

Joint Trade Union statement on the future of the probation service and youth justice in Wales

Probation services and the administration of youth justice play crucial roles in reducing reoffending and protecting communities from harm. However, provision and governance of the probation service in the United Kingdom is now at a critical juncture. Through numerous reforms - of varying degrees of failure - probation in the UK has been severed from the essential services it intersects with. This has resulted in poorer rehabilitation outcomes, an increased probability of reoffending, and is a failure to the public.

Since the inception of the National Assembly (now Senedd) in 1999, the powers afforded by devolution have increased significantly. This is a welcome development, however, thus far, this has not extended to justice, more specifically, the probation service and youth justice.

Instead, the paradoxical approach of centralisation of the probation service – via the creation of HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), administered by the Ministry of Justice – has only served to increase division at the expense of working in synchronisation with intersecting services. A corollary of this has been a loss of the probation service's identity as separate and distinct from the prison service.

In addition to the societal cost of such policy making, the impact on staff has been substantial and enduring. A lack of consistent strategic direction, increased caseload, and the hollowing out of organisational local leadership after the privatisation and later re-nationalisation of the probation service has

caused reputational damage and a lack of democratic accountability. To expect the workforce to resolve or bridge such challenge is beyond the extent of reason and the rational in the absence of systemic and constitutional change.

The necessity for change is beyond dispute and has the endorsement of influential advocates and actors. The “Justice in Wales for the People of Wales” report (Lord Thomas, 2019), “A New Britain: Renewing our Democracy and Rebuilding our Economy,” (Brown, 2022) both recommend the decentralising of power from Westminster as the first step in rebuilding probation and establishing essential links with social care, housing, health, and other devolved services.

We note the Welsh government's commitment to pursue the devolution of justice as part of its programme for government 2021-26 and its objective to attain this in its entirety, with the caveat that there must be a phased approach.

As trade unions, and organisations who represent the workforce, it is our responsibility to pursue solutions that advance and improve the services for the benefit of our members.

This statement, therefore, is a declaration of support for the devolution of the probation service and youth justice from Westminster to Wales. It affirms that any such discussion pertaining to service organisation is performed in partnership with the recognised trade unions and associations with the shared aim of rehabilitation through education, employment, and reducing homelessness with local, democratically accountable service providers.

