

ACTION PLAN - SEXUAL ABUSE/VIOLENCE RESEARCH

	Action	Lead Organisation	Supporting Organisation	Target Date
Engagement with, and updates from, the police				
1	<p>Through police training we will continue to improve officer knowledge and awareness of sexual violence and re-emphasise the need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to treat victims of sexual violence and abuse in a dignified, courteous, sensitive, tailored, professional and non-discriminatory manner; • to treat incidents of sexual violence and abuse seriously; • to ensure that contact with the victim takes account of the victim's right to privacy; • to ensure that discussions with, or updates to victims, take place in suitable locations unless operational or practical constraints make this impossible; • to advise victims of sexual violence and abuse of both the general and specialist support services that are available; and • to provide victims with regular updates, as far as possible and as agreed with the victim, on the progress of their case (as it relates to the police investigation). <p>Steps above to be incorporated into relevant procedures and guidance and actioned.</p>	PSNI		March 2018
2	We will carry work to better understand the nature of attrition in terms of victims and we will address any findings	PSNI		March 2018
3	We will continue to run a number of education programmes to raise awareness of sexual violence and abuse and to encourage reporting.	PSNI		March 2018

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Awareness of available services, including the Victim and Witness Care Unit				
4	Victim Support NI and Nexus to continue to work with the police to improve awareness of their support services.	VSNI Nexus PSNI		March 2018
5	Victim Support NI will undertake further work to raise awareness of their community service.	VSNI		March 2018
6*	We will review the findings of NIVAWS and consider actions necessary to improve services to victims and witnesses of crime, including increasing awareness of the Victim and Witness Care Unit role and the single point of contact in that unit.	All		March 2018
7*	We will capture, and reflect back to criminal justice agencies, the view of victims and witnesses (through the Victim Support NI Voice of the Victim post) in order that this can be used to evidence good practice and consideration of the need for operational change.	VSNI	All	Annually from March 2018
8	We will continue to promote the services provided by the Rowan through publications, website and a communications strategy.	The Rowan		March 2018
9	We will continue to deliver training to PSNI, including new recruits, on the role and services of the Rowan.	The Rowan		March 2018
Engagement with the Public Prosecution Service (including Counsel)				
10	We will provide specific training to prosecutors on the treatment of victims, including victims of sexual violence and abuse, taking account of the issues raised in the report (particularly around engagement with Panel Counsel; interpersonal interaction with victims; and the requirement to be fully knowledgeable of the facts of the case by trial stage).	PPS		From May 2017
11	We will continue to make provision for prosecutors to meet victims ahead of the day of the trial in all sexual violence and abuse cases at Crown	PPS		From April 2017

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	Court and where possible in other courts.			
12	We will ensure that training to prosecutors include guidance on how discussions with victims and witnesses can be made as accessible as possible, reducing the use of legal jargon.	PPS		From April 2017
13	We will advise victims of when they are likely to receive updates and continue to emphasise that VWCU can be contacted for an update at any point in the progression of the case, following a decision to prosecute.	VWCU		March 2018
14	We will continue to take steps to raise awareness of the services that are provided by the VWCU and the role of case officers – including through continued engagement with NGOs and other representative bodies, possible inclusion of contact cards, etc.	VWCU		March 2018
15*	We will continue to review the work of the Serious Crime Unit, particularly in relation to building confidence, delivering proportionate and effective prosecutions and monitoring the performance of independent counsel.	PPS	PSNI	From April 2017
16*	PPS legal staff within the Serious Crime Unit and Panel Counsel will continue to undertake ongoing specialised training relevant to the work of the Unit.	PPS		From April 2017
Practical issues at court (seating arrangements)				
17	We will explore the possibility of reserving a small number of seats for the victim and family/friends in some of the larger courtrooms.	NICTS VSNI		March 2018
Support Services				
18	In the first communication and meetings between Victim Support NI and victims, Victim Support NI should clearly explain the services that they provide in their core services, making reference to what they do not provide (i.e. counselling) and also advise that they can provide onward referral to specialist services.	VSNI		March 2018

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19*	We will consider how best to provide support services for young victims of crime from when a crime is reported, through to aligning with current court support services. This will include training on appropriate referral pathways/service providers.	DOJ	VSNI/ NSPCC	December 2018
20*	We will evaluate the provision of support to victims of sexual violence, through independent sexual violence advisors, on a pilot basis.	VSNI	DOJ/PPS/ PSNI	March 2019
Delay and Adjourments				
21	Regulations to be brought forward to deal with case management and the progression of proceedings in the Magistrate's and Crown Courts, taking particular account of the needs of victims and witnesses.	DOJ	PPS/OLCJ	Subject to Ministerial and Executive approvals in due course
22*	We will bring forward legislation to reform the committal process, and implement the changes resulting from this, so that victims of crime are not required to give evidence ahead of trial.	DOJ	PPS/PSNI/NICTS	Subject to Ministerial and Executive approvals in due course September 2018

* in the current three year victim and witness action plan for 2017/20

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23*	We will roll out the Indictable Cases programme across Northern Ireland, for certain offences (attempted murder, wounding with intent, causing grievous bodily harm with intent, unlawful wounding, inflicting grievous bodily harm and offences in relation to the supply of drugs), subject to the availability of funding.	DOJ/PPS/ PSNI		From May 2017
24*	We will continue to work with practitioners towards reducing victim and witness waiting times at court. Consideration will also be given to how best to enable prosecutors to consult effectively with victims at court.	PPS/NICTS	VSNI/ NSPCC	March 2020
25*	(i) PPS will continue to work with PSNI to enhance file quality and timeliness (including disclosure), with the aim of improving evidential and file quality, the effectiveness of case progression and reducing delay. The PSNI/PPS Working Together pilot will seek to address these matters in respect of cases deemed suitable for summary prosecution. (ii) We will review Phase I of the Working Together Pilot and use this to inform any further roll out.	PSNI/PPS		From April 2017 February 2018
Victim personal statements and victim impact reports				
26	We will consider how to revise the Victim Personal Statement leaflet, as well as other steps that could be taken, with a view to raising awareness of the VPS facility as well as making reference to the distinction between VPS and Expert Victim Impact Reports.	DOJ	VSNI/NSPCC	June 2018
27	We will provide refresher training to staff to make clear the purpose of the VPS, addressing the issues raised in the research and ensuring that staff have the necessary skills and experience.	VSNI/NSPCC		March 2018
28	VSNI/NSPCC, as far as possible to facilitate victims preparing their statement in the first instance, with guidance from their organisations.	VSNI/NSPCC		March 2018

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Sentencing				
29	We will progress approved recommendations from the sentencing review.	DOJ CJ organisations		From April 2019
30*	As part of the Department's review of sentencing policy, we will consider evidence around victims' understanding of the sentencing process and what steps could be taken to enhance that understanding in order to improve the experience of victims in the criminal justice system.	DOJ	NSPCC/ PPS/VSNI	From April 2017