

Nacro's response to the Justice Committee call for evidence: Rehabilitation and resettlement: Ending the cycle of reoffending

About Nacro

Our response to this inquiry is based on our experience of supporting thousands of people across the criminal justice system (CJS) every year and our commitment to ensuring their voices and experiences are heard.

We support 28,000 people every year across all Nacro's services. We deliver services across England and Wales in each part of the CJS, from liaison and diversion in police custody and court, support for people on a community order or on release from prison, including advice with accommodation, personal wellbeing and finance, benefits and debt. We deliver the Community Accommodation Service (CAS-2) on behalf of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), housing prison leavers on Home Detention Curfew and those bailed from court in need of an address, as well as a range of supported housing projects for people leaving prison. We run a national criminal records helpline supporting 12,000 individuals and employers annually. We also have experience delivering education in prisons and the youth estate.

We recognise the impact crime has on individuals and communities and we work with people who have committed offences and who are victims of crime. To reduce reoffending, we believe that rehabilitation must be at the heart of an effective CJS.

We have restricted our answers to areas where we have the most knowledge and expertise.

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Section 2: Rehabilitation in prisons

3. What impact does custody have on prisoner health and wellbeing, and how effective is provision for this in prison in promoting rehabilitation?

People in prison are generally in poorer health than the general population.¹ Nacro's recent reports on mental health² and physical health³ in prison set out how the prison environment negatively impacts health and wellbeing. This includes overcrowding and unsanitary conditions, frightening and violent environments, poor quality diets, a lack of personal control and support networks, and a lack of purposeful activity and time out of cell.

Our 2024 survey of over a hundred recent prison leavers also highlights barriers to healthcare in prison:

- 40% experienced problems in getting to an appointment within the prison.
- 34% who had an appointment at outside hospital couldn't attend.
- 43% said they didn't get the treatment they needed from the medical professionals they saw. Of these:
 - o 60% had a longer period of pain and discomfort.
 - o 12% were then not able to work when released from prison.
 - o 29% said it caused mental health issues or exacerbated pre-existing issues.

Prison must not worsen health outcomes and Government must take action to ensure equivalency of healthcare.

4. What is the current offer of training and education available in prisons and is it sufficient?

Education and training in prisons and the youth estate is not fit for purpose. Tackling overcrowding and staffing issues, opening up regimes and ensuring education and training engages, supports learning and focuses on pathways into employment is critical. Government should ensure digital approaches, employer engagement and better metrics for success are in place.

HMIP reports very poor provision of education and training in prisons with attendance at classes "often astonishingly low".⁴ We often hear of empty workshops/classrooms, and people unable to access courses at levels required for employment or insufficient vocational

¹ House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmhealth/963/963.pdf>

² <https://nacros3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/24203115/Mental-Health-and-Prisons-Briefing-FINAL-WEB.pdf>

³ <https://nacros3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/16111240/Physical-Healthcare-in-Prison.pdf>

⁴ https://cloud-platform-e218f50a4812967ba1215eaecede923f.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/sites/19/2024/09/25.13_HMI-Prisons_AR-23-24_v6a_Final-WEB.pdf

training. Too often education doesn't reach the people who it would benefit most, particularly those with poor prior educational experience/attainment. Additionally, in the youth estate there is a heavy reliance on keeping children apart from each other to minimise violence which means they are regularly unable to access education, group-based offending behaviour programmes or visits.

From our experience of delivering education, issues impacting delivery include:

- Shortage of available spaces
- Difficulties in recruiting education staff
- Prison staff shortages
- Security concerns in prisons
- Inappropriate curriculums, where the range, quantity and quality of education, training and work on offer does not stimulate and/or provide the skills needed on release
- Lack of digital infrastructure
- Ongoing impact of the pandemic

5. To what extent are prisoners given enough time out of cell to engage in purposeful activity?

We see a recurring pattern of inactivity and wasted opportunities to support people during their sentence to prepare them adequately for release. A radical review of regimes, purposeful activity and time out of cell is required as this is a major driver of inadequate provision of education, work, access to healthcare and ultimately impacts on rehabilitation.

Less than 50% of people in prison are in work or education. For those who are, many only work part-time and prison regimes often result in a very short working day. Many people spend long periods of time locked in their cells, with little to fill their time. HMPPS must increase access to work and education and ensure a working pattern that, as far as is possible, reflects the working day outside.

We often hear about limited access to the gym or library, and people having to choose between attending education/work or having visits, attending medical appointments or offending behaviour programmes.

a) What impact does contracting and staffing have on the delivery of purposeful activities in prisons?

For organisations contracted to deliver education in prisons, it is difficult to recruit and retain teaching staff and vocational trainers, impacting delivery. Contracts need to allow providers to offer competitive packages to attract staff of the right calibre to work in a challenging environment.

8. What examples of best practice within the prison service are there in promoting rehabilitation?

Promoting rehabilitation works best when it is person-centred and focused on needs, but this is often not the case in prison.

Organisations like Recycling Lives⁵ work within prisons building skills, experience and qualifications to enter the workforce on release. They provide wraparound support on release, and people save a portion of their prison wages to help them get back on their feet when they are released.

Therapeutic communities such as HMP Grendon provide group-based therapy within an environment that promotes positive relationships, personal responsibility and social participation. Studies have shown lower levels of reoffending.⁶

Section 3 – Resettlement services and alternatives to custody

9. To what extent does the Probation Service have the capacity to support effective resettlement pre and post release?

The Probation Service faces a chronic and unsustainable staffing crisis impacting their ability to deliver effective resettlement. The Government must resource an effective Probation Service and voluntary sector services for the long-term and urgently assess ways to ease capacity, including bringing in voluntary sector expertise.

Many people we support speak about insufficient contact with their Prison Offender Managers before release, and a lack of continuity in the community with high staff turnover. This can be a significant barrier to building relationships; can lead to interventions being repeatedly offered but not delivered; and having to repeatedly retell their history.

We see the practical difficulties of these capacity challenges eg probation staff have responsibility to complete the duty to refer for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, an important part of housing support, however, we regularly see delays which impact on the support that organisations like us can offer.

Since reunification, probation have responsibility for identifying support needs and making referrals to other agencies, and ongoing liaison with and approval of support plans from each agency. In our experience, probation have found these responsibilities difficult to deliver. This leads to delays in support providers being able to begin work and can directly impact on resettlement outcomes, such as not being able to secure accommodation on release.

⁵ <https://www.recyclinglives.org/our-programmes/rehabilitating-offenders/>

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<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20070906193335/https://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/r115.pdf>

Voluntary sector providers could take an increased role. Accommodation Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) providers could take on the duty to refer to streamline delivery. Voluntary sector providers could assess and coordinate required support services, creating joint support plans. This would utilise voluntary sector expertise, reduce pressure on probation, reduce silos and deliver a more holistic service.

Recent changes to ease probation workloads reduced the supervision of those with low-level offences. It is critical those considered lower risk are still able to access appropriate support as they often lead more chaotic lives and have higher support needs. Our staff tell us that despite these changes, capacity issues remain.

10. How does joint working between services happen so that ex-offenders receive the support they need post-release?

In areas where we have strong relationships with probation, housing providers, the local authority and other local support providers we see the best results for people. However, joint working is not consistent.

The current model of commissioning of services by Probation has led to a siloed approach which hampers joint working, and which doesn't deliver well for the individual. HMPPS must change this approach when it retenders CRS services.

a) Is there sufficient data sharing between services?

There is insufficient data sharing between services which, if improved, could significantly improve the support delivered and reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

Our staff often experience incorrect or incomplete referrals from other services, including probation, impacting our ability to provide timely and effective resettlement support.

CRS providers are held back by no longer being able to access probation's case management system, NDelius, often leaving them without key information to help identify other professionals involved and provide appropriate support. Changing this would reduce the likelihood of reoffending or crisis due to improved ability to identify emerging needs and collective concerns and respond more quickly.

11. How effective is support provided to ex-offenders on release such as homelessness prevention, employment opportunities and health and wellbeing services?

Support with accommodation, finances, wellbeing, mental health and substance misuse issues in the transition from prison to community are critical to reduce reoffending.

We deliver CRS services in regions across England and Wales, contracted by probation to deliver advice and support for different support needs.

As CRS contracts are not commissioned on outcome or impact metrics, there is currently no robust data to demonstrate effectiveness. We recommend this is reviewed in the next round of commissioning.

Homelessness - Prison leavers released homeless are almost twice as likely to reoffend.⁷ Action to tackle homelessness must be a priority. There has been an increased focus on homelessness prevention, and services include CRS which supports people to understand options, obtain accommodation & sustain tenancies; CAS-3 which provides short-term accommodation to people at risk of homelessness on release; Accommodation for Ex-Offenders Local Authority funded projects; Homelessness Prevention Teams; and Prison Accommodation Advisors.

CRS providers help people navigate complex systems to try and secure accommodation; making applications; liaising/advocating with local authorities; housing providers and landlords. The housing crisis makes securing accommodation very challenging and with high local authority waiting lists, private rented accommodation is often the only option for people not considered priority need, but is not always appropriate or accessible for prison leavers. CAS-3 has provided immediate relief for many people at risk of homelessness in the absence of other options.

Securing and maintaining immediate and long-term accommodation remains very challenging. Recent data shows that 14.3% people were released homeless. Of those released with accommodation, less than half (45.4%) were housed in settled accommodation upon release and 38.4% were housed in temporary or emergency accommodation (including HMPPS CAS accommodation). More than a quarter of prison leavers don't have settled accommodation three months after release.⁸

Action to tackle homelessness must be a priority. To reduce reoffending, we need increased focus on longer-term and move-one housing, including supported housing; increased flexible support in CAS-3 provision to help people sustain accommodation; and improved multi-agency working.

Employment: While the number of people in employment has increased - nearly a third of prison leavers are in work six months after release - ⁹ a large proportion are not. Positive work in the pre-release period includes support with CVs and ID, the introduction of Employment Advisory Boards and recently announced Employment Councils, but more focus is needed during the period in prison and after release. There is no longer a commissioned resettlement pathway to support education, training and employment and people tell us they don't feel they are getting the support they need to help them retrain or find employment.

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/proven-reoffending-statistics-october-to-december-2022/proven-reoffending-statistics-october-to-december-2022>

⁸ Ministry of Justice, 2024. Offender Accommodation Outcomes
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-accommodation-outcomes-update-to-march-2024/offender-accommodation-outcomes-statistical-summary>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-employment-outcomes-update-to-march-2024/offender-employment-outcomes-statistical-summary>

People in supported housing face particular challenges moving into work and independent accommodation as benefits are withdrawn but income is often insufficient to meet the higher rents of supported accommodation. This is a wasted opportunity to support people towards independence and should be reviewed with transitional support introduced.

Mental health and wellbeing: Support includes NHS England's RECONNECT service; local mental health teams; CRS personal wellbeing services amongst others.

As a CRS personal wellbeing provider, we deliver services which build on people's strengths and take a tailored approach to individual need. People tell us how transformative the support has been and leads to increased engagement with other services and community integration.

12. What impact do licence recall conditions have on promoting resettlement?

Recall to prison is an important power to manage risk to the public but the sharp rise in recalls, with fewer than 1 in 4 involving a charge of further offending, suggests the current system isn't working.

People we support and staff tell us many recalls are avoidable, and people do not always understand what may cause them to be recalled, causing stress and anxiety. We hear of people recalled for missing appointments or because they are homeless and so in breach of their licence. Returning to custody can stall progress, and can lead to losing jobs, homes and connections.

Deterioration in behaviour during a licence period is often the result of insufficient support and not addressing need. We need a clear framework, ensuring that consideration is given to whether appropriate support was in place and, unless there is a significant risk of harm to individuals or the wider community, steps should be taken to rectify this ahead of recall.

Consideration should also be given to whether the Probation Service should have direct power to recall, although we acknowledge where there is risk of serious further harm decisions need to be taken quickly. Regardless as to where the decision sits, support providers should have the opportunity to make representations, as we often see that people continue to engage with our services when their relationship with probation has broken down.

13. What role should non-custodial sentences have in promoting rehabilitation?

The Government should end ineffective short prison sentences and increase the use of community sentences which are more effective at reducing reoffending. Community orders have the potential to tackle the causes of offending, whilst ensuring the harm caused by a short prison sentence is avoided. Unlike imprisonment, community orders allow for people to keep their home where they have one, maintain family and community ties, retain

contact with support networks and services, keep jobs, and continue with any childcare responsibilities - all factors which help reduce reoffending.

a) What impact would an increase in the use of non-custodial sentences have on resettlement services?

The CJS is interconnected and increasing non-custodial sentences would inevitably impact probation and support services, which are vital to ensuring people receive the support they need. It is critical that we significantly invest in community services and an effective Probation Service for the long-term; they are vital to the success of plans to solve the prisons and courts crises and to increase the confidence of victims, judiciary and wider public. See Q9 for steps which can also increase the voluntary sector's role thereby reducing probation pressures.

b) What, if any, changes to community sentencing should be introduced if the Sentencing Review recommends a move away from short custodial sentences?

We need a range of high-quality support options and community orders available nationally, and delivered promptly to a high standard to ensure that people get the support that they need. This should include treatment for mental health issues and substance misuse, personal wellbeing services, improving the rehabilitative potential of unpaid work, and developing a network of community hubs to facilitate the integrated delivery of services. There also needs to be sufficient capacity in CRS and probation to deliver preventative and proactive support, such as tenancy sustainment or addressing antisocial behaviour which may risk current accommodation.

Unpaid work - Some people we support speak positively about carrying out unpaid work, although some also talk about negative aspects around shame. They report feeling useful and doing something valuable for their community, a welcome distraction from loneliness or isolation. However, we must improve the rehabilitative potential of unpaid work so that it supports the development of people's skills and links to further opportunities.

Creating a network of Community Hubs - We believe creating a network of Community Hubs, building on the work of the current CFO Activity Hubs, has the potential to provide more capacity for the Probation Service to deliver effective community orders at scale.

Community hubs would be a 'one-stop-shop' where a package of suitable interventions could be delivered as part of people's rehabilitation activity requirement days. People could access advice and practical support with benefits, health, education, training and employment, including CV writing or interview support. Hubs could also help combat isolation and build positive supportive relationships, including through peer mentoring. This is particularly valuable for lonely and isolated individuals who are low risk but can get trapped in the revolving door of low-level offending and short prison sentences.

14. What examples of best practice are there for effective resettlement?

From our delivery:

Departure Lounges: Nacro's Departure Lounge at HMP Doncaster is a day of release service to support with barriers people face when first leaving prison. This includes help with accommodation, finances, employment, education and training and basic provisions. Agencies such as probation and drug services use the space to prevent the risk of losing contact on release and to integrate support. User feedback has demonstrated how important this has been for ongoing engagement with services.

Nacro's Personal wellbeing services (PWB): People on community orders or on licence are referred to PWB as partial fulfilment of rehabilitation activity requirements. With partners we provide tailored, one-to-one and group support and help people access further support from other agencies, such as substance misuse, housing or employment. PWB is a vital part of the resettlement support available and people who go through this service tell us how transformative it has been and how it builds confidence, tackles loneliness, and supports them to access and engage with other services such as probation, and turn their lives around.

Nacro's Health Resettlement project: Nacro provides support for men in HMP ISIS and Wandsworth with significant mental health concerns during their transition from prison to community. Commissioned by NHS Oxleas, we ensure people are immediately linked with community-based support services. Intensive support pre- and post-release helps people to navigate services, including housing, and we provide advocacy. The most recent data from the service shows a 71% reduction in reoffending rate and type of crime.