



changing lives
reducing crime

Nacro's response to the plans for Secure College rules

27 November 2014

About Nacro

At Nacro, the crime reduction charity, we are dedicated to reducing crime and reoffending in communities across England and Wales. We design and deliver programmes that equip people with the skills, advice, attitude and support they need to move their lives on and move away from crime.

Our services include:

Education: We provide young people with the skills they need to get back into education, training or employment through specialised courses such as pre-vocational and vocational programmes, problem-solving and employment preparation programmes that are designed for people who are stuck and can't see a way forward.

Housing: We help people, often with complex needs, including young people, to find somewhere to live and to give them the stability and support they need to acquire new skills and patterns of behaviour to turn their lives around.

Offender management: We work with offenders in the courts, in prisons and in the community, managing the offender journey in a way designed to minimise the risk of reoffending. We also work at the heart of communities to give people the best possible chance of reintegrating into society successfully.

Resettlement Advice Service: Our dedicated national phone and online service provides advice and support on resettlement matters to offenders, their families and practitioners such as finding somewhere to live, getting a job and dealing with the disclosure of a criminal record.

Substance misuse: Our services combine a dual focus on the individual and the community, offering people interventions, information, advice and guidance programmes so they can not only recover from drug or alcohol dependence but also start to contribute actively and positively to the community.

Working in partnership to influence policy: We use our knowledge of what works to reduce crime to help inform policy and shape practice. In line with this, we work closely with government and public and private sector partners, using our experience on the ground to establish and pilot the best ways of reducing crime in local neighbourhoods. Nacro is also a regular contributor to government consultations and important debates on key subjects in the criminal justice sector.

Introduction

Nacro is responding from the perspective of a specialist provider of education and training to a significant number of young people who are 'lost' to the mainstream education system. Nacro Education achieved a 'Good' (Grade 2) in its recent Ofsted inspection in April 2014. We run over 30 education centres around the country, with personalised, vocational courses that provide young people with the skills they need to get into education, training or employment. Over the past ten years, Nacro's education programme has helped more than 60,000 young people.

Nacro's learners include those who have learning difficulties, low educational attainment and those who have spent time in custody. Some have grown up in care, and some have suffered abuse. Over half of Nacro's learners have an offending background. Unlike many providers, we refuse to routinely exclude on the basis of prior offending because we believe that young people should be given a chance at rehabilitation. Therefore, many of the lessons learnt from working with young offenders inside our classrooms are equally applicable to working with young offenders in custody.

Young offenders are one of the most socially excluded and vulnerable groups and have already experienced multiple disadvantage in their lives. They suffer significant health inequalities, particularly in the area of mental health, and many have multiple needs. Therefore, Nacro welcomes the continued emphasis on minimum standards for young people in custody.

Response

Ethos and purpose

Nacro welcomes the renewed emphasis on the education that young offenders receive whilst in custody. Through our education programmes, Nacro understands the importance of education and training to move lives away from crime. Whilst approximately one in three young offenders have educational or employment related needs, research from the Nacro-led Beyond Youth Custody (BYC) programme – a research and evaluation programme delivered in partnership with three specialist organisations and universities – found that young people in custody often have additional needs which are cumulative and interlocking.¹ For example, almost a third of young offenders have a mental health need (31%)² and both physical and mental trauma is particularly common in the backgrounds of violent young offenders: in one study 91% of violent young offenders had experienced abuse or loss,³ and in another study 60% had traumatic brain injury.⁴ Whilst it is important to improve educational attainment and provide skills for life, the ethos and purpose must also give equal attention to other rehabilitative interventions so that the reasons why young people end up in custody in the first place are addressed systematically. Without this focus, the proposals in the consultation are unlikely, in and of themselves, to have the desired effect in terms of reduced reoffending and offender well-being.

Education

All young people should be given the opportunity to engage in a flexible curriculum. In particular, Nacro supports the rule that provides young people in custody with 30 hours of education per week as there should be no inequality between the education that young people receive in custody and in the community. Whilst Secure Colleges should provide an opportunity to systematically engage young

¹ Bateman T, Hazel N and Wright S (2013) *Resettlement of Young People Leaving Custody: Lessons from the literature* London: Beyond Youth Custody

² Chitsabesan P, Kroll L, Bailey S, Kenning C, Sneider S, MacDonald W, Theodosiou L (2006) 'Mental health needs of young offenders in custody and in the community' *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 188:534-540

³ Boswell G (1996) *Young and dangerous: The backgrounds and careers of section 53 offenders* Aldershot: Avebury

⁴ William H (2012) *Repairing shattered lives: Brain injury and its implications for criminal justice* London: Barrow Cadbury Trust

people in custody in some form of education, the flexible curriculum should allow for the fact that some of the young people will not have an entry level qualification, and will need a period of stabilisation before they can engage in the curriculum. In the interim, young people should be familiarised with the Secure College regime and needs such as mental or physical illness, trauma or substance misuse should be addressed by specialised services which teach them coping mechanisms that build up their resilience to fully engage.

The experience of Nacro's education services points to the need for quality education provision which supports young people in choosing the life they want by tailoring our approach to each individual, challenging them and focusing on achievable outcomes. In this mix, a flexible curriculum must be tailored to conform with trauma-informed practice, given that many of the young people will have suffered trauma in early childhood. Trauma-informed practice is different from trauma-specific services and may involve 'awareness raising and training for staff, the provision of safe environments, reducing the scope for re-traumatisation and the coordination of provision designed to increase resilience and support.'⁵ It can incorporate three key elements: an understanding of the prevalence of trauma; recognition of the effects of trauma both on those affected and on those who work with them (secondary trauma); and the design of services which are informed by this knowledge.

Education in custody must aim to impact positively on reoffending upon release. Completed education programmes can lead to employment which in turn has been shown to reduce reoffending. However, given that the average length of time in custody for young people is 85 days,⁶ education programmes may not be completed whilst in custody. Therefore, the curriculum should be:

- Easily transferable to education and training providers in the community so the young person can pick up where they left off.
- For older children, education should also link to realistic employment opportunities, so that they can find work quickly upon release.

Such a curriculum can be achieved more easily if education providers operate in the community and have strong links with local employers so that there are no gaps in provision on release, where reoffending often takes place.

Assessments, plans and services

Nacro agrees that there should be rules for assessments and plans as they have been an irregular feature when young people arrive in custody.⁷ It is important for them to adhere to the regulatory requirements for a single assessment process which informs a unified Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), as outlined in the Department of Education's 'Support and aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability'.⁸ This approach will simplify the process of identifying and planning provision for young people in the secure estate. The assessment should include screening for mental health problems as well as traumatic brain injury. In this regard, the rule on safe and timely access to health services should explicitly include physical and mental health services to ensure that both are on an equal footing.

In addition, assessments and plans should be carried out by qualified professionals who are adequately trained. The assessments should not just involve a tick box exercise which relies on self-disclosure

⁵ Wright S and Liddle M (2014) *Developing trauma-informed resettlement for young custody leavers: A practitioners guide* London: Beyond Youth Custody

⁶ Ministry of Justice (2014) *Youth Justice Statistics 2012/13: Statistics bulletin* London: Ministry of Justice

⁷ *Supra* note 1

⁸ Department of Education (2012) *Support and aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability: Progress and next steps* London: Department for Education

which may not accurately identify their needs: for example, the young person may not know that they have a learning difficulty or are experiencing the effects of trauma. Therefore, an element of observation should be included to uncover unidentified needs. To get the best outcomes, the BYC research suggests that young people must be fully involved and engaged in the rehabilitation planning process.⁹

Staff

In line with the BYC research, custodial staff should be chosen for their ability to display empathy and respect as well as their ability to build trusting relationships with young people.¹⁰ The BYC research also found that where staff have a personal interest in, and dedication to, the young person's rehabilitation, and the young person is aware of this, this can motivate them to engage and keep on engaging with resettlement services once out in the community.¹¹ Custodial staff should undergo adequate training, but this rule should go further and include the required level of experience pertaining to custodial staff, given the complexity of the young people in custody. Through their day-to-day interactions, custodial staff members are well placed to assist in identifying needs which may not have been picked up by an initial assessment. Custodial staff members are also critical to all successful custodial interventions, not only in the delivery of the services they provide, but also through their everyday interactions with young people and should be equipped with an appropriate level of understanding of the circumstances which lead to incarceration including their risks, needs, assets and motivations. This should also include the importance of facilitating connections between young people and their families (see visits scheme below). Training should also include an awareness of mental health, learning disability and trauma.

Library

Nacro agrees that all young people should have access to books within a library. Books can be seen as an important aspect of effective rehabilitation. As well as developing an individual's learning capabilities, reading can also enhance skills such as self-reflection, empathy and imagination. Libraries should stock a range of publications to help young people with their own personal and skills development and be complemented with virtual access to appropriate reading material within prison cells. Not only will this bring Secure Colleges into the digital age, it will widen the range of materials available and increase IT literacy.

Visits scheme

Nacro also agrees that there should be a rule to establish a visits scheme in which all young people are entitled to a minimum of one visit per week. The positive effect of maintaining family relationships is well documented and the BYC research found that in one study almost three quarters (74%) of young people in custody regarded maintaining links with their family as very important.¹² Whilst every effort must be made to facilitate in-person visits, video link technology should be provided to young people in custody and their families to promote more contact through 'virtual visits'. To get the best from these visits a 'whole family' approach should be adopted including working with families to develop their relationships with their children. This approach involves rebuilding family ties to aid reintegration of young people upon release by developing skills and strategies to improve parenting practices and family relationships, but also supporting families within their local communities to access services which can address their needs.

⁹ *Supra* note 1

¹⁰ Bateman T and Hazel N (2013) *Engaging young people in resettlement: Research Report* London: Beyond Youth Custody

¹¹ *Ibid*

¹² *Supra* note 1