

**Is the day of a probation officer in Germany similar to the one of someone working in Romania? In the series ‘A day in the life of a probation officer’, we publish articles written by probation officers from different countries in Europe to see if their days look alike or are very different from each other. This article is written by Patricia Hackett, a Probation Officer from Northern Ireland.**



No two days working in probation are ever the same. Every day brings new challenges and opportunities and that is what I love about the job. I have been working for the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) since before I qualified as a Social Worker in June 2019. During my social work studies I secured a temporary post as a community service officer in Omagh. Working in this role I gained a good understanding of the range and breadth of work carried out by probation and once qualified I then secured a job as a probation officer in Magherafelt which is in Mid Ulster, a rural area of Northern Ireland.

Due to COVID-19 my pattern of working at the moment is two days in the office and three days at home each week. I am seeing service users on a one-to-one basis in the office and I also get the space to do paperwork, participate in partnership meetings and write pre-sentence reports while working remotely.

### **Morning**

Depending on where I am the day starts differently. At home I will get the laptop on and check messages and emails first thing and respond to any potential reported incidents/arrests. In the office there can be a number of reports for Crown and Magistrates' courts that need attention, and it is a good opportunity to catch up with colleagues and share experiences.

In the office, I will have supervision appointments with service users, mixed with report writing appointments to gather the information needed to complete the report for court. As part of their supervision, I complete one-to-one brief interventions with service users, as part of their case plan.

I attend a range of meetings every day including risk strategy meetings, team meetings and meetings organised by Social Services and other statutory agencies. These meetings provide a forum for information sharing and the development of plans to appropriately manage risks which service users may pose.

During lunchtime we all stop working and have lunch together. Working from home full-time lasted so many months and now we are all pleased to be able to talk face to face, whilst still observing necessary precautions and social distancing where required!

On a Wednesday I may be on Court duty and that means in front of a screen all day via Sight link (the Courts Service remote system). The team completes Court duty on a rota basis. Working through Sight Link has its benefits as it saves travel time to Court and I can work away when I am not needed in Court.

### **Afternoon**

I have a number of people on my caseload, all of varying offences from drugs-related offences, driving offences and domestic violence offences. Service users who have been convicted of a domestic violence-related offence complete one of PBNI's programmes Building Better Relationships or Respectful Relationships. A number of assessments are completed with each service user at the pre-sentence stage, consultation takes place with PBNI Psychology and I gather information from other agencies such as the Police and Social Services to determine the most appropriate programme for the individual.

In cases of domestic abuse, while the service user completes the programme, I work closely with the Partner Support Worker, if applicable. The PSW is employed by PBNI to work with the partner of the perpetrator so that we can carefully manage the domestic circumstances and where appropriate keep lines of communication open. It is also very important if there are children involved. This partnership approach is crucial to supporting the victim, and for their protection – letting them know where help is available.

Recently, one of my service users who was on a Licence, had committed serious further offences and I initiated recall proceedings after consultation with my manager. He had been arrested and remanded for similar, more serious offences to his index offence for which he was on Licence for.

In interviewing him for the recall report I was in a position to interrogate his motivation in reoffending. Interestingly he fully acknowledged that he was guilty of the new offences and didn't challenge the recall, this could potentially be a difficult conversation but he stated that 'he knew the risks and did it anyway', although now he was aware of the consequences he regretted not taking on board the work we had been doing.

After submission of my recall report to the Parole Commissioners, he was subsequently recalled. I then participated in an oral hearing whereby I provided evidence to the Parole Commissioners on his suitability for release. As a result, the Parole Commissioners made the decision to not release him and he is now serving the remainder of his sentence in custody.

This job provides a real opportunity to make a difference in people's lives. One of the most satisfying parts of the job is knowing that I am contributing to making this community safer. If I can work with one person and prevent them from reoffending in the future that can have a

huge impact not only on that individual but on their family and the wider community in the Mid Ulster area.