



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

**Committee for Justice**

# **OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)**

**Inquiry into the Criminal Justice Services  
available to the Victims and Witnesses of  
Crime in Northern Ireland**

**16 February 2012**

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

## Committee for Justice

### **Inquiry into the Criminal Justice Services available to the Victims and Witnesses of Crime in Northern Ireland**

**16 February 2012**

**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Paul Givan (Chairperson)  
Mr Raymond McCartney (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Sydney Anderson  
Mr Stewart Dickson  
Mr Seán Lynch  
Mr Alban Maginness  
Ms Jennifer McCann  
Mr Basil McCrea  
Mr Jim Wells

**Witnesses:**

Ms Susan Reid	Skills for Justice
Mrs Amanda Ryalls	Skills for Justice
Mr Joe Stewart	Skills for Justice
Mrs Judith Thompson	Skills for Justice

**The Chairperson:** The next item is the inquiry into the criminal justice services that are available to victims and witnesses of crime. At the meeting on 26 January, the Committee considered correspondence from Skills for Justice, and noted that the organisation had carried out work for the Department of Justice on the training needs for those staff on the criminal justice organisations who come into contact with victims and witnesses of crime. We agreed to invite representatives to give evidence as a part of the inquiry into criminal justice services available to victims and witnesses of crime. We will get a short DVD as a part of this briefing. I am not sure at what stage that is coming.

I welcome Joe Stewart, Chairman of the Northern Ireland Country Group, Judith Thompson, its manager, Amanda Ryalls, its operations director and Susan Reid, a member of the Northern Ireland Country Group, Skills for Justice. This will be recorded by Hansard.

**Mr Joe Stewart (Skills for Justice):** Thank you, Chair. This is where justice is really joined up. The broad family, as represented by Skills for Justice, ranges through the whole gamut of the justice system and extends into the Fire and Rescue Service. That is what we hope to illustrate this afternoon. I have

chaired this committee with some pride for a considerable period of time. It is one of the better aspects of the job that I do daily.

I am accompanied today by Judith Thompson who is the manager of the Northern Ireland Country Group, Amanda Ryalls, the UK director of Skills for Justice and Susan Reid, who is the chief executive of Victim Support for Northern Ireland. Without any more ado, I hand over to Judith.

**Mrs Judith Thompson (Skills for Justice):** Thank you all for inviting us here today. We will start with the video that you mentioned. To start the presentation, I hand over to my colleague Amanda Ryalls.

**Mrs Amanda Ryalls (Skills for Justice):** This is a video that you will have seen before, and it is a part of a series of road safety videos. We ask that you watch it with a close eye on the staff within the justice organisations. So, try to watch it in a different way to the way that you have seen it before. It is very short.

**Mrs Ryalls:** OK. You will have seen that video far more often than I have. When you watched it previously, perhaps the focus was on the impact on the offender, the victims and their families and the witnesses to the scene. However, looking at it today, I hope that you can see how, in particular, the staff in the justice organisations work seamlessly in a highly skilled and co-ordinated way to deliver what is expected of them.

The point that we make when we show the video is that that does not happen just by accident. Skills for Justice works with and for employers to develop national occupational standards that define best practice in and across the different roles in parts of the justice sector. We also work with justice organisations to develop staff skills, competence frameworks and qualifications, and we offer other products and services based on those standards to enable people to perform to the best of their ability in high-performing organisations.

In the video, you see the PSNI officers assisting with casualties, securing evidence and beginning the investigation process, including victim liaison. Staff are specially trained in investigation, family liaison and case preparation, and the PSNI relies on the Skills for Justice national occupational standards and the policing professional framework to profile those roles and to develop the staff within them.

The victims and witnesses whom you see in the video also require support before, during and after the criminal trial. Fifty-one Victim Support Northern Ireland staff members and volunteers have received serious crime training to enable them to provide that support, using a training programme that has achieved a Skills for Justice quality skills mark. The same principle applies to all organisations. Our key point is that we and you know that the skills and competence of the justice workforce are absolutely vital. They are the deciding factor in whether the criminal justice system succeeds in delivering good and effective services.

I will hand over to Judith Thompson, who sees more of the work that we do daily with the employers and organisations in the justice sector in Northern Ireland. She will say a little bit about the exciting work that we have planned for the next two years to support you, with an emphasis on the work that we are doing to support the workforce who support victims, survivors and witnesses.

**Mrs Thompson:** I would like to pick up where Amanda left off and focus on two things. First, the success of legislation and policy and their impact in this sector depend more than anything else on the skills of the individuals involved. Individually, in a small way, you saw a number of different organisations in the video; Amanda referred to witness and victim support issues and the PSNI. However, in the background, you also saw forensic scientists, the Fire and Rescue Service, the courts and the prosecution process. All those have to work in a joined-up way, and they often have to work in the same place. Sometimes, they are in a same place doing the same thing, and, at other times, they are in the same place doing different things. However, that joined-up working is absolutely at the heart

of delivering justice and of achieving the results that you and all of us seek to achieve through legislation and policy.

Our role, because we work across the justice sector and with all the organisations in it, is about bringing organisations together to develop skills, particularly where they are going to have to use those skills together. The added benefit is about communication and mutual understanding, but it is also about creating relationships and working practices that deliver on the ground. The strengthening of that interconnectedness is a key feature of achieving skills and achieving impact in justice.

The Committee will be very aware of the development of the new college at Desertcreat, which will be a state-of-the-art training facility that will radically increase the impact of learning in the justice sector. That will bring about that radical difference, and, wherever possible and useful, it will create impact through a collaborative learning curriculum. As the sector skills council for justice, Skills for Justice has been commissioned by the Desertcreat project board to help it with that joined-up curriculum and to take the standards that are already used by organisations across the sector to help them define best practice and what their learning programmes must give them and to look at where those standards apply across organisations and how they can be used to bring learning together. It will achieve efficiency, but it is also about increased impact and having a justice sector that delivers that input by joining up and by exercising the right skills for the right people at the right time.

You may wish to note that Skills for Justice has also developed national occupational standards for victims and witnesses of crime. There are specialist standards relating to witness care, specialist standards relating to domestic and sexual violence, and new national occupational standards, which we have recently been asked to produce, on the specialist role of independent sexual violence advisers.

Those national occupational standards describe competent performance, identify the knowledge and skills that workers need to achieve that performance and allow a clear assessment of that competence across a range of workplace situations. The development of those standards is always based on collaborative working between ourselves and the whole vocational sector. We produce the standards from steering groups and working groups, which are made up of experts and key practitioners. They work with us. We know the format in which things need to be produced, and they have the expertise to populate that. The national occupational standards are used to define roles and the knowledge and skills that are required to perform those roles. In that way, consistency can be achieved in service delivery.

I noted some of the conversations in the Committee this afternoon about community confidence and trust. That issue is obviously there as well for people who make the decision to come forward as victims and witnesses of crime and to engage in a justice process. Our point is that although confidence and trust are, obviously, critical, competence is a big part of what creates confidence and trust.

I want to talk briefly about the economic and social impact of crime. It is important to highlight that crime has an economic and social impact, particularly on small businesses. The Department of Justice has estimated that the economic cost of crime to businesses here is about £624 million per annum, with £143.6 million lost in economic output. We are working closely with the PSNI, the Department of Justice and local councils to do some research on the levels of reported and unreported crime against small businesses. We want to capture the human cost. However, we also want to capture some of the economic impact and see what that impact has on urban and rural communities when small businesses, where the margins are thin, start to fold. Big businesses can manage loss from crime. They predict it; in many cases, they can manufacture security products to help them to deal with it; they can factor it into their bottom line; and they manage it. Small businesses cannot do that. In a recession, the impact on them is doubled.

We have been led by research carried out by the University of Central Lancashire, and we believe that raising skills in risk assessment and crime prevention can make a significant difference. The university work showed reductions in the loss to businesses through crime by up to 80% a year in some cases as a result of skilled intervention, good advice and action planning to minimise risk. Detection and prosecution rarely gives back to a business what it has lost. It is prevention that can make a big

difference to small businesses. Importantly, that project will also form a research base for a larger European project from which we hope to bring a significant amount of European money, perhaps up to €3.5 million, into Northern Ireland. We could be a benchmark project for crime prevention with European links.

We will leave you with some information about other work that we are doing in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England on the development of a skills framework for those who work with victims and witnesses of crime. We are developing that in full consultation with employers and stakeholders, and the aim is to clearly articulate the required competences for employees and volunteers operating across the workforce. It is a holistic approach and is about benchmarking the roles of those who interact with victims and witnesses at a range of levels during the justice process, and I know that the Committee is very aware of the impact on victims and witnesses of all those who work in the justice sector.

We sort of looked at that as a pyramid. At the top, there is a relatively small number of workers who are very skilled and whose main purpose in their work is around work with victims and witnesses. If you look down that pyramid, you will see a very broad range of staff, quite often in administrative and other roles, who have an interaction with victims and witnesses that is an important or a critical part of a victim's or witness's experience. When thinking about skills, it is important to look at the top of the pyramid, but, in many ways, it is just as important or more important to look across the bottom of it and think of all of those people in statutory and voluntary organisations who will be first point of contact and for whom it is not their main job but who are very important to the people who encounter them.

In the longer term, a framework such as that developed in consultation, could support the development of a specialist register for some specialist workers if that were wished, perhaps in areas such as domestic and sexual violence. It may also link to article 24 of the EU directive around minimum standards on the rights, support and protections of victims of crime.

Finally, our key message is that it does not just happen by accident. The delivery of a skilled, integrated service by those who work for the justice sector only happens as an outcome of a great deal of skills development and collaboration that happens behind the scenes. At the moment, as we all know, we are squarely caught in the storm of a recession, and we are all experiencing belt tightening. We know from experience that recession will have an impact on crime and that we can expect rises in some types of crime. That will put pressure across the criminal justice system, including on organisations that deal with victims, survivors and witnesses. We also know that resourcing skills development is particularly challenged during times of financial constraint. In that scenario, there is a real danger that workforce reductions and reduced investment in training will lead to service failure. Paradoxically, when there is additional pressure to perform well and deliver, investment in training is more important but harder to sustain when there is pressure on finance. In our work with the Committee and with the sector, we do everything that we can to make the case for continued funding for skills and for increased flexibility to support a skills agenda that will deliver the outcomes that this Administration needs.

Thank you for taking the time to hear our presentation, and we hope that you will see and understand that skills are a critical part of achieving justice. We are here to answer any questions that you may have and to work with you in any way that we can to help to clarify the skills that are needed and to work to deliver them.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you. What is the take-up of the training that you offer to the criminal justice organisations as to how victims and witnesses services are delivered?

**Mrs Thompson:** I will let some of my colleagues answer for their own organisations. We do not deliver training as such; we produce agreed standards, which should benchmark what a job looks like and what training on skills should be delivered to that person. Mr Stewart will talk about how the policing professional framework is used, and that is one of the best examples. It is used fully in PSNI, which

will probably be one of the police forces most versed in its use. My colleague Susan Reid has been doing quite a lot of work with us to use those standards in her organisation.

**Mr Stewart:** In terms of professionalism and expectation of the community and the Policing Board, the PSNI could not possibly function without that national standard. It is the litmus test of how we deliver training to our officers and to police staff in forward-facing roles and in roles of investigative standards as well. The standards that people must achieve and the training process that they must undergo to achieve those standards are set out clearly for our officers and relevant staff. Every new police officer who has been recruited to the Police Service in Northern Ireland has been trained to a national standard as a means of assuring the Chief Constable and the public that we are on the right track.

When we go through promotion processes, those national standards are engaged, where relevant, to set up the interview processes, the assessment centres and so on to ensure that people who are selected to be sergeants and inspectors have achieved the right standard to warrant that promotion.

**Ms Susan Reid (Skills for Justice):** We in Victim Support are trying to apply the national occupational standards in a very similar way, but on a much smaller scale. Therefore, the help that we are getting at the minute from Skills for Justice is to take every role in the organisation, whether it is a volunteer, somebody managing volunteers or somebody who is doing advice work at a criminal injury compensation appeals panel, and, with help and guidance from them as experts, we are identifying the national occupational standards that are most critical to that role. Therefore, that could be around managing volunteers in one role or it could be about assessing the need of a victim. As Joe has outlined, there are particular criteria under the national occupational standards that help us to be very clear about what we look for and what we specify when we recruit, which means that we make best use of the money that we have when we go out to recruit and select new staff or look for volunteers.

We also use it to guide our training. If we get it right and get the right people into the roles in the first place, we need to spend less resource in training them in-house and skilling them up to do the job.

Finally, hopefully, we also reduce the amount of time and difficulty we might have in performing on issues. If we have the right people in the roles, we are all clear about what is expected and what is needed from that role, and we have a framework of accountability around that. Ultimately, that saves us time, and, dare I say it, hassle in performing to deliver the best service. Therefore, ultimately, the synergy of all that is that we have the most time as an organisation to support and help victims and witnesses.

**Mr B McCrea:** I am not sure where to begin here. I apologise for not knowing very much about what you are doing. First, tell me how many people in Northern Ireland have a level 3 qualification in community justice work with victims, survivors and witnesses?

**Mrs Thompson:** Thank you for asking that, because, this morning, I contacted our assessment centre to try to get an up-to-date number on that. Around 50 people are currently registered, some to do victims and witnesses and a number to do youth justice. In the past, hundreds of people have gone through those awards. For example, in the youth justice centre, all staff who are not qualified social workers hold the youth justice award and are required to do so in order to hold that post.

Across organisations such as the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, a social work qualification is required and used for probation officers, but non-probation officer staff do a community justice qualification as a requirement of their job.

In organisations such as policing, it has not been about the qualifications; it has been about benchmarking, roles, recruitment and performance management, which is just as important in terms of using standards and around the area of victims and witnesses. It is an area where there is a diverse workforce and a plethora of different training, but a lot of it is not accredited. Therefore, the

introduction of these qualifications is important, and it is great to have organisations such as Victim Support progressing that.

**Mr B McCrea:** There is an issue here that we have to let people know a bit more about what is going on, and I am interested to know how we would go about doing that. Obviously, you are here to talk about it.

I suspect that a lot of people would be interested. Some elements may be suitable even for people in constituency offices, where we get a lot of volunteers. What are the plans to promote the NVQs?

**Mrs Thompson:** You have hit on a really important point. It is difficult to get the message out there. To be honest, sometimes people do not get very excited about training courses, and sometimes the message is, first of all, about setting standards and achieving competence. We are delighted to be here today, because we want people to know about us.

We have senior managers from each of the justice sector organisations on our Northern Ireland management steering group and we work quite closely with the other organisations at that level. I would expect that people at that level have heard of us and know what we do. However, it is harder to get out there on the ground. We have plans for how we communicate and raise our profile and we do a lot around e-communications. However, I accept you point: it is difficult to get the message out and we are really glad for any suggestions people can make.

**Mr B McCrea:** I would be keen to give a hand where I can. I interact in other places with people such as the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO), the Probation Board and various others. I suppose we have established that we have to do something. Maybe we will find a way to do that collectively to help with the issue.

I was quite taken by the idea of advanced apprenticeships in your written submission. What is the difference between an apprenticeship and an advanced apprenticeship?

**Mrs Ryalls:** Apprenticeships are traditionally seen as the qualification that people take as school leavers. You might take it at level 2 or 3, and it is at that skill level. With employers in the justice sector, we are looking at whether we can have apprenticeships at levels 4 and 5 and above. That recognises that what is special about an apprenticeship is high-quality theoretical training mixed with on-the-job practice. We want to see that at a much higher level for our employers, who are saying to us that they spend lots of money on management and leadership qualifications, which are all very good in their own right, but they could do with something that is more about being on the job and apprenticeships that are for agencies across the sector. In other words, joint apprenticeships and not apprenticeships with, for example, just the police, the Prison Service or the Fire Service.

**Mr B McCrea:** I happened to speak to representatives from another sector skills council today, and they told me that they were introducing the concept of, I think, premium apprenticeships.

**Mrs Ryalls:** Right.

**Mr B McCrea:** They have a similar concept. Those are for levels 4, 5 and 6. In fact, a famous person who designed the 'Titanic' was a premier apprentice, and you are not supposed to laugh at that. When you hear the word "apprenticeship", you think of somebody just coming out of school. Frankly, you think of someone like a car mechanic. I know that is not right, but that is the thing. I just wonder whether sector skills councils can get that gradation about there being a basic level and whether the terminology ought to be brought together.

I could not help but notice that your CV refers to the justice sector as being highly politicised. What impact does that have?

**Mrs Ryalls:** When sector skills councils were set up, about eight years ago, part of their role was to lobby the UK Government on behalf of employers on issues in the skills system that were making life difficult for them in recruiting and developing people. In some sectors, it is now easier to do that. A lot of our employers are government bodies, so it would be hard for employers to lobby against government because they would be lobbying against their paymaster. So we have had quite a tricky role in many respects. We work very closely with our employers, because there is a very difficult line to tread. Also, I do not think that a day goes by when you do not see something on the news about the justice sector, the way that it could be better or the pressures facing it, etc. Everybody has a view, including the general public, of how it would work. It is highly politicised. It is also highly unionised. That makes some of the work that we try to do with and for employers and employees elongated and difficult. Some straightforward solutions that we might like to put in place, and which employers would like to see put in place, have to jump through incredible hoops, and it takes quite a long time for them to emerge.

**Mr B McCrea:** We probably do not have time to deal with it here today, but we are challenged here with a criminal justice system that seems to exist in a world of its own. Everybody is well-meaning, but nothing seems to improve. At some other stage, I would like to take you up on a discussion to see how we might improve things. Thank you very much.

**Ms J McCann:** You are very welcome. Thank you for the presentation. Perhaps I picked this up wrongly, but did you say that you do not deliver the actual training? So you just advise on standards?

**Mrs Thompson:** In a way, that separation is quite important. We are in the business of working with employers and stakeholders to identify the standard, but it could be further or higher education delivering the training, or it could be a work-based NVQ or an apprenticeship. If it is a vocational qualification, an awarding organisation, such as City and Guilds, Edexcel or whatever, would actually deliver it. We work with them, but we do not compete with them.

**Ms J McCann:** In relation to your key partner, Skills for Justice, is that an organisation that you tap into? What is that list there for?

**Mrs Thompson:** Our key partners in Northern Ireland are people from each of the justice sector organisations. When we say justice, we are including the third sector, work around community safety and victims and witnesses, and fire and rescue. In the broadest way, we work with representatives or senior managers from every one of those. We also feed in with the Department of Justice and the other relevant Departments, because obviously there is an interest from the Department for Employment and Learning and others.

**Ms J McCann:** You were talking about the community safety aspect of it, and some of the key partners in the community sector are there, but the restorative justice groups, like Community Restorative Justice (CRJ) or some of the local community safety partnerships, are not there.

**Mrs Thompson:** That is absolutely fair. It would become a very long list, but I can tell you that we certainly met the restorative justice organisations. We have also met local councils and community safety managers, and we work with the part of the Department of Justice that works in community safety. I do not have everybody on the list, but we do our absolute best to engage.



**Mr A Maginness:** I think it is a good thing to try to upskill people in the sector and to try to create some sort of professional standards. The days when people were just told to get on with it are gone. It is very important. You are doing this work at a national level, but who actually sets the standards?

**Mrs Thompson:** The way the process works is that, if we are going to develop a set of standards, they would initially need to be requested by somebody who needs to meet them. That could be a policing board, or sometimes it is part of a government or legislative initiative, and sometimes it is a gap that is identified by an employer. Somebody will come to us and say that they need standards because there is a new role, a new job, a new thing to focus on, or things have changed and some work is needed. Once that is done, a funding stream would be set up, and we would then identify all of the key bodies at national level and whether there are any existing regulatory bodies. With policing, a whole series of bodies would have a say about the standards. They would all be part of our reference group for that project. We would then convene across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland — each of those, normally. Occasionally, if something is very specific to one of those regions, we can do standards just for one.

**Mr A Maginness:** In Northern Ireland at the moment, is the range of skills and standards being offered by, for example, further education colleges?

**Mrs Thompson:** Vocational qualifications are offered by the awarding organisations City and Guilds and Edexcel, which work with the employers. In relation to the likes of the policing framework, you are talking about, for the most part, a framework for HR purposes rather than for the delivery of qualifications. Those standards will define the learning outcomes of the training that goes on at the police college.

**Mr A Maginness:** Do you imagine that the police college, when it is up and running, will provide those sorts of courses and upskill people?

**Mrs Thompson:** Absolutely; that is the plan. The college will not only do what the existing colleges do, which is to deliver courses that aim to give people the competence to meet those standards and to identify where that competence is, it will look at where training can be joined up.

**Mr Stewart:** I know —

**Mr A Maginness:** Sorry, Mr Stewart, I just want to deal with this point for a moment. I know that the members appointed to sit on the new policing and community safety partnerships (PCSPs) will not be delivering in the same sense as those in the justice system, but do you imagine that they will be upskilled?

**Mrs Thompson:** We have a history here. Such things are voluntary, so no one is required to do them. However, following the initial introduction of community safety partnerships and district policing partnerships, we worked with six further education colleges, as they were under the previous structure, to deliver a training programme around assessing, putting together and delivering community safety plans and engaging with communities. Those courses ran, and I think that some still run. We also worked with the University of Ulster to put an academic curriculum behind the same standards, and the university then delivered degree modules based on that work. That is an example of how you can use the standards to develop —

**Mr A Maginness:** I think that it would be very useful if members were offered such courses.

**Mr Stewart:** At our last Committee meeting, we discussed the potential for assisting the development of skills in the PCSPs and how each of the organisations represented in Skills for Justice could assist with that. What you find across the justice sector and round our table is that there is great support for, if you like, going the extra mile. We all do this work in addition to our day jobs because of our commitment to the justice sector. We want to see a more joined-up sector and better help for victims and witnesses. That is where we focus a lot of our attention.

The arranged contract for Desertcreat is up and running. I speak for the Prison Service, the Fire and Rescue Service and ourselves when I say that we see the college as an open-door academy for the broad justice sector and, at the very least, the emergency services. We will seek to offer modules there that will be of use to the broad justice sector, be it Victim Support, the Probation Board or whatever. In that way, we feel that we can make a real contribution not only to a joined-up justice sector but to the efficiency and effectiveness of it.

One of the projects that Skills for Justice is helping us with right now, and on which it is about to put proposals to us, is how to bring training modules for the Fire and Rescue Service, the Prison Service and the Police Service closer together, so that we all learn from each other and we are not duplicating our efforts. Take first aid as a very simple example: there is not a unit on first aid for police officers, another one for fire and rescue officers and yet another for prison officers. We do multi-training together to the one standard. We now have to fit the national requirements for each of those services into the one standard; that is one of the tasks. However, when we get the new college up and running, we would like to go beyond that co-operation to achieve about 30% integration of training for those three services. We have asked Skills for Justice to assist us with that curriculum development.

**Mr A Maginness:** That is very sensible. Mr Stewart, I interrupted you previously.

**Mr Stewart:** That was the point that I was going to make.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you very much for coming along today.

**Mrs Thompson:** Thank you for hearing us.