

Workload in Probation – A Call for Papers

Few conditions shape the everyday reality of probation practice as profoundly as workload. Practitioners across jurisdictions consistently describe their work as ‘relentless’, pointing to rising caseloads, expanding administrative demands and diminishing resources (Phillips et al., 2016; Norman & Ricciardelli, 2022). While caseload size – the number of supervised individuals per professional – has long served as the dominant metric, scholars have argued that it captures only part of the picture: workload encompasses the full range of tasks, responsibilities and emotional demands placed upon practitioners, including report writing, risk assessment, inter-agency work and the performance of emotional labour (DeMichele & Payne, 2018; Westaby et al., 2020). Attempts to define adequate caseload standards have repeatedly demonstrated how difficult it is to translate the complexity of probation work into workable numbers (Geiran & Durnescu, 2019).

The consequences of excessive workload are increasingly well documented along two lines of research. The first concerns outcomes for people under supervision. The evidence is mounting that an excessive workload is associated with poorer probation outcomes (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2021; Fox et al., 2022; Robinson et al., 2014). The second line of research concerns the probation workforce itself. Contemporary studies link workload to emotional exhaustion, depressive symptoms, sickness absence, resignations and staff shortages – dynamics that risk becoming self-reinforcing, as vacancies further increase the workload of remaining staff (Barrett & Cartwright, 2025; Phillips et al., 2024; Haggard, 2025). Workload is thus not merely a managerial variable but a matter of occupational identity, professional discretion and legitimacy.

Despite the European Probation Rules’ explicit requirement that caseloads “shall have a caseload which allows them to supervise, guide and assist offenders effectively and humanely” (Council of Europe, 2010), remarkably little is known about how workload is defined, measured, allocated and experienced across European probation systems. The existing evidence base is dominated by research from the United States and England and Wales, while comparative European perspectives remain rare. This special issue therefore aims to bring together conceptual, empirical and comparative contributions on workload in probation, in order to advance theory, inform policy debates on staffing and workload measurement, and support sustainable working conditions for probation staff across Europe and beyond.

We recognise that the language, organisational structures, and professional responsibilities associated with probation, and justice work generally vary internationally. Accordingly, we welcome submissions addressing workload across the wider justice workforce, including justice social work, community corrections and related professions, particularly where workload arises through partnership and interagency working.

Contributions to this special issue may address, but are not limited to, the following themes:

- Conceptualising and measuring workload: caseload versus workload, workload measurement tools and weighted caseload models.
- The relationship between caseload size, supervision quality and outcomes (e.g., recidivism, breach, compliance, desistance).

- Workload, occupational stress, burnout, wellbeing, sickness absence, staff retention and turnover.
- Workload allocation, management strategies and organisational responses to staff shortages and recruitment crises.
- Workload and the quality of working relationships, including perspectives of professionals and people under probation.
- Workload in the context of organisational reform, managerialism, austerity and changing probation mandates.
- Digitalisation, technology and administrative burden in probation work.
- Comparative European perspectives, international standards (e.g., the European Probation Rules) and workload in emerging probation systems.
- Historical and theoretical perspectives on workload, professional discretion and occupational identity.

The journal traditionally focuses upon peer reviewed full-length articles. This special edition seeks to offer a platform to include full length and shorter pieces which focus upon the lived experience of workload in probation practice. The aim is to encourage contributions from researchers *and* practitioners across different jurisdictions – this could take many forms including (but not exclusively)

- Empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods) on workload, its measurement, distribution or consequences.
- National case studies and comparative analyses of workload policies, standards and allocation models.
- Practice-based accounts of workload management, staff support and organisational innovation.
- Lived experience accounts of the impact of workload on the experience of supervision.
- Book reviews of significant publications relevant to workload, staff wellbeing and probation work.

We anticipate two types of contribution: full articles of no more than 7,000 words and shorter practice articles of no more than 2,500 words. Our aim is to encourage researchers and practitioners alike to share their findings and experiences with a wider audience.

Proposed Timeline:

Steps	Timeline
Call for Papers announced	July 2026
Abstract deadline (fortnight turnaround to accept/reject)	September 30th, 2026
Submission deadline	January 31st, 2027
Peer review, feedback and revision	February – May, 2027
Publication	July 2027

Further information and submission: [Special Issue: European Journal of Probation](#)

Guest editors are:

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Christian is a qualified social worker (BA/MA) and a former probation officer. He completed his PhD at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München with a dissertation on the relationship between scientific knowledge and probation practice. Since 2019 he has been Professor of Social Work at the Nuremberg Institute of Technology (Technische Hochschule Nürnberg Georg Simon Ohm). His research focuses on rehabilitation and resettlement, desistance, drug use and harm reduction. He currently leads a research project on the professional support of children of incarcerated parents, including the development of an e-learning system for education professionals. He also leads the evaluation of the implementation of the Act on Ambulant Reintegration and Victim Support in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany (ResOG SH) and conducts research on the relevance, consequences and mechanisms of exclusion regarding criminal records among social work students.

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Caroline is a registered social worker and former senior probation officer. She completed her thesis at the University of Essex, exploring gatekeeping professional education. She is a Lecturer in Social Work at The Open University and a Teaching Fellow in Criminal Justice Studies at the University of Portsmouth, UK. She is Co-Chair of the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) Criminal Justice Special Interest Group, Probation Institute academic advisory group member and co-editor of the *Routledge International Handbook of Criminal Justice Social Work*. Caroline's research focuses on criminal justice education, professional identity and workforce development, with interests in brain injury, human rights, and history as a lens to explore the relationship between justice and care systems. Her work seeks to strengthen the evidence base for inter-probation and social work practice and education through collaborative research with practitioners, people with lived experience and international partners.

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