

Department of Justice Research Agenda

2024/2025 – 2026/27



Department of
Justice




An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt

Mánnystrie O tha Laa

www.justice-ni.gov.uk

Updated
April 2024

Contents

	Page
 1 Context	3
 2 Linking Research Need to Strategic Priorities	6
 3 Going Forward	9
Annex 1	11

For queries related to this publication please contact:

Analytical Services Group,
Financial Services Division,
Department of Justice,
Level 3, Block B,
Castle Buildings,
Stormont Estate,
Belfast BT4 3SG

Telephone: 028 9052 0181

Email: statistics.research@justice-ni.gov.uk

1 | Context

About This Section

This is the Department's second formal Research Agenda. This section provides an overview of the background, how it was developed and the factors that were considered as part of the development process.

The Department's Support for Research

The Department of Justice (DoJ) was established in April 2010, following the devolution of justice to the Northern Ireland Assembly. It has a range of powers relating to devolved policing and justice functions and is responsible for the resourcing, legislative and policy framework of the justice system. Together with its agencies, Non-Departmental Public Bodies and stakeholders, it supports the Minister of Justice in delivering on its mission of 'working in partnership to create a fair, just and safe community where we respect the law and each other' via four strategic themes (see Section 2).

The Department has a long record of developing, supporting and commissioning research to inform the delivery of its strategic priorities. It also has a strong commitment to evidence based policy both within the core Department and its Non Departmental Public Bodies, Executive Agencies and Arm's Length Bodies.

Why a Research Agenda?

The Department's first formal Research Agenda was developed in 2021 to cement and develop its commitment to evidence. Running from April 2021 to March 2024, it detailed the strategically important evidence and research needs that the Department planned to develop over the three year period. Research needs were mapped against the Department's strategic themes, allowing a more strategic and cross divisional examination of needs. This helped ensure prioritisation, that identified research needs were efficiently and effectively met and that best use was made of available analytical support. The Agenda also remained aware of broader ambitions and needs.

This is the Department's second formal Research Agenda. Following the same approach to the previous one, it outlines DoJ's identified research priorities and will run for three years (April 2024 to March 2027). Like the previous Agenda, research needs are mapped against strategic themes. Again the Agenda will remain aware of broader ambitions and needs. It will also remain fluid, with annual review points built in to allow regular consideration of emerging strategy, policy and evidence base needs, with newly identified research prioritised accordingly.

Building on the success of the first Agenda, it is hoped that this formal strategic approach will continue to help ensure that Departmental strategies and policies continue to be underpinned by robust and timely evidence. Further detail about the DoJ and its policies, programmes and priorities can be found on the [Departmental website \(opens in a new window\)](#).



1 | Context

Agenda Governance

The Department's Research and Analysis Group (RAG) was established in late 2019 to identify, prioritise and learn lessons from cross Divisional research and analytical opportunities for the benefit of policy making across the Department. Chaired by the Deputy Secretary from the Justice Delivery Directorate, Departmental statisticians and economists provide secretariat support.

The group has responsibility for agreeing the priorities for the research identified within the Research Agenda, meeting two to three times a year to discuss progress and consider any emerging and/or developing needs and their impacts on current prioritisation. This approach to governance worked well for the first iteration of the Agenda and will continue for the second.

The Importance of Stakeholder Engagement

The work of DoJ requires wide ranging support from delivery partners across the wider justice system, other government Departments, and the community and voluntary sector. During 2021-2024, stakeholder engagement enabled us to build research capacity and capability, keep abreast of live and emerging research and helped with our understanding of shared research interests. It also enabled us to maximise the impact of the Research Agenda, allowing us to avail of and aiding the production of

evidence based research to inform policy development and implementation.

Over the last three years we have continued our engagement with the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) and the Northern Ireland Social Work Leaders Network. We also established Strategic Partnership Agreements with the two local universities in relation to engagement on research priorities. These agreements and the engagement they have helped to foster have provided the department with a better insight into the research priorities of the universities; early access/ information on relevant research projects and seminars that we would not otherwise be aware of; and a platform for more consistent academic engagement across the department. The Department and two universities have also developed a series of successful workshops, with academics presenting research findings to relevant DoJ policy officials. These sessions generated useful discussion on key evidence based policy questions with topics including domestic and sexual violence, child criminal exploitation, human trafficking, reducing reoffending through prison education and the needs and experiences of parents of children in contact with the youth justice system.

Building further on the progress made with stakeholder engagement during 2021-2024, will be key to successfully delivering and maximising the 2024-2027 Agenda.



1 | Context

Other Factors for Consideration

- **Programme for Government**

While the Northern Ireland Executive returned recently there is still no agreed Programme for Government (PfG). In addition, Officials from The Executive Office are in the process of drafting a Wellbeing Framework. Currently in draft format, the Framework sets out 10 domains, with DoJ directly associated with the Safer Communities domain which aims to work towards a country where *'everyone feels safe, we all protect the law and each other'*.

Should the draft Wellbeing Framework change or a PfG be established the 2024-2027 Research Agenda will, as part of planned annual updates, be amended to reflect changing research needs and priorities.

- **Rolling Evaluation Programme**

Evaluation is an essential activity to ensure that all Departmental policies, programmes and projects are regularly reviewed to ensure that they are having the maximum possible impact against our objectives, are providing value for money, and that lessons are learned for future delivery.

To ensure a clear separation between research and evaluation needs, the Department runs a separate Rolling Evaluation of Policies and Programmes alongside the Research

Agenda. By drawing out evaluations separately to identified research needs, research findings and lessons learned from across the Department can be collated and fed into the overall decision-making process. Taken together, our research and evaluation findings, alongside our Official and National statistics publications provides a significant volume of evidence for the Department.

- **Data Strategy**

As the Department has evolved, the scope and opportunity it has to collect and leverage data to support evidence base needs has expanded. Collecting good quality data and using it effectively is vital to the work of the Department. However, our data sets come from information systems designed for operational purposes and not for the production of statistics. Therefore, in parallel to this Research Agenda we have developed the Department's first Data Strategy. This Strategy seeks to recognise that a strategic approach to the consideration of data as an asset should then afford analysts and policy makers with a greater ability to leverage the data we hold and collect. Such an approach could provide additional evidence base support to the Department with richer, more insightful and meaningful analysis for policy and operational staff.



2 | Linking Research Need to Strategic Priorities

About This Section

This section provides an overview of the Departments strategic priorities and how the research needs identified within the Agenda are linked to them.

What are the Departments Strategic Priorities?

The DoJ Corporate Plan 2022-25 and the Business Plan 2022-23 set the priorities, operating and budget context for the Department. The plan contains the following four overarching strategic priorities -

1) Support safe and resilient communities

We will work with our partners to help build safe and resilient communities and reduce the vulnerability of individuals to becoming a potential victim and/or offender. We will empower communities, businesses and individuals to protect themselves from becoming a victim of crime, and will provide support where people do become victims of crime. We will also work within a multi-agency partnership model to provide for and link strategic and operational responses to crosscutting community safety issues, and will address criminality and coercive control within our communities through proactive collaboration and local problem solving.

2) Address harm and vulnerability

We will work with partners to provide early stage diversionary approaches to address issues that contribute to offending behaviours. We will provide practical support to victims, and develop policies and legislation to protect those most vulnerable in our society.

3) Challenge offending behaviours and support rehabilitation

We will work with people who offend to challenge their behaviour and support them to become active and responsible citizens. Working with our partners, we will promote rehabilitation; and when a custodial sentence is imposed, our focus will be on resettlement leading to integration back into society.

4) Deliver an effective justice system

We will lead work to make our justice system faster and more effective, and more importantly, to serve the needs of those who engage with it. We will ensure appropriate access to justice for our citizens. We will also deliver a system, which supports other court users in the early and proportionate resolution of civil and family proceedings. We will support and empower people working within the justice system to deliver effectively.



2 | Linking Research Need to Strategic Priorities

Mapping Research Need to Strategic Priorities

Identified research needs were mapped against the Department's four strategic priorities. This exercise was overseen and agreed by RAG; the out-turn of the exercise is documented on the following page. We recognise that there will of course be some degree of overlap as research may provide the evidence base across a range of justice measures.

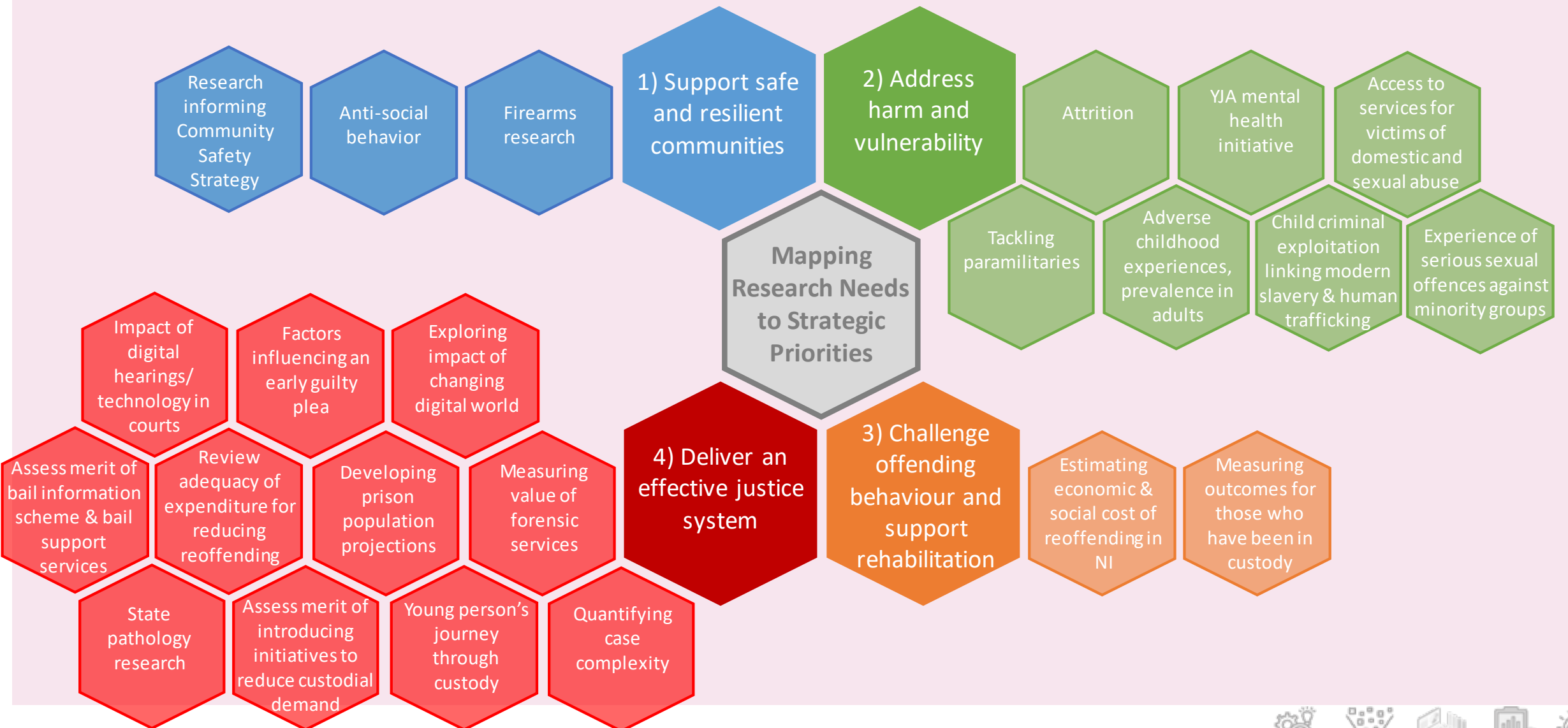
In keeping with the overarching principles of the Research Agenda, this approach aims to ensure that the research undertaken will add value to and strengthen the links within and between research, policy development and service delivery within the Department.

This three year Research Agenda has aimed, through engagement with policy makers, to identify the specific research needs of the Department. These needs have been mapped against the Department's four strategic priorities as detailed in the previous chapter. It is important however to recognise that whilst we haven't necessarily always identified a specific research project the Department remains committed to and interested in research and evidence around the following; Early intervention and diversion; Child criminal exploitation; Domestic and sexual violence; and Societal and justice impacts of i) overall addiction levels and ii) those suffering from mental health related issues.

The Department will also allow space for new, ad hoc and emerging specific research needs over the life of the Agenda by strategic prioritisation of research projects.



2 | Linking Research Need to Strategic Priorities



3 | Going Forward

About This Section

This section provides an overview of ongoing considerations, governance arrangements and how the research, produced from the Agenda, will be disseminated.

Continued Stakeholder Engagement

As already noted in section 1, as a Department we are keen to work with delivery partners, academia and other interest groups to ensure that we have a comprehensive understanding of the breadth of shared research aims and interests on key social policies. Building research capacity and capability ultimately lets us avail of and aids the production of evidence based research to inform policy development and implementation.

Over the last three years we have continued our engagement with PBNI (See Annex 1) and the Northern Ireland Social Work Leaders Network and as we identify and take forward our own research needs we are mindful of the research programmes of others. During our first Research Agenda (2021-24) we also established Strategic Partnership Agreements with the two local universities and have had both strategic and project specific engagement with both. Building further on the progress made with regard to stakeholder engagement will be key to delivering and maximising the 2024-2027 Agenda.

Best Practice and Other Relevant Research

Having identified Departmental research needs for the next three years, the Research Agenda will be outward looking and where possible, will take account of best practice. It will also aim to ensure the Department is aware of relevant external, policy related research.

The Department's Economics team review relevant published research which they then collate and publish three times a year in their Qualitative Research Review (QRR) bulletin. The QRR should help ensure that we benefit from evidence, that is already available, and that as far as possible, that duplication is minimised. The Economists also hold a repository of identified research.



3 | Going Forward

Available Resources

Given the current financial climate there is no research budget available to deliver identified research. The Department however benefits from a limited number of analysts comprising economists and statisticians who alongside their core responsibilities will work alongside policy colleagues, where possible to complete identified projects internally. These professional staff also provide support and direction to develop Terms of Reference for research, engage with external researchers, steer and quality assure the technical aspects of research projects.

Should funding become available over the life of this Research Agenda then the allocation of these funds will be administered via the RAG. In addition to this internal expertise the Department also ascertains evidence through engagement with specific researchers. This can be, where budget allows, through open market tendering and/or through academic engagement for mutual benefit with early career researchers at Masters and PhD level.

Governance

As already highlighted in section one, RAG have responsibility for agreeing the priorities for the research identified within this Agenda, meeting two to three times a year to discuss progress and consider any emerging and/or developing needs and their impacts on current prioritisation.

Dissemination of Research

Through the leadership of the RAG, the research produced under this Agenda will be provided with a platform to ensure that it feeds directly into Departmental policy development. Where possible, the research produced will also be shared on the [Department's website \(opens in a new window\)](#).



Annex 1

List of PBNI research projects –

- Service user involvement in criminal justice social Work - the rhetoric, the reality and the real-world challenges.
- [Post Incarceration Syndrome – exploring the experience of post traumatic growth following incarceration \(opens in a new window\).](#)
- Arson - The study aims to explore the experience of men who have been convicted of arson in Northern Ireland. There is no formal prediction for the outcome of this study, but rather a focus on the meaning and sense you make and have made of your experience. It is hoped that this will help further understanding of why individuals commit arson.
- Recall of life sentence prisoners – long term project not currently active.
- Assessing the feasibility and viability of a victim-led restorative justice system for cases of serious sexual violence.
- NIACRO are researching the specific needs of the Global Majority (Ethnic Minority) people coming into contact with the Criminal Justice System.