



Nacro response to Work and Pensions Committee - Support for ex-offenders inquiry

April 2016

Introduction

Nacro, the crime reduction charity, is dedicated to reducing both 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:

- Housing: we help people to find somewhere to live and to develop independent living skills, helping them to foster the know-how and stability they need to bring about lasting change in their lives.
- Education and training: we provide pre-vocational and vocational programmes, problem-solving courses and employment preparation programmes for people who are stuck and can't see a way forward.
- Substance misuse: our services combine a dual focus on the individual and the community, offering interventions to people so they can not only recover from drug or alcohol dependence but also start to contribute actively and positively to the community.
- Offender management: we work with offenders and those at risk of committing crime and antisocial behaviour.
- Resettlement Advice Service: Our dedicated national helpline 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.
- Employer Advice Service: We offer operational advice, training and strategic support to organisations about safer recruitment or admissions of applicants with criminal records so that they can strike a balance between the issues of safeguarding whilst also enabling ex-offenders are not a risk to gain equal access to education and employment opportunities.

We also 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.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of our response further, please contact: Caroline Drummond: caroline.drummond@nacro.org.uk, 0207 902 5442, or Sally Benton: sally.benton@nacro.org.uk.

We have responded to the questions as per the inquiry terms of reference, as below. We would be very keen to assist the Committee with this inquiry further; to provide more detail on our response and our services.

1. How are prisoners helped to find employment; is support available both pre and post-release?

Education, Training and Employment (ETE) following release from custody is the responsibility of the Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) or the National Probation Service (NPS), where applicable. Work is done pre-release, by National Careers Service (NCS) or Jobcentre Plus (JCP), with an aim to match ability and aspiration to job roles in custody. All prisoners are screened and signposted into ETE. However for many prisoners, competing priorities (such as accessing substance misuse and health services) and poor experiences of careers advice in the community means that there is little motivation to proactively engage in ETE in custody. Prisoners will, in most cases, have an initial meeting with the relevant careers adviser soon after arrival, which will highlight their preferred custodial ETE options but it may be sometime before available jobs/placements arise in their chosen area during their sentence. Nacro's experience tells us that during this time many are reluctant to engage in other activities e.g. English or maths qualifications to help boost employment opportunities.

For most prisoners, post-release employment support fails to start early enough in a sentence to have an impact and the quality of service can vary from prison to prison. To have a lasting impact prisons and CRCs should have joint responsibility to work towards sustainable employment. However joint working and the level of support varies depending on the prison and area. Factors such as prison population numbers, staff ratios and the wider and competing priorities of prison governors mean that national picture for ETE remains patchy. A [joint thematic review](#) by HM Inspectorate of Prisons, HM Inspectorate of Probation and Ofsted in September 2014 stated that 'the quality of information, advice and guidance that offenders received was of variable quality', highlighting the inconsistencies across the prison estate. Virtual Campus, a secure web-based prison tool, is perceived as of limited use and under-utilised in many places due to staffing and IT infrastructure issues.

In order to secure long-term, sustainable employment, planning and preparing individuals for work needs to start earlier than twelve weeks before release and, as with all resettlement services, preparation for release should begin on induction. As a result it cannot be the sole responsibility of resettlement prisons. It is critical that a sentence is used to build aspirations and encourage purposeful, work-related activity which not only builds motivation but provides the skills and qualifications that can continue employment and development on release. The work offered should reflect the local labour market and Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) should be more widely available to facilitate access to employment because it provides tangible transitions back into work pre-release.

Dependent on contract, post-release CRC providers are responsible for delivering a variety of employment support functions. Nacro resettlement services provide community support to help individuals source employment, develop CVs, build confidence, secure training and help with disclosing convictions. This is often done in group work. Whilst one-to-one support is sometimes more preferable the structure of contracts means one-to-one advice is not always possible. The capabilities and landscape of the CRC only go so far, and continued development for individuals is often dependent on the availability of local services once CRC support ends. In reality, given local funding constraints, the burden falls on JCP advisors who are ill-equipped to provide specialist advice and cannot maintain the level of support required. Individuals leaving custody will sometimes be mandated on to the Work Programme, depending on whether their JSA claim was started in custody or not and individual circumstances. It is important that the new Work and Health Programme considers how mandation on to the programme will work for individuals leaving custody, and takes into account work readiness.

The financial pressures and early models of Transforming Rehabilitation (TR), which began from February 2015, are still in their initial stages and the models naturally vary from CRC to CRC, however there are fundamentals that are critical to achieving successful employment outcomes, in

particular, support needs to be consistent and in tandem with other services such as health, suitable accommodation and relationship-building.

Statistics taken from a Ministry of Justice, DWP and HMRC data-sharing exercise show the concerning extent to which people released from prison struggle to find sustainable employment in the years following their release, with 42% claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) two years after release¹. This highlights the complex barriers of helping offenders find work and the importance of providing the right support to source sustainable employment and progression. Securing employment can also depend on the type of offending background disclosed to an employer, for example someone with a history of violent or sexual crime will find it harder to source employment than someone convicted of a white collar crime. In addition employers will often select those that have less complex health issues and lower level supervision requirements from the National Probation Service. This is understandable. Employers, particularly smaller and micro-businesses fear the resource required around the sustained recruitment of people with complex problems and offending histories. Securing employment in these more complex cases often requires a personal or corporate commitment to giving people a second chance. Nacro's Employer Advice Service supports employers by giving them the confidence, tools, expert advice and guidance and training to navigate this complex area effectively, particularly managing risk and avoiding any potential legal pitfalls. The service has proven to be invaluable for employers and it is critical that this level of support is offered on a more consistent basis. In May 2015, Nacro launched '[Recruiting Safely and Fairly](#)', a guide for employers on how to successfully recruit people with a criminal record. It is important not to overlook employer experience and viewpoints; there are a number of challenges and expert support needs to be in place to enable them to offer opportunities.

In reality the level of support needed for individuals and employers is not provided as a matter of course. The CRC's responsibility for securing employment ends at the time of post-sentence supervision. At this point in time there is often a large amount of work to be done to secure or sustain successful recruitment resulting in the employment outcomes for ex-offenders we see today. Too often support ends at the start of employment neglecting the crucial importance of transition for individuals and employers. Nacro's Wolverhampton substance misuse programme, funded by the local authority, is one of our projects that support individuals during their employment. We know that continuing support during this critical phase is crucial to a successful outcome both for individuals and employers.

Beyond this, disclosure of criminal records creates a complex barrier. There is widespread confusion among individuals, employers and JCP professionals about what needs to be disclosed on a job application. To this end Nacro and JCP are working in partnership in some locations to train staff to deal with the complexities of criminal records disclosure. This is integral to delivering successful outcomes, empowering JCP staff to give valuable advice whilst giving individuals confidence in advisers which results in better engagement.

2. What benefit payments are available on discharge from prison and how long does it take to access those benefits?

Benefits serve as an important financial lifeline for prisoners on discharge and need to be received immediately on release. Currently, JCP representatives that work in prisons only process individuals who will receive Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) on release. Individuals who may not be able to work, due to addiction problems or physical and mental ill health, and would claim Employment Support Allowance (ESA), are assessed upon release. When an individual is released they need to present themselves at a JCP to access all benefits. The time it takes to receive these benefits can vary, from six weeks to six months. This has a wide-reaching impact on individuals who have complex health problems.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/experimental-statistics-from-the-2013-moj-dwp-hmrc-data-share>

In order to access benefits or JSA, a bank or credit union account is needed. This should be set up while in prison to ensure payments are received without delay. This can present a number of problems. For example, identification is needed to set up an account and many prisoners do not have this. Identification can include a document signed by the prison governor, however this process is not a fast one and the individual has to pay the administration cost. For many, this is not a priority while in prison, and it is hard and time-consuming to set this up once released.

Furthermore, banks will sometimes limit the number of accounts available for prisoners and ex-offenders. For example some set a limit to a maximum of ten a month, or they may delay in opening them and require resource-intensive chasing. Setting up an account post-release is more expensive and will further delay receiving benefit payments. Delays inside and outside of prison mean accounts are not always opened in time, causing financial insecurity and pressure. This has a significant impact on the critical early stages of resettlement. Arguably, an alternative process is needed. This requires working with financial providers to make this process smoother and less burdensome, both inside prison and after release.

Currently a £46 discharge grant and £4.50 travel warrant is given to individuals released from prison, before benefits are received. This arbitrary amount barely covers basic food and sustenance needs for a small number of days. If an individual is released as described above, without work or additional support set up with JCP advisors, this will not be sufficient to cover basic costs, including accommodation etc.

As stated above, benefits are a key lifeline. Many of the problems could be addressed by changing the process and working with financial institutions, for example, by waiving the administration fee to obtain ID to set up an account.

3. Do the employment and education programs available in prisons prepare prisoners for formal employment?

In September 2015, the Ministry of Justice announced a review of prison education, to investigate the quality of provision and how courses link up with employment opportunities on release. Nacro responded to this consultation urging the importance of connecting curriculum needs to match available training and employment opportunities for when prisoners leave custody, locally and nationally.

Currently, the employment and education programs available in prisons do not consistently achieve required outcomes for individuals. Quality of provision varies from prison to prison, and there are no standard training programs in line with employment needs. There is little incentive for offenders to take part in education or training, especially if they see no benefit on release, for example sustainable employment with opportunity to progress. Compounded with the fact that there are often around thirty prisoners per one member of staff, prison staff do not have time to encourage offenders to engage.

There are a number of factors that need to be addressed in order to prepare individuals for employment on release. Fundamental to getting this right in education and ETE is robust initial information, advice and guidance (IAG) assessment. Nacro is a national provider of tailored education, centred on providing quality vocational education that harnesses talent, engages young people back into learning and leads to tangible employment or further education opportunities. Much of our work is providing workplace skills and traineeships to facilitate the transition from education/training into the workplace. Nacro's provision covers 14-16 year olds, 16-19 year olds and adults.

Our curriculum and teaching model in the community is based on a curriculum pathway, using IAG to engage individuals in learning by identifying a clear route (with choices) to a career which, combined with quality teaching, generates a 71% success rate. The model is centered around an individualised approach, concentrating on the best options for the learner, focusing on the end goal, i.e. what the learner wants to achieve and where they want to get to. In custody and on release, aspiration,

motivation and consideration for the future are vital for sustained engagement with education and training. By basing our offer on positive options for the future we are able to secure and sustain buy-in.

Individuals enter prison at different stages of life, education and employment and require an individual approach to ensure true progression. Learning disabilities and sub-threshold educational needs should be identified and addressed, recognising that they may have been missed previously. Similarly, the curriculum needs to cater for offenders who have entered custody at a higher level. Training and employment pathways should exist to some level for all, from entry-level to higher-level offenders and offer employment progression, matched to aspiration and skill levels and be continued through to the community post release.

Moreover the current funding mechanisms in place mean that for individuals a course that starts in prison too often fails to continue or progress (onto the next level) once released. Continuation of education and training post-release is vital. If not, there is little incentive to engage with education and training while in prison and even less on release, particularly if access to funded adult courses are not available.

4. What support do offenders receive to help them find suitable accommodation on leaving prison?

The links between homelessness and reoffending are stark and finding suitable, affordable and stable accommodation is key to reducing the risk of homelessness associated with leaving custody. Statistics show that 79% of people homeless on release went on to reoffend in the first year, compared with just under half who had accommodation.² Appropriate accommodation is pivotal in finding and sustaining employment. People who have accommodation arranged on release are four times more likely to have employment, education or training arranged than those who don't.³

As stated above, appropriate accommodation is a foundation of resettlement. Staff in resettlement prisons will first explore if an individual can go back to previous accommodation or stay with family and friends. If this is not possible, staff will try and find appropriate housing for release. Often this comes in the form of supported housing. Supported housing is provided when an individual has no home upon entering prison, or when an individual cannot return to the family home or previous locations and require continued support to move on. It is provided when an individual has connected problems such as drug and alcohol addiction, mental and physical ill health. It also provides stability and the positive environment that facilitates individual's recovery and the consistent support needed (not least from an address) to secure employment and more permanent and sustained accommodation.

Nacro deliver just under 100 programmes of supported housing, many of which support offenders. However, the Government's proposed 1% rent reduction, as well as Local Housing Allowance caps on this type of housing will mean that a significant proportion of our services will not be viable. The effect on individuals that need this type of support and accommodation to turn their lives around is potentially catastrophic, with a debilitating effect on securing employment and wider positive outcomes following a period in custody.

Nacro case study – Longden House

Longden House is a 10-bed supported housing scheme for female offenders or those at risk of offending. It offers a comprehensive support package for women with complex issues including mental health, substance misuse and alcohol abuse.

² <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Bromley%20Briefings/Factfile%20Autumn%202015.pdf>, p60

³ [Ibid.](#)

As well as providing accommodation and service user-led support, the project links up with key outside agencies to ensure that experts in their field offer guidance and other specialist support with the women to ensure that all of their needs are being met. Staff are also on hand 7 days a week all day and overnight to ensure that the most vulnerable residents are fully supported to move on and address barriers to moving on such as arrears, anti-social behaviour and tenancy sustainment.

Even without the added risk of pending funding cuts to supported housing, the reality is that the chronic lack of housing stock means it is not always possible to house everyone appropriately on release. Some individuals may go back to family or friends but this is not always possible or appropriate. Too many prison leavers return to negative environments and relationships that facilitated their offending in the first place, such as gangs or drug-related activity; or leave to unstable accommodation for short periods, sofa surfing at friends' or associates' places before returning to street homelessness and/or prison.

Transforming Rehabilitation has changed the landscape in some ways, with providers expected to secure longer-term accommodation. Nacro resettlement services provide support to ensure three months' safe and secure housing. However, this is an ever-increasing challenge. In the main, a resettlement worker will approach a local authority to secure housing for an individual. A significant variance exists in availability of social housing, particularly in London and the South East. There is further variance in how local authorities position individuals released from prison as 'in need' of housing or not, with some choosing to define a period in custody as making oneself intentionally homeless. Consequently, custody leavers are often at the bottom of the list. Whilst the evidence clearly links housing to reduced reoffending, it is often difficult for local representatives to consider the evidence when balancing public opinion and ever tightening fiscal constraints.

If an individual is moving out of the prison and CRC area on release there are additional challenges for resettlement workers. Negotiations between CRC areas are not only logistically challenging, often requiring individuals to work together without direct contact, but they also present contractual problems for payment by outcomes and a smoother system of joined up working is required.

5. What are the impacts of factors such as homelessness and unemployment on the propensity to re-offend?

While accommodation and employment are key factors, offending, and the cycle of reoffending, occurs for a large variety of reasons. Reoffending rates are high, with 45% of adults reconvicted within one year of release from custody and 68% from youth custody, reflecting the complex nature of the causes of offending. There are often multiple and complex reasons why people reoffend, including mental health, addiction, finances and relationships. For example, 62% of adult male and 57% of adult female sentenced prisoners have a personality disorder⁴ and 49% of women and 29% of men in prison reported needing help with a drug problem when entering prison. One survey also showed that 64% of prisoners reported using drugs and 22% said they drank alcohol every day in the month prior to custody. Both these groups had a higher reconviction rate⁵ reflecting the significant proportion of individuals in custody with complex health conditions. These statistics highlight the complexity of the barriers and problems that need to be addressed on release.

However attractive it is to think about reducing reoffending in simple terms; get a job, get a partner, or get a home, the reality is often much more complicated. Of course there are fundamentals of resettlement, housing, health, education and work that should and do direct resource and support. Yet in making support decisions it is important to recognise that each individual has their own personal narrative into offending. Without recognising this individual nature of offending and addressing primary problems, which will differ from person to person, it is unlikely we will reduce the high

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ <http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/cji/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2014/09/Resettlement-thematic-for-print-Sept-2014.pdf>

reoffending figures we see today. In order to transform rehabilitation it is important not to over simplify the problem and to piggyback on small successes and showcase as the panacea for all resettlement.

Nacro's policy is clear, that resettlement and rehabilitation needs to be a tailored approach, including ways of working that are often overlooked such as re-building relationships and engaging with support staff. For instance, research has shown that family and friends are often the most important factor in enabling successful resettlement and yet have not historically been involved in sentence planning⁶. Above and beyond addressing individual and practical factors such as homelessness and unemployment, there are fundamental elements of resettlement that need to be in place. For example; plans for release must start at the earliest opportunity and the transition back into the community on release can trigger stress and requires enhanced support. This is a challenge for policy makers and providers. Rehabilitation is a process and not an event. Resettlement is central to facilitating change yet (as stated above) the trigger for change will be different from one person to the next. For one person, time in custody will mean they never offend again, for another it will be the opposite, choosing prison as a safer option than the multiple problems, such as mental ill health or homelessness they face on release. An understanding of how to get to the end point, through various different paths with engaged professionals, connected and funded services and supportive volunteers, is critical to success.

6. How does benefit and employment support integrate with other services for ex-offenders?

As set out above, individuals released from custody often have a number of complex problems and the integration of services to address these is vital. Supporting offenders is complex and challenging, there are rarely quick fixes, particularly for repeat and prolific offenders and pinpointing the intervention that resulted in success is inherently difficult.

Professor Carol Black conducted a review in September 2015 into the employment outcomes for people with alcohol and drug addictions and obesity. Nacro's response to this review emphasised the importance of healthcare and other services being integrated within a multi-agency and coordinated response, so that the needs an individual presents are addressed simultaneously. Without an integrated approach there is a risk that people with drug and alcohol dependencies may fall through the gaps and disengage with services altogether. This approach is vital in sustaining long-term recovery and stability and replicates across support for offenders in the community. Our response also outlined the importance of not forcing someone into employment before they are ready, as this can hinder progress and cause a relapse.

The level of support from JCP advisors to individuals can vary hugely from centre to centre and place to place. Some are more skilled, informed and equipped than others to signpost to services. Integration with other services also varies from area to area. In practice it relies on ad-hoc relationships and commitment between individuals, rather than having a consistent framework and structures for integrated service delivery. This is not sustainable and invariably breaks down when individuals in services move on. A national or regional multi-agency framework could be an option. The roll of national Liaison and Diversion services across England demonstrates how a national model can provide consistency of service for the end user whilst providing the ability for local and regional partnerships to deliver against the model in innovative ways.

From Nacro's service delivery experience we know that health is often the missing link when it comes to integration. Lack of data sharing means health information does not get passed between JCP, CRCs and healthcare providers, causing delays and gaps where support is needed and pivotal to a sustainable recovery. In prison, initial screenings take place but usually focus on physical health. Mental health often gets overlooked and depends on individual sharing of personal and sensitive information, or self-referral.

⁶ <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/cji/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2014/09/Resettlement-thematic-for-print-Sept-2014.pdf>

The multiple dimensions of an individual's barriers to resettlement and eventual employment needs strong integration of services and a local joined-up approach.

Nacro case study of service integration – Greenwich Resettlement

This service is funded by the Oxleas NHS Trust to provide an additional resettlement service to offenders with medium to high mental health concerns, at high risk of reoffending and/or gang affiliation leaving HMP Belmarsh, HMP Thameside and HMP ISIS.

The service works with ex-offenders for 3 months in custody and up to 6 weeks post release:

- *To secure safe accommodation*
- *To maximise income by securing welfare benefits / employment*
- *To re-establish positive relationships with family and friends*
- *To seek and engage with health services in the community*
- *To maintain existing tenancies*
- *To seek any other support appropriate to the individual e.g. substance misuse services, counselling, debt advice etc.*
- *To reduce reoffending by having a positive support structure in place*
- *To enter into some form of ETE*
- *To engage with statutory and third sector agencies in order to reduce involvement in gangs, anti-social behaviour (ASB) and criminal activity*

7. Is there specific support for different groups such as young offenders and female offenders?

In prison, specific employment support for women and young offenders will depend on the specific provision in that institution as well as the support available in the community through the CRC. There are very distinct risk factors and barriers that exist for different cohorts of individuals leaving prison, and these should be addressed by resettlement teams, both before release and in the community.

For example, women offenders are more likely to have been victims of sexual trafficking or domestic violence. More logistical considerations, such as childcare responsibilities also need to be considered and supported by JCP advisors in the community. An individual approach needs to be taken to address these gender barriers where possible, dependent on the availability of local services. The Corston Report explored the barriers and issues faced by women offenders, highlighting, amongst other things, the prevalence of mental health and substance misuse in this cohort.⁷ Research also shows that 53% of women offenders have experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse compared to 27% of men. It is therefore vital that these individual circumstances are taken into consideration alongside employment support. The small number of women in custody also means that resources for this group are limited.

As referenced above in question 6, ex-offenders will have a variety of complex needs and circumstances unique to them; there is no one size fits all model to resettlement (which includes employment support). It is important to bear in mind that diversity occurs within groups and intersectionality requires an individual approach. For example, a female ex-offender aged 17 with learning disabilities will require a specific approach to her individual circumstances.

Work to support specific groups of offenders, including employment, varies from CRC to CRC, but most are geared towards health or well-being, as opposed to specifically employment. Nacro's work in Essex CRC is an example of a women-specific community-based service to address issues such as

⁷ <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/docs/corston-report-march-2007.pdf>

sex work and domestic violence, which in turn supports an individual's long term journey to employment, where appropriate.

Similar to women, young people leaving custody have unique risk factors and in turn, barriers to employment. Nacro's Beyond Youth Custody is a five year, Big Lottery funded project designed to challenge, advance, and promote better thinking in policy and practice for the effective resettlement of young people. Their research has identified the barriers experienced by different groups, including women and young girls and BAME young people. Please see here for more information:

<http://www.beyondyouthcustody.net/wp-content/uploads/Recognising-diversity-in-resettlement-a-practitioners-guide.pdf>

<http://www.beyondyouthcustody.net/wp-content/uploads/Resettlement-girls-and-young-women-guide.pdf>

Further, the Youth Justice Board announced a pilot project, 'Turn around to work', to help young people in Greater Manchester and London leaving custody to find employment. The initiative aims to 'bring together a range of organisations, including national and local employers, to help provide training, corporate mentoring and work experience opportunities for young people on their return into the community.' We would urge the Committee to explore the progress of this initiative in more detail.

8. What recommendations should be made to improve support for ex-offenders?

We have extrapolated the main points from our response and listed below:

- **In prison:** smoother processes for prisoners to set up bank accounts to receive benefit payments, including the process of obtaining ID.
- More effective join up between prison, NCS and CRC staff in delivering and engaging prisoners in ETE support.
- ETE support for post release needs to start from beginning of the sentence and join up with the local labour market.
- Funding mechanisms need to be altered to support progression of ETE: through the gate where courses have been started and need to be completed, as well as individuals leaving custody who can progress their education.
- **In the community:** addressing the primary needs and tailoring support to an individual is vital – including specific barriers and risk factors of cohorts including women and young people. Explore how JCP staff can be equipped with the resources to understand individual needs and work with other services to provide an efficient, joined-up approach.
- Address the lack of accommodation for people leaving custody as a cornerstone of effective resettlement and reducing reoffending, and a foundation to securing and sustaining employment.
- Encourage a cultural shift towards employers recruiting individuals with a criminal record, giving them the confidence to recruit safely and fairly. This means engaging employers as well as giving them the tools to develop responsible and inclusive recruitment procedures.
- Look at how service integration can be more efficient; innovate around how data sharing can be improved with limited funding.