



changing lives
reducing crime

Response to Punishment and Reform: Effective Community Sentences

Executive Summary

June 2012

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Nacro's response to *Punishment and Reform: Effective community sentences*

Nacro's response to this consultation is focused on the need to make community sentences as effective as they can be to reduce reoffending. It concentrates on the following key areas:

1. Making community sentences work. Community sentences must incorporate measures which balance appropriate punishment with victim and community payback and targeted interventions which address the causes of offending behaviour and stop offenders from reoffending. Ensuring that there is a recognisable punitive element in community sentences is important, but this must not come at the expense of reparation to victims or the rehabilitation of offenders. Community sentences must challenge and motivate offenders to change their attitudes and behaviour, encourage them to take responsibility for their actions and their lives, and promote the importance of reparation to victims and communities wherever possible. They must also address substance misuse and mental health problems which have a link to offending behaviour.
2. Addressing compliance. Those who deliver community sentences (or their component parts) must engage offenders in sentences, and work to increase compliance and reduce attrition. Offenders who drop out are far more likely to reoffend than those who complete programmes. To achieve higher completion rates programmes must address: motivation; practical access to programmes; lack of pre-programme information; and inappropriate targeting. It is also essential that programmes are located and rooted in communities.
3. Using appropriate sentences. Short-term prison sentences all too often have a detrimental effect on offenders, which in many instances can contribute to the likelihood of them reoffending. The introduction of intensive community punishments presents an opportunity to divert offenders from costly and unproductive periods in custody. But they must target the right type of offenders and be reserved for those who are on the cusp of custody. Without clear guidance, there is a risk of net widening, namely, those who are currently given short-term prison sentences will not receive an intensive community punishment and will still be sent to prison, and costly and overly punitive interventions will be imposed on offenders who do not need them.
4. Building public confidence. It is crucial to build public confidence in community sentences. Evidence shows they are already more effective at reducing reoffending than short-term prison sentences, yet the general public is largely unfamiliar with community sentences in comparison to other areas of the criminal justice system. For community sentences to gain public support they need to be rooted within communities and therefore visible to ordinary people. Getting ordinary people involved and delivering sentences in the heart of communities has the potential to fundamentally change the way we work with offenders, to impact on reoffending rates and to make communities safer, whilst at the same time increasing public confidence.