentioned once (1). Three countries did not report any activity in this category of Pre-Trial / Pre-Sentence advise.

Other activities that were mentioned are:

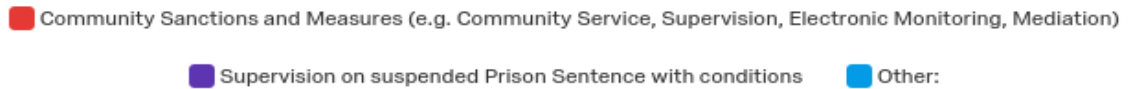
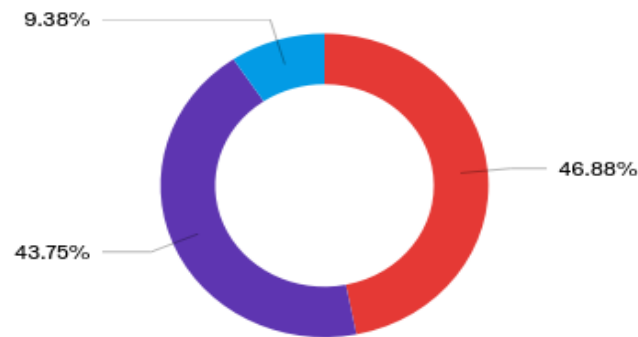
1. Assessment on previously served sentences by the offender to help judicial authorities in the decision on new offenses; mandatory pre-sentence/pre-trial reports in case of the imposition of a) community service b) electronic monitoring or c) attendance of a program of social training/education.
2. Development of reintegration programs; electronic monitoring;
3. Reports regarding victims and witnesses, to establish the credibility and level of harm; early oral settlement.

The minimum level of education required for this area:

Q12 Education Pre-Trial / Pre- Sentence advise (N=20)	Perc.	Count
Secondary education (follow-up on primary education) [ISCED 3-4]	6%	1
Short cycle tertiary vocational education [ISCED 5];	18%	3
Bachelor (Applied sciences / Polytechnic / Fachhochschule or Academic) [ISCED 6]	53%	9
Master (Applied sciences/ Polytechnic/Fachhochschule or Academic) [ISCED7]	23%	4

4.2.2 Area 2: Non-custodial Options

To provide Community Order (e.g. Community Service, Supervision, Electronic Monitoring) and Suspended Prison Sentence with conditions



On both topics (N=20), Community sanctions and measures (15) as well as Supervision on suspended sentence are reported as almost equally important (14). However, 3 countries do not report any activity in this category of non-custodial options.

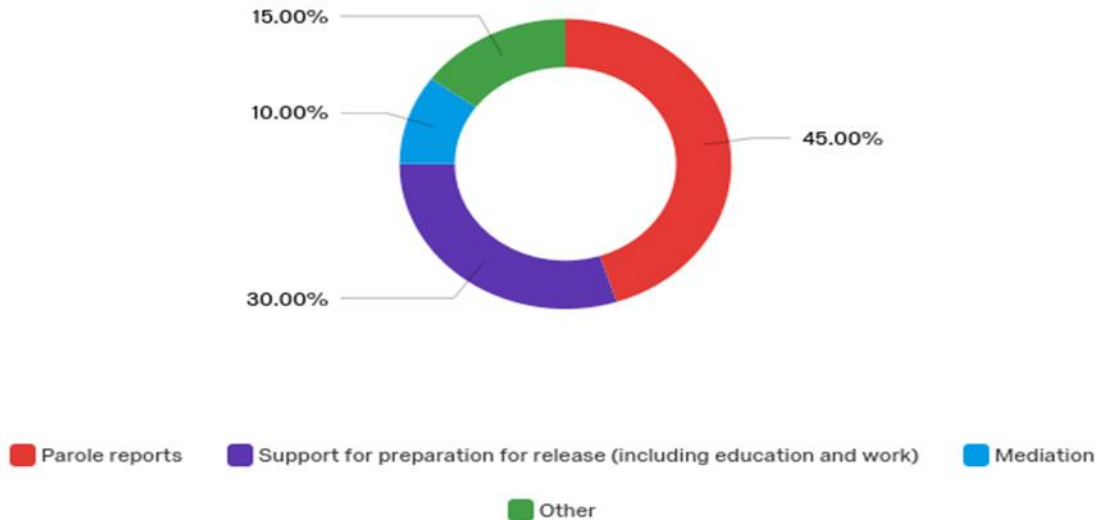
Other activities that were mentioned are: report follow-up court, parole, post custody supervision and supervised temporary release.

The minimum level of education required for this area:

Q14 Education Non-custodial Options (N=20)	Perc.	Count
Secondary education (follow-up on primary education) [ISCED 3-4]	11%	2
Short cycle tertiary vocational education [ISCED 5];	22%	4
Bachelor (Applied sciences / Polytechnic / Fachhochschule or Academic) [ISCED 6]	50%	9
Master (Applied sciences Polytechnic/Fachhochschule or Academic) [ISCED7]	17%	3

4.2.3 Area 3 Assistance Immediate Custody

To provide Parole Reports and Support for preparation for release (including education and work)



In the category Assistance Immediate Custody (N=20), 7 countries do not report any activity in this category. For the remaining respondents the emphasis is on Parole reports (9), followed by Support for preparation for release (6) and Mediation (2). The combination Parole report and Support for preparation is provided by 4.

Other activities that were mentioned are:

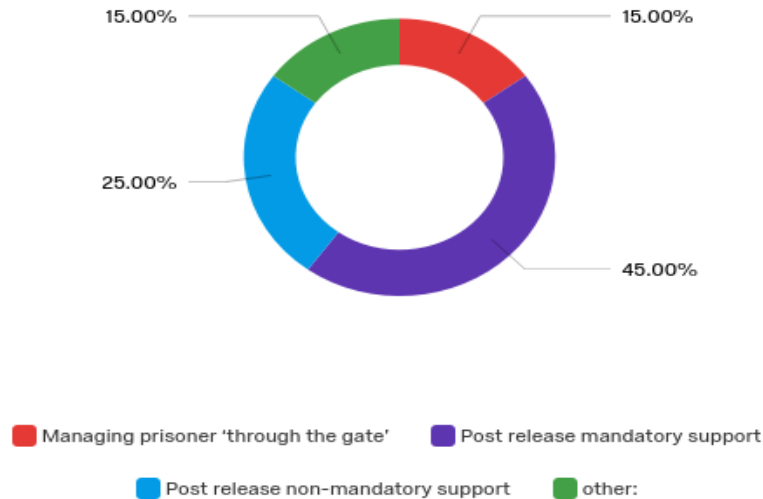
- Release on temporary license and home detention curfew (HDC) reports.
- Support is provided by volunteer mentors, based on a dedicated mentor program.
- Our probation officers are responsible for alternatives to prison sentences.

The minimum level of education required for this area:

Q16 Education Assistance Immediate Custody (N=20)	Perc.	Count
Secondary education (follow-up on primary education) [ISCED 3-4]	8%	1
Short cycle tertiary vocational education [SCED 5];	17%	2
Bachelor (Applied sciences / Polytechnic / Fachhochschule or Academic) [ISCED 6]	50%	6
Master (Applied sciences Polytechnic/Fachhochschule or Academic) [ISCED7]	25%	3

4.2.4 Area 4: (Early) Release

To manage the prisoner 'through the gate', preparation of release and post release resettlement



In the category (Early) Release, 6 respondents from different countries indicated that they don't employ any activity in this area. The remaining respondents emphasize Post release mandatory support (9), followed by Post release non-mandatory support (5) and managing prisoner 'through the gate' (3). Of the respondents, 1 combines managing prisoners through the gate with both mandatory and non-mandatory support.

Other activities mentioned are:

- Support is provided by volunteer mentors, who work based on a dedicated mentor program
- Our probation officers don't have this function.

Minimum level of education required in this area:

Q18 Education (Early) Release (N=20)	Perc.	Count
Secondary education (follow-up on primary education) [ISCED 3-4]	0%	0
Short cycle tertiary/vocational education [ISCED 5];	15%	2
Bachelor (Applied sciences / Polytechnic / Fachhochschule or Academic) [ISCED 6]	64%	9
Master (Applied sciences Polytechnic/Fachhochschule or Academic) [ISCED7]	21%	3

4.2.5 Most performed area.

In the survey participants were asked to 'drag & drop' the four areas, mentioned above, into the position from 1 (most) to 4 (least) performed area. That gives the following result (N=16):

1. Monitor and assist persons subject to early release and non-custodial sentences.
2. Provide pre-trial/pre-sentence information and advice to judicial and other deciding authorities to help them reach informed and just decisions.
3. Assistance of offenders at pre-sentence immediate custody and preparation of their release and resettlement.
4. Assistance of offenders at post-sentence imprisonment and preparation of their release and resettlement.

4.3 Admission and training

4.3.1 Recruitment and introduction

Almost 64% (N=19) of the probation workers are recruited at a national level. Others are recruited by local probation services (36%). To apply for a position pre-printed forms or open application letters sometimes supported by references and police clearance are required. Followed by an interview (40%), a structured personality assessment (17,50%) or competitive entry exams (25%) and occasionally an observation period.

Except for one, all respondents (N=18) indicate that an introduction training is given within the first 12 months of the probation workers appointment. The introduction training is mandatory for all workers (100%) with no experience in probation.

The introduction period is given shape in different ways (N=16):

Mentoring & supervision by senior probation workers	27%	15
'On-the-job' shadowing, building up a caseload, from low risk cases to regular probation	23%	13
Classes/lectures/assignments:	20%	11
Exams to become a licensed probation worker	8%	4
Video recording of sessions with clients	6%	3
Other*	16%	9

*Other is described as:

1. Tests but not for a license.
2. Qualification completion VQ3 for probation services Officers, Probations Officers require a degree or VQ3 to join and then complete a diploma in probation studies and a VQ L5 (UK).
3. Much of the work of probation officers is carried out by two professionals (summaries, judicial examinations, expert witness of credibility, etc.) which allows to make an

assignment during the period of training of new technicians, combining a technician with experience with one in training. This kind of training is compulsory for everyone regardless of the degree of prior specific training.

4. Internship at different justice jobs and advanced training.
5. A two week induction program is provided, as well as ongoing access to the training.
6. Online training on different subjects.

These remarks specify the given categories.

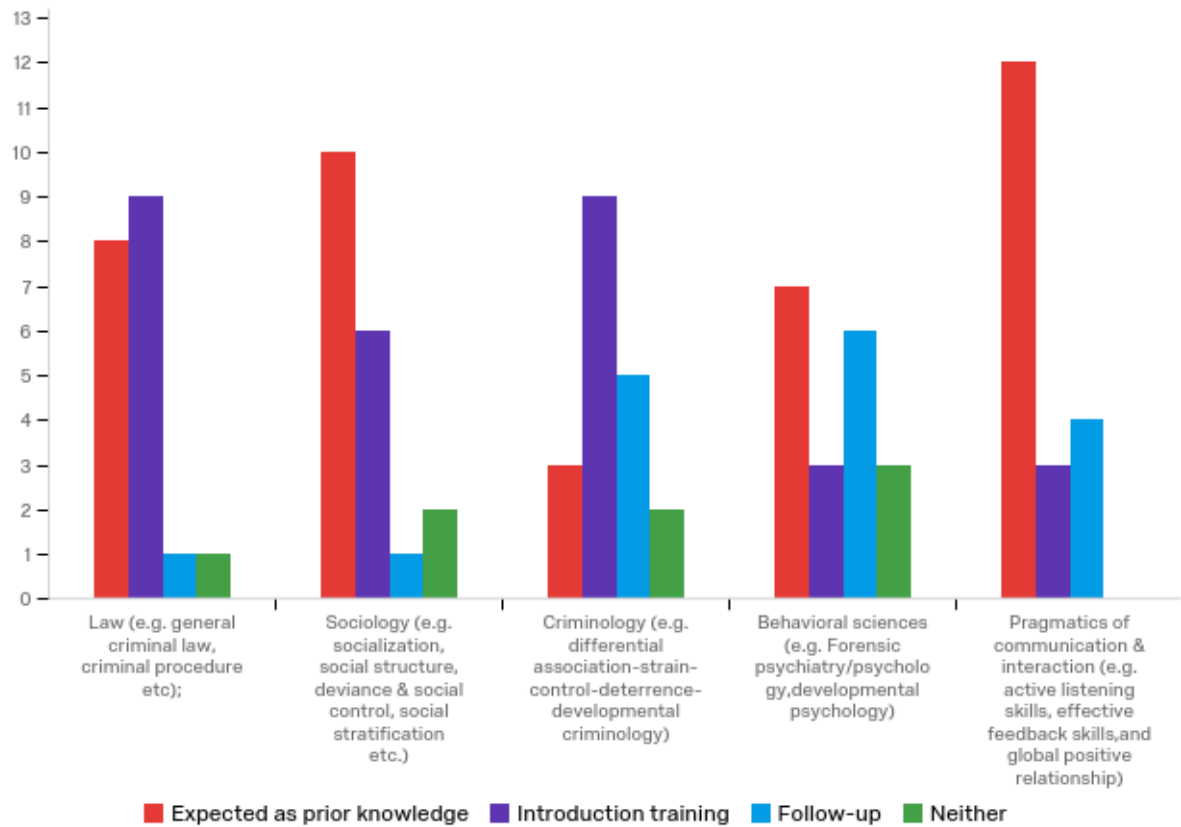
All respondents (N=19) agree that the probation worker develops knowledge and skills during his or her employment. Experience in the field, combined with a training program enables the probation worker to develop into an experienced probation worker according to the respondents.



According to the respondents, the probation worker develops knowledge and skills during his employment, though less on the topics *'meets within the legal framework, as much as possible self-determination of the client'* and *'cares for his or her personal emotional and mental stability, especially during stressful situations'*.

4.4 Relevant knowledge prior, at the start and during their employment

Prior to the start as probation worker, respondents (N=19) consider general knowledge regarding the pragmatics of communication, as well as basic knowledge of sociology, law and behavioral science to be important. Criminology, law and sociology are important during the introduction training whereas in follow-up training the emphasis shifts to criminology, behavioral science and pragmatics of communication.



In addition to the more general knowledge about the subjects mentioned above, there are a number of more specific items that are considered important knowledge before joining as a probation officer.

Specific items related to probation

A number of specific items were addressed to see what items are expected as '*prior to employment knowledge*' and what items are part of '*the introductory training*'.

Topics relevant for knowledge and skills of probation workers (N=20)	Prior to engagement	Introductory training
Privacy and protection of client data	0	15
Risk assessment	1	14
Writing advisory/ pre-sentence report	3	12
Legislation concerning the implementation of the probation measures	6	12
working with non-co-operative offenders/ handling misconduct	1	12
Documentation of supervision	0	11
Motivational interviewing	2	11
Practical application of R.N.R. principles	1	11
Enforcement of different community sanctions and measures	5	10
Ethics of probation work (e.g. protection of human dignity, care and assistance, fairness offenders rights; corruption)	8	9
Implementing structured intervention programs based on R.N.R principal and focused towards desistance	0	8
Use of social media in the supervision of the offender	1	8
Pro social Modelling & Problem solving	5	7
Principles and practical application of desistance	4	7
Conflict resolution	5	6
Engagement and positioning skills /nonviolent communication	7	6
Case-management and working within a network;	11	6
Intercultural awareness	6	4
Restorative Justice/ mediation	2	4
Other	2	3
	70	175

All options can be scored as either 'prior' (70) or 'introductory' (175) or 'follow-up' (72). The table shows that specific performance-oriented topics are part of the introduction training.

As for the follow-up training, the items mentioned the most are:

• Implementing structured intervention programs based on RNR principles and focused towards desistance	8
• Restorative Justice/ mediation	7
• Principles and practical application of desistance	6
• Practical application of R.N.R. principles	5
• Conflict resolution	5
• Intercultural awareness	5
• Pro social Modelling & Problem solving	4
• Engagement and positioning skills /nonviolent communication	4
• Working with non-co-operative offenders/ handling misconduct	4
• Documentation of supervision	4
• Use of social media in the supervision of the offender	4

A number of issues concern the ability of the probation worker to manage the daily work; the protection of personal data in contact with clients, the pressure of the workload, the emotional stress of dealing with their clients, and teamwork within the organization. All of these issues are part of the introductory course, especially protection of personal data (16) and reflection on personal development (9) are important topics. But once passed the introductory period, burn-out protection becomes the most important topic (9). Burn-out is considered an important issue for further development and training (15) as well as:

- Reflection on personal development in handling probation supervision (12)
- Training teamwork & decision making skills (11)
- Training managing your case-load (9)

Furthermore the following topics are pointed out as relevant for development of future expertise:

- Intercultural awareness (11)
- Conflict resolution (10)
- Ethics of probation work (e.g. protection of human dignity, care and assistance, fairness offenders rights; corruption) (9)
- Restorative Justice/ mediation (9)
- Principles and practical application of desistance (8)
- Practical application of R.N.R. principles (8)
- Case-management and working within a network (8)

Suggestion for other topics are:

- Methodologies to involve community resources
- Assertivity
- Need for advanced training for experienced staff

5. Conclusion

The research question of this survey was:

What kind of formation precedes the start of a career of a probation worker in the various EU Member states and how does it develop throughout his or her career?

In order to answer this question, an overview was needed of the services provided by the probation organisations. The overview of the services shows that there are differences but that the services all fit in the four areas;

1. pre-trial/pre-sentence advise;
2. non-custodial options;
3. assistance immediate custody;
4. (early) release.

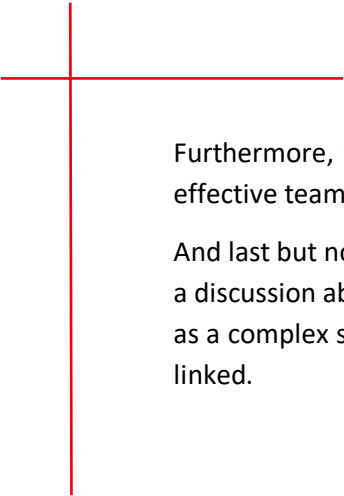
Of these four areas, the non-custodial options to monitor and assist persons subject to early release and pre-trial/pre-sentence advise and report are the most common services.

Almost all new recruits need a general starting qualification on the tertiary level of education, being either level 5 short cycle tertiary education or bachelor/master level 6/7, professional or academic.

Recruitment and selection of probation workers, centralized as well as decentralized, is done in several ways: interviews, structured personality assessment or competitive entry exams. Training is sometimes part of the recruitment processes but always a compulsory part of an induction period to become probation worker.

The general starting qualification on the tertiary level of education is not sufficient to start off as a probation worker. Basic qualifications point in the direction of general knowledge necessary to know the pragmatics of communication, the concept of law and (criminal) law procedures, human behavioral and sociological structure of society. However, introduction training focuses on specific professional knowledge regarding operational (work) procedures and general standards for effective probation work. An introduction period consists not only of lectures with transfer of knowledge. Other forms, such as mentoring and 'on-the-job-shadowing', ensure that new employees can gain experience under supervision in order to build up a caseload, from low risk cases to regular probation.

Although a range of topics related to general standards for effective probation work are addressed in the introductory formation period, these topic remain important for further development. The application of concepts like RNR, Desistance, Restorative Justice, and Mediation can be further elaborated.



Furthermore, topics related to self-efficacy, such as reflection, managing (your) caseload, and effective teamwork, are mentioned and rated to be important.

And last but not least, burn-out is considered a major topic to be addressed in the near future. In a discussion about the preliminary results of this research, this theme was recognized and named as a complex subject to which both questions about organization and personal development are linked.



6. Recommendation

This survey provides an outline on education and training prior to and after employment as well as topics for the further development of professional expertise. It is therefore recommended to start a network with these organisations to map and articulate more precisely the current learning needs in the different countries. Furthermore the network could draft a strategy to connect these needs to (existing) academic knowledge and training expertise and tailor it to national or local needs for the improvement of effective probation work.



7. Discussion

The questionnaire has been distributed among members of the CEP. The member organisations differ in size and reach. Some cover several thousands of employees nationwide, whereas others are small, regional and sometimes in their early stages of development.

The results offer a first overview, a baseline on the formal perception of what is important in the formation of the probation worker. Only through further research and exchanging details of this formal perception becomes visible.

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