

Napo Manifesto Demands General Election 2017

Napo – Trade Union and Professional Association for Probation and Family Court Staff. Napo is an independent non-affiliated trade union.

It has been well documented that the justice system is in meltdown. 50% of the probation service was privatised in 2015 leading to ongoing failures by private providers and excessive job cuts. The family courts are now also at breaking point as workloads have become dangerously high and prisons are in chaos. This document sets out Napo's demands for the 2017 election and what we want to see the new government take action on to save our justice system and its staff.

End the public sector pay freeze

Probation and Family Courts staff have suffered a six year pay freeze. An increase in public sector pay would also put pressure on private providers to review pay in order to keep them competitive.

Extend Youth Justice Boards to cover 18-21 year olds

Youth Justice Boards have proven to be very successful at reducing reoffending rates. Extending them to work with this cohort of offenders would enable a smooth transition to probation, reduce reoffending and reduce the number going into custody.

Full independent inquiry into Community Rehabilitation Companies

The inquiry should review the contracts, performance and cost of private probation providers. Those shown to be failing should be brought back under public ownership using the power of the Golden Share. Accountability for service standards and local commissioning should be delegated to democratically accountable bodies, regulated and inspected by a national HMI Probation. There should be widespread consultation about the form this should take, with potential for pilots for Police and Crime Commissioners and Regional Mayors (e.g. in London where MOPAC are involved already in monitoring the CRC contract following the HMIP's report in December 2016).

Promote Probation

Half of the £1.3 billion ear marked for building new prisons should be invested in probation. There needs to be increased dialogue between sentencers and all probation providers to help rebuild trust and confidence. Current government policy is very prison focused. We want to see a policy that sees prison as the last resort and focuses much more on community interventions.

Reverse cuts to legal aid

Specifically review the qualification thresholds for qualifying to improve the quality of justice and reduce the strain on professionals, especially in Family Courts.

Increased funding for the Family Court Service

The huge increases in cases particularly arising from greater focus upon child protection nationally is having a detrimental impact on service delivery. Cafcass is now at breaking point with many members working increasingly long hours to complete work.

Review sentencing guidelines

Prison sentences have gone up 27% despite a fall of 25% in sentences for serious crime. We need to develop a strong presumption against imposing short prison sentences. Increase problem solving courts to help reduce prison sentences being passed.

Prison Reform

A commitment to reduce prison population as reform cannot happen while prisons are overcrowded. Prison & Courts Bill does not go far enough. This should be reviewed with a greater involvement of prison and probation staff. Napo believes that there has not been enough thought or consultation into the proposal to increase the number of probation staff in prisons or the impact this will have on community resources or staff.

Introduce a Licence to Practice for probation staff

This is already under consideration in the MOJ and would provide protection for all staff and keep providers focused on training staff to the right level for the job they do.

Workload crisis

Workloads in both probation and family court are dangerously high. In probation this is exacerbated by staff shortages, ongoing job cuts and poor recruitment and retention. Probation staff in both the NPS and the privatised CRCs face enormous and increasing workload pressures with some staff carrying workloads of over twice the accepted safe level (i.e. ranges from 150% - 210% on the workload management tool measure) and many reporting caseloads of 80-90 clients. One member in a CRC told Napo, ***“I am constantly anxious and terrified that I'll miss something critical because I haven't seen someone or completed some task.”*** While another member working in the NPS told the union they had ***“..no time to do any offence focused work and are constantly firefighting.”***

In CAF/CASS the workload has significantly increased causing stress and poor health to our members. It has a direct impact on the quality of work delivered and places the public at risk of harm.

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