

# **From the High, Hard Ground of Theory to the Swampy Lowlands of Risk Assessment in Practice: The Real-Life Challenges of Decision-Making**

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**Summary:** Assessment of risk, both the likelihood of reoffending and Significant Risk of Serious Harm to Others, is a core component of a Probation Officer's role. Arguably, nowhere in a Probation Officer's work is Schön's 'swampy lowland' (see below) more obvious than in the assessment for Significant Risk of Serious Harm to Others, where theory can jar with the reality of everyday practice. This article considers the implications of that tension within wider literature. It outlines PBNI's approach to the Significant Risk of Serious Harm to Others assessment and draws on a case study to explore decision-making and risk assessment, considering the immediate and wider influences.

**Keywords:** Risk assessment, risk of harm, significant risk of serious harm, decision-making, professional judgement.