



## Nacro Response to the National Audit Office: Probation

Autumn 2022

### Response:

1. How well did the government manage the transition from the previous resettlement model in place (known as 'Enhanced Through the Gate') to its current resettlement approach under unified services?
  - In hindsight it was too challenging for the whole system to transition on one day: it would have been better to transition probation employed staff on one day (probation officer, managers) and continue TR contracts for a period of 3-12 months and gradually phase them out. This would have enabled consistency for service users and other key stakeholders, ensuring no drop in service. This process created significant challenges that are still being felt today.
  - Lack of consultation with the prisons: whilst the centre was confident that prisons had been consulted, the majority of our prisons were unaware of the changes and how they might impact on their delivery/the service provided to them. This made it difficult for our teams who were the frontline staff in the prisons delivering messages to prison teams (namely the reduction of resettlement provision/capacity) which was challenging and not well received. Perhaps consultation or engagement with prisons should be with Heads of Reducing Reoffending if messages haven't been received and passed down as planned.
  - Changed ways of working: Intervention providers were used to being embedded into probation, however now co-locating is only by agreement where probation offices have capacity to allow staff to co-locate. This has created in some offices an us-them mentality which hinders a fully coordinated service to people in need of joined-up, more holistic support. The impact of this has been increased as a result of covid restrictions which have remained in place in Probation offices far longer than in prisons.
  - Intervention providers no longer have access to nDelius (the probation system) which means that there is no background information about a case, as referrals only include very minimal information. Consequently, intervention providers have very limited risk information, information about other agencies/appointments or progress/behaviour updates. This creates a heavy admin burden as intervention providers then need to request additional info, which delays people getting access to the support they need. The system also removes some cases once they are closed and so there is no cumulative record of cases/delivery without duplicating case details on different systems, which has an impact on service delivery time. It's taken until summer 2022 for the system to produce accurate reports about volumes of referrals, starts, interventions etc. which has hindered the ability to understand progress against KPI's. As one of our intervention providers put it: 'we feel we are delivering interventions with our eyes closed to some extent without all of the multi-agency working/joint working that we used to deliver'.
  - The gaps in service with no support to remand prisoners and the delays in Finance Benefit and Debt "day 2 service" commissioning could easily have been avoided, and have resulted in significant gaps in support reaching service users. While Commissioned Rehabilitative Service provision has done its

best to plug the gaps in service, this has left service users with limited support to address debt, source benefits and set up bank accounts and ID, which will create additional complex barriers for service users to resettle effectively into the community.

2. How would you describe the government's current (post December 2020 in Wales and June 2021 in England) performance in resettling prison leavers into the community? We are particularly interested in your comments on support for prison leaver to find accommodation or education, training or employment
  - **Accommodation:** despite welcome government funding of temporary accommodation for prison leavers at risk of homelessness, 444 people per month were still released into homelessness between March and January this year. Access to more sustainable, longer-term accommodation – both social and private housing – also remains difficult for many prison leavers. Currently, 30% of all prison leavers do not have access to secure accommodation three months after their release. Prison leavers continue to face a range of barriers to accessing accommodation. For the temporary accommodation scheme to be effective, and to subsequently improve the resettlement outcomes of people coming out of prison, urgent action needs to be taken to ensure that there is sufficient support for people housed, as well as guaranteeing long-term housing options. Additionally, though we acknowledge that conversations with the Ministry of Justice are ongoing, support for people being released having been remanded (who are then released) must be included within existing dynamic framework contracts.
  - There are also specific challenges within the dynamic framework commissioned services: there are gaps in the accommodation contract service delivery, as there is a lack of clarity and understanding around the contract. There is an expectation that support workers in the accommodation contract service are there for urgent crisis need, however staffing levels against referral levels don't allow the service to be a crisis management. The accommodation contract is not designed to be a crisis management support unit. With the remand contract coming on board, this will again bring additional challenges to understanding of the different processes and contracts, as it is another new referral process.
  - The day of release isn't streamlined enough: e.g., the Prison Release and Ex-Offender Homeless Pathway Protocol was developed in Leicestershire with the local authority and voluntary sector partners, yet hasn't been implemented. Learnings from protocols such as these would ensure better pre-release support and more effective resettlement for prison leavers.
  - **Employment:** only 19.8% of people leaving prison are employed six months after their release despite much focus on the issue given current record labour market vacancies and the 45,000 working-age prison leavers searching for employment every year. This is despite shifts in both employer and public opinion on the merits of hiring people coming out of prison, as well as Government initiatives such as the first tranche of Employment Advisory Boards. It is important the Government recognises that there are issues faced by those released from prison that affect their ability to find and sustain employment, and these must be addressed alongside securing employment in itself.
  - **Education and training:** Targets set on the completion of training and acquiring of qualifications by people in prison can lead to individuals being placed on inappropriate courses, predominantly lower-level qualifications as these can be completed quicker, instead of ensuring each individual is put on the right pathway towards higher level skills and/or into employment on release. Learnings and qualifications also still do not follow the learner as their sentence progresses.
3. What does the government need to do to improve resettlement services?

- Significant review of RMS system (the current communication system for intervention providers) to expand the key information shared within the system or allow providers access to nDelius to facilitate better multi agency working / communication between probation and partner agencies/CRS providers. This will also allow suppliers to work in a more trauma-informed way as it will avoid the need for Service Users to undergo assessments each time they're referred to a different pathway.
- Support the integration of suppliers into probation offices/prisons to improve coordination of services to Service Users and increase joint-working across agencies and improvement eg to increase and improve referrals
- Issue further guidance and training to probation officers to ensure they improve the quality of referrals to CRS providers – need to be better quality, with more info and to reduce misunderstanding amongst probation pre-release teams about the scope of work delivered by CRS providers
- Clearly define CRS provider and probation staff roles and responsibilities to avoid duplication of work
- Provide updated data to suppliers on a regular basis to support better planning and allocation of resources based on likely need.
- Ensure that contract management practice is more consistent nationally, ensuring that providers are in receipt of the same levels of support and held to account in the same way regardless of geographical location.
- Review the process for dissemination of information to prison governors and key staff to ensure transparency and not leave partners to share information on changes with prisons directly.