

Management of the PQF

Introduction

In future, qualification training arrangements need to supply sufficient qualified staff to meet the needs across the sector including both NPS and CRCs. Providing the required learning opportunities to create a joint talent pool is therefore a collective responsibility.

NPS will retain the PQF as the qualification pathway pending a full review and development of a successor programme by April 2016. This work will be undertaken in partnership with the new providers and the Probation Institute. The challenge is to transition the PQF into the new arrangements and enable existing and newly recruited learners to complete on time and to the required standard.

The PQF has not been mandated for the CRCs, although it will be made available to providers who choose to use it and this requires reciprocal arrangements to enable learners to access the full range of experience required. These arrangements need to be fit for purpose in a commercially based environment post share sale.

Learning Context

Prior to 2016, new PQF learners will undertake the Graduate Diploma route, which means that they will have 15 months to acquire the experience to qualify as probation officers. The objective is to produce reflective practitioners who are fit to practise upon graduation and sufficiently resilient to thrive as probation officers managing caseloads of high risk offenders.

NPS will be in a position to offer many of the required learning and placement opportunities in Courts, Approved Premises and LDUs and these will be maximised. However, there is a question about whether the cases, including the MAPPA cases in NPS, will provide a sufficient range of experience and if there will be enough suitable PSO roles/placements available, particularly if PQF numbers rise. Workforce planning indicates that investment in the PQF may need to increase significantly in order to meet future staffing requirements across the sector; therefore the delivery model needs to be fit for purpose to accommodate higher numbers of learners undertaking the accelerated pathway.

Principles Underpinning the Delivery Model

- All placement options within NPS will be explored and mapped to the PQF units
- Responsibility for managing case risk sits with the responsible agency and cases may not be borrowed across the CRC/NPS boundary post share sale
- An extended four month induction for new PQF learners will be provided in NPS prior to any placement and this will encompass Gateway to Practice and an introduction to core offender management skills including risk assessment. Learners must pass this module and demonstrate core skills in order to be allowed to progress to a placement

- Learners will be sequenced through an incremental approach to risk assessment and management and specific VQF units/academic modules will be identified in their learning contracts for each phase of the programme. Learners who fail to complete the programme will not remain in NPS
- A costed menu of products/services that NPS/CRCs can access will be drawn up so that the financial implications of planning decisions are explicit. CRCs will have access to all elements of PQF training and be free to recruit PQF graduates without restriction,

Consultation outcomes

Current Trust Chief Executives were surveyed to collate their views regarding potential CRC placements for PQF learners. There was a view that CRCs have a potential role to play but some concern about the resource implications of providing the management oversight of learners' casework and bearing the associated risk.

There were concerns about the timing of any CRC placements in the 15 month programme and the potential for newly appointed learners to be productive case managers. This has been addressed by designing an extended induction programme which will include an introduction to the operating model and core offender management skills.

There were also concerns that performance management and capability issues could take up a lot of middle management time, however the PQF learners will remain NPS employees throughout their training therefore these responsibilities will fall to the Divisional Training teams. Supervision, teaching and assessment will be provided by the Practice Tutor/Assessors (PTAs).

Proposals

- The programme will maximise the use of NPS placements, using low and medium risk cases in IOM and MAPPA
- PQF learners will be NPS employees throughout the 15 month programme; this includes recruitment, payment of salary/on costs and performance management. The line management implications for NPS middle managers will be reviewed and consideration given to resource requirements for this function.
- The role of the Practice Tutor/Assessor (PTA) will be reviewed to create a national role profile. PTAs will be managed via the Divisional Training teams and these teams will play a central role in dealing with any poor performance issues
- There will be a specified, modular pathway through the PQF programme supported by specific placement opportunities, a learning contract and a formal secondment agreement that will apply to CRC placements
- To minimise disruption, current learners based in NPS may continue to hold CRC cases as an interim measure. Post share sale cases may not be shared across the NPS/CRC boundary and PQF learners will therefore move to CRC placements if they are undertaking CRC work
 - All PQF learners must satisfy the recruitment criteria. CRCs will have the opportunity to be involved in the national process for the selection of PQF learners and to select for specific CRC sponsored places, if they wish. CRC sponsored learners would be their employees and subject to CRC terms and conditions but offered NPS learning opportunities

- Placement opportunities between NPS and CRCs will be reciprocal and supported by a formal Interchange Agreement which specifies length of placement, workload, range of casework, learning opportunities, milestones and supervisory/line management arrangements
- PQF learners must build up experience of high risk casework prior to graduation. In order to ensure that they have the opportunity to do this, they will be designated as full time offender managers during the final 8 months of the programme. This is a new proposal designed to build their core experience and the resource implications for PSO work in NPS will be reviewed
- PQF graduates appointed as POs will have a phased caseload and extended supervision for the first year of practice.

Talent Pool

The 371 PQF learners currently in the system and the additional 300 recruits who will start the programme in autumn 2014 represent a resource that will supply probation officers to either NPS or CRCs. This means that employers have a collective responsibility to facilitate their successful completion of the programme by identifying appropriate work experience across NPS and CRCs. NOMS will review any additional resource costs incurred by CRCs as a result of the management oversight and ownership of risk associated with the placements on a case by case basis.

The Probation Institute

The Institute will offer membership and registration to PQF learners and graduates in both CRCs and NPS. Responsibility for the national curriculum and training delivery model will remain with NOMS, however both CRCs and the Institute will join the stakeholder group responsible for the governance of the programme, which will play an important part in the review of qualification arrangements post 2016.

Risks and issues

There is a risk to workforce planning assumptions if PQF completion is delayed as a result of a lack of timely access to practice opportunities.

PQF learners must build their skills and confidence at the right pace to avoid the risk of learner attrition during the programme or shortly after graduation. The shorter Graduate Diploma programme limits the opportunities for consolidated practice therefore the sequencing of the modules is important.

Expansion of learner numbers in response to workforce management requirements will put pressure on resources by requiring higher numbers of placements, increased line management support and additional practice tutor/assessors.

Next Steps

- Issue a bulletin to current PQF learners and PTAs to clarify that the status quo will continue without interruption and that the Divisional Training teams are in the process of recruitment.

- Review CRC/NPS workforce planning requirements in consultation with NPS DDs and CRC CEOs to identify resource implications for line management, PTAs and learning opportunities for PQF learners
- Complete PQF unit costing work

Conclusion

Within the first couple of years of CRCs, a natural career pathway will develop with potential probation officers progressing from CRCs to NPS to undertake qualification training. There will also be the opportunity to design a new programme to fit the future delivery arrangements from 2016 and this will provide a chance to revisit the option of a training route for experienced staff without a relevant degree. The priority is therefore to design an interim solution that can ensure sufficient probation officers are trained.

Opportunities to provide NPS placements and learning opportunities within NPS will be maximised but it is unlikely that NPS could consistently provide a whole training solution, especially if the PQF numbers rise. CRCs need to be satisfied that participation in PQF arrangements delivers sound business returns and therefore the funding mechanism and delivery methodology must provide an appropriate incentive that is not dependent upon goodwill.

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