



We change lives

Policy briefing

Policy analysis from Nacro

Practical barriers to effective resettlement: Identification for prison leavers

This briefing is the second in a series which will shine a spotlight on the practical challenges to effective resettlement for people leaving prison and put forward cost effective solutions. At a time when the Government is reviewing the future of probation, we have an opportunity to improve the overall criminal justice system and remove the practical barriers to rehabilitation.

Introduction

Nacro is a national social justice charity with more than 50 years' experience of changing lives, building stronger communities and reducing crime. We house, we educate, we support, we advise and we speak out for and with disadvantaged young people and adults. We have delivered resettlement services for people leaving prison for many years and we seek to improve services through our national and regional influencing.

From our experience of supporting people on release from prison, we know that there are a number of practical challenges people face to moving on in their lives. The first days and weeks of release are a window of opportunity for change as motivation is often at its highest point; however this period can also be fraught with obstacles. Practical challenges such as the impact of a lack of personal identification (ID) can quickly turn enthusiasm to change into disappointment, and often a return to familiar ground to make ends meet.



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Why is ID important?

We know that ID is a crucial foundation to accessing many elements of resettlement, including Universal Credit (UC), housing, training and employment. Many of these will require multiple forms of identity verification, including photographic ID and proof of address. Nacro's work in supporting people in resettlement has highlighted to us that many people leaving custody do not have ID and may struggle to acquire this, creating significant barriers to effective resettlement. Photographic ID such as a passport can cost upwards of £75.50,¹ almost double the discharge grant, making it inaccessible for many without financial support.

“You can't get ID as you need ID to get it”

Young Person from Safe Hands project, Everton FC

“I don't have anyone to send money in for me and don't have a job on the wing so can't afford it.”

Nacro service user

“Most of my clients do not have any form of ID when leaving prison. This will be for a number of reasons. They may have been street homeless before being remanded in custody, they may have been evicted from their property and their possessions disposed of, or they may have lived a chaotic lifestyle and lost it.”

Nacro resettlement worker

“ID is a real issue that needs tackling. So many young people we see come out of prison don't have ID and so it creates a delay upon release in terms of signing up for universal credit, housing, etc. and these few days upon release can be critical to how they behave on the outside.”

Staff at Safe Hands project, Everton FC

1. Passport £75.50; Driving Licence £34 for first/provisional, CitizenCard £15 in community but reduced cost of £10 for those in custody; and Birth Certificate £10



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What impact does a lack of ID have?

Lack of ID can have a huge impact on a number of different areas that are crucial to successful resettlement:

1. Universal Credit

Universal Credit (replacing Jobseeker's Allowance) can be a lifeline for many people leaving custody who do not have a job to go to on release; government figures show that only 17% of people are within PAYE employment within a year of leaving prison.² There can be up to a five week wait to receive payment after a UC claim, so many prison leavers will need to apply for an advance claim to tide them over for the first few weeks after release. To access an advance UC payment on the day of release, you need photo ID – specifically a driving licence or passport – to verify your identity through the online service. A recent report by the National Audit Office has indicated that the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has “significantly overestimated the number of claimants that would be able to confirm their identity online with only 38% (compared with its expected 90%) succeeding using Verify, the government’s online identity verification tool.”³

When a person leaving prison does not have photo ID, they have to verify their identity at an interview with the Jobcentre before they can access an advance of their UC claim. The time between initiating their claim on the day of release and receiving money can range from days to a week. People leaving prison can, in theory, arrange an interview at a local Jobcentre Plus office for the day they leave prison through a prison work coach; however, our experiences show that access to work coaches is inconsistent.

Where a gap is created between day of release and access to an advance payment, people leaving prison can be left without enough money and fall back into familiar patterns of behaviour, as one resettlement worker stated:

“When there is a delay in getting benefits, even for a matter of days, clients are at risk of reoffending, and returning to custody.”

Nacro resettlement worker

2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/from-the-wings-to-the-workplace-the-route-to-reducing-reoffending>

3. <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Rolling-out-Universal-Credit.pdf> p.9



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Recently, the DWP confirmed to Nacro that CitizenCards and bank debit cards (which show the individual's name, sort code and account number) are accepted as valid ID for UC claims. This is not a well publicised fact within the list of acceptable forms of ID in DWP UC guidance and we have also heard of conflicting advice being given locally by DWP staff. This information needs to be consistently communicated to DWP staff as well as other staff working with prison leavers to access UC.⁴

We welcome the announcement as part of the Rough Sleeping Strategy that a new process is being trialled in HM Prisons Birmingham, Norwich and Wayland to improve access to UC by preparing claims so that they are ready to submit immediately on release. We hope that the findings from these trials are used nationally to ensure that prison leavers can receive UC on the day of release.

2. Bank accounts

ID is required to open a bank account, ensuring that UC claims and earnings from employment can be accessed immediately. Within the Finance, Benefits and Debt strand of our resettlement delivery, we work with service users to set up bank accounts both in custody and the community. However, the Justice Select Committee, in their inquiry into Transforming Rehabilitation, highlighted that this still does not happen enough across the board. The Government responded to this by stating that a programme has been running in prisons to help those soon to be released with setting up a basic account.⁵ We welcome the increase in bank accounts being set up, however HMI Probation's Annual Report also highlighted that provision to do this is patchy and inconsistent.⁶

For those on short sentences or those who have had periods of homelessness, and therefore cannot provide a consistent address history, it may not currently be possible to set these up in custody. However, if someone has not been able to open an account in prison, a lack of ID will be a huge barrier to opening an account with a bank or credit union on release, and make access to financial support very difficult.⁷

4. At the time of publication of this report, CitizenCards did not feature on the checklist of acceptable ID available from gov.uk

5. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmjust/482/48202.htm> para 188

6. <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/12/HMI-Probation-Annual-Report-2017-1.pdf> p.60

7. A Prison Governor's verification of a serving prisoner's identity makes opening a bank account in custody more straightforward in custody than it is in the community, where more details such as proof of address are required.



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EXAMPLE

“We had one service user released with an old passport, ripped and damaged, which the DWP accepted as ID for his Universal Credit claim but no bank would accept it in order for him to get a bank account. We now have a credit union who has accepted it but they haven’t processed the account and so he is 3-4 weeks out of custody with no access to his claim. We have had to support him with money for clothes, food and travel.”

Nacro resettlement worker

3. Employment

Pre-employment checks require proof of identification including proof of address and right to work in the UK, most easily verified through a passport or birth certificate. Access to ID is a key driver of the government’s Education and Employment Strategy and yet we have heard from a number of employers that work with people leaving prison about the challenges they face when people do not have ID.

“From an employer’s perspective, having the correct ID from day one is absolutely vital. If a person doesn’t have it then we’d struggle to do our checks and would have a hard time paying them as they wouldn’t be able to open a bank account. Most employers won’t go to the time and trouble to resolve these issues so having it all prepared before leaving prison is key.”

Recycling Lives, Employer

Access to ID should be prioritised as a critical barrier to the success of the Government’s strategy to ensure more prison leavers can access employment and training opportunities.

4. Housing

Housing is fundamental to stable resettlement, but access to most types of housing will require some form of ID. Presenting as homeless at a local authority as well as private rented accommodation require proof of the right to live in the UK, which could be a passport or a combination of a birth certificate and a letter from the prison service.

We know from our experiences that while some local authorities may accept national insurance



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numbers or prison discharge papers, this will vary from authority to authority. ID that is accepted by both local housing authorities as well as landlords is critical in gaining access to housing as quickly as possible.

“It just makes it more difficult when you are trying to get housing, as they ask for ID, but you can’t get ID without an address – it makes no sense.”

Young person from Safe Hands project, Everton FC

What we do

As part of our work under Transforming Rehabilitation, we are currently supporting the people we work with in our resettlement services to get ID before they leave custody. In 2017/18, we opened 648 bank accounts for our service users across three CRCs, clearly highlighting the need for them, particularly given the challenges in doing so in the community.

Identifying who needs ID and/or a bank account is part of our initial screening when we start working with a person in prison. We believe this should be a standard part of the screening process. Similarly, there are no KPIs for prisons or the CRCs relating to people having ID and so support provided to access it may vary. While we know that there are examples of good practice in this area, particularly in setting up bank accounts, we believe that more could be done to ensure people leave prison with ID and a bank account.



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Nacro's ask

We firmly believe that everyone should leave prison with valid ID as we know it is critical for supporting resettlement. There are a number of simple steps that could be taken to improve future outcomes:

- 1 Ministry of Justice and HMPPS should ensure a lack of ID is identified as part of prison reception screening processes, by mandating it as a question which all CRC providers must ask and record information on. This will provide the government with better data to fully understand the size and nature of the problem and respond.
- 2 Funding should be allocated to ensure that a lack of ID is addressed before someone is released from prison.
- 3 In the interim, acceptable forms of ID, particularly for UC claimants should be made clearer, for example:
 - The National CitizenCard should be listed on the checklist of acceptable ID specified and available from gov.uk
 - DWP staff and staff in prisons need to be accurately briefed about acceptable forms of ID when supporting people to make UC claims