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PROBATION IN CRISIS

The service protecting the public is being pushed to breaking point.

The crisis facing probation, the people who work in it and the risks to public safety.



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ENOUGH IS ENOUGH.

Why Napo members are taking action.



A long history of standing up

Napo has represented probation and family-court workers for more than 100 years. This is only the fourth time in its history it has taken industrial action.

Talks have not delivered

Negotiations have repeatedly failed to secure meaningful progress on the issues that matter to members.

Members have voted for change

Our members voted to demand fair pay, tackle unsustainable workloads, and defend probation's future.

Probation runs on goodwill. That's the problem.

Staff work late, skip breaks, catch up at home, and give personal time to keep essential work moving. Working to contract is a powerful action because of this unpaid additional work.

A vital public service

Probation protects victims, manages people who have committed offences, prevents further harm, and supports rehabilitation. It helps create safer communities for everyone.

Under real pressure

But probation faces departures, vacancies, excessive workloads, and staff stress, exhaustion, and mental ill health.

A public service should not depend on staff routinely giving away their time.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Years of political experiments.
A service still paying the price.

2014

Transforming Rehabilitation

Dismantled 35 probation trusts, splitting the service between the National Probation Service and 21 privately operated Community Rehabilitation Companies.

2021

Contracts ended early

Probation returned to public control after fragmentation, poor performance, financial difficulties, and lost professional continuity.

2024–26

Further reforms and continuing crisis.

The National Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee raised serious concerns.

Reunification did not undo staffing shortages, instability, broken systems, and operational challenges.

Probation has spent years being reorganised.

It is time it was properly rebuilt.



A WORKFORCE IN CRISIS

Too few people. Too much pressure.

Probation officer vacancy rate

By April 2026 almost one in four probation officer posts across England and Wales was vacant.

England and Wales	24%
London	36%
Greater Manchester	31%
Kent, Surrey and Sussex	31%
North West	28%

Other key roles vacancy rates

Administrative vacancies	21%
Programme Facilitator and Unpaid Work Supervisor vacancies	36%

Workload pressure

Probation officers work at an average

118%

of assessed capacity, with regional peaks of **126%.**



Members report:

- unpaid overtime
- missed breaks
- evening and weekend work
- responsibilities not reflected in **workload calculations.**

This is not a temporary recruitment problem.

It is a workforce crisis.

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THE HUMAN COST.

A workforce being driven into the ground.



95 %

respondents to Napo's workforce survey said pay and workload pressures affected their mental health.

14

average working days lost to sickness absence per probation staff member in the year to March 2026.

60.2%

of probation officers' working days lost were attributed to mental ill health.



Experienced professionals are leaving for better pay and conditions, taking knowledge, expertise, continuity, and the ability to support newer colleagues with them.

You cannot build a safe and effective probation service by driving its workforce into the ground.

SECTION 5

THE PUBLIC SAFETY WARNING

SERIOUS RISKS. REAL CONSEQUENCES.

28%

risk-of-harm assessments judged adequate in 2024, down from 60% in 2018–19

54%

inspected cases where critical information was not sufficiently analysed and translated into risk management

31%

relevant cases where information from children's services was insufficient to inform risk assessment

18%

relevant cases where domestic-abuse information was insufficient to meaningfully inform risk assessment

55%

Charges for serious further offences committed by people under probation supervision were 55% higher in 2023–24 than in 2020–21.

Probation professionals identify escalating risks, protect victims, manage people convicted of serious offences, and support safer communities. This vital work requires time, judgement, accurate information and inter agency communication.

These figures do not prove every failure is caused by staffing shortages, but they show the seriousness of problems and consequences when public-protection systems fail.



When the system cannot consistently identify, understand and manage risk, public safety is put at risk.

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MORE RESPONSIBILITY. LESS CAPACITY.

The demands keep growing. Where is the investment?



38,042
prisoners released early between September 2024 and June 2025.

Around
5,000
more are expected to be released in 2026.

Each release adds probation work:

- Risk assessments
- Supervision
- Accommodation
- Licence conditions
- Work with partner agencies

The Sentencing Act 2026 increases probation's role in managing people in the community, including through greater use of suspended sentences.

Properly resourced community sentences can aid rehabilitation and reduce reoffending.

Increasing demands are pressing on an understaffed service.

You cannot transfer pressure from prisons to probation and pretend the problem has been solved.

THE PRICE OF UNDERVALUING PROBATION

Fifteen years of pay erosion. A profession falling behind.

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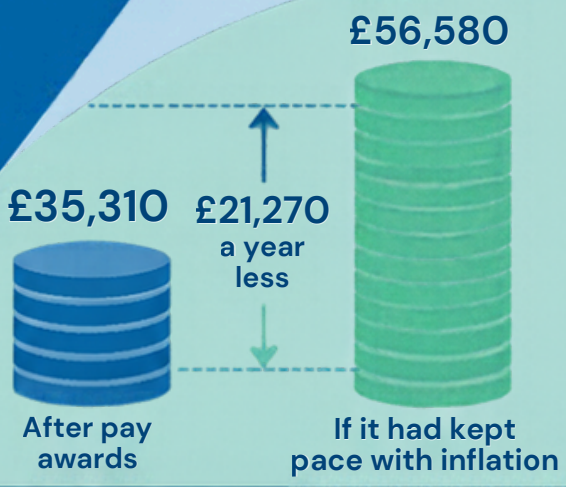

A £30,000 probation salary in 2010 would now be worth approximately £35,310 after pay awards, or £56,580 if it had kept pace with inflation – a difference of £21,270

Annual pay awards (2010–2025)

Year	Probaton	Police Staff	Local Government	Health	Prison Officers
2010	0.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	2.0%
2011	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	2.0%
2012	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%
2013	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%
2014	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%
2015	1.0%	2.0%	2.0%	1.0%	2.0%
2016	1.0%	2.0%	2.0%	1.0%	2.0%
2017	1.0%	2.0%	2.0%	1.0%	2.0%
2018	1.0%	2.0%	2.0%	1.0%	2.0%
2019	1.0%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%
2020	1.0%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%
2021	1.0%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%
2022	2.0%	3.0%	3.0%	3.0%	3.0%
2023	4.0%	5.0%	5.0%	5.0%	5.0%
2024	2.0%	5.0%	5.0%	5.0%	5.0%
2025	1.7%	4.8%	4.0%	3.5%	4.9%
Total	**17.7%**	**44.8%**	**40%**	**37.5%**	**45.9%**

Figures show cumulative pay awards for 2010–2025. RPI inflation over the same period: 88.6%.

Pay affects recruitment and retention.

Falling real pay makes it harder to recruit new staff and to keep experienced colleagues.

Fair pay will not solve every problem,

but it is essential to rebuilding the workforce.

It's time to

invest in the people

responsible for public safety.

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THIS IS EVERYONE'S FIGHT.

How you can help stand up for probation.

Probation affects victims, families, communities, and everyone who depends on a working justice system. Our members need public support to continue protecting the public and changing lives for the better.



Follow Napo and share our campaign

Follow, share campaign materials, videos, and updates.

- Website: www.napo.org.uk
- Podcast: https://napopodcast.riverside.com/
- Magazine: www.napomagazine.org.uk
- Twitter: https://twitter.com/Napotheunion
- Bluesky: https://bsky.app/profile/napotheunion.bsky social
- Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/napohetradaeunion
- LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/company/napo-trade-union-and-professional-association
- YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/@NapotheUnion

Write to your MP

Ask them to raise the crisis with Government and the Ministry of Justice and stress that fair pay, manageable workloads, and adequate staffing are essential to public protection.

Get your trade union or organisation involved

Issue solidarity statements, share the campaign, support local solidarity events and picket lines where appropriate, raise the dispute with elected representatives, and amplify the case for a properly resourced service.

Talk about probation

Explain the work and pressures, share evidence, challenge misinformation, and make public safety part of the conversation.

Encourage colleagues to join Napo

Better pay, safer workloads, and a sustainable service benefit the whole workforce. Find out more at **www.napo.org.uk.**

THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN WARNED.

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PROBATION STAFF HAVE RAISED THE ALARM FOR YEARS.

They have highlighted the risks, warned of growing pressures and called for the resources needed to keep the public safe.

OUR UNION HAS CHALLENGED, NEGOTIATED AND CAMPAIGNED.

We have pressed for change, stood up for our members and kept probation on the political agenda.

PARLIAMENT HAS QUESTIONED SERVICE PERFORMANCE AND INDEPENDENT INSPECTORS HAVE HIGHLIGHTED SERIOUS PUBLIC-PROTECTION WEAKNESSES.

Our members are now taking action for fair pay, safe workloads, and a probation service with the people and resources needed to protect the public.

STAND WITH NAPO.
STAND WITH PROBATION.
STAND UP FOR PUBLIC SAFETY.

www.napo.org.uk

