




**“Clinks will always
have an umbrella handy
if it starts to rain.”**

Clinks member

Impact assessment

2019

Summary



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Clinks member

ideastoimpact

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Impact assessment 2019 | Summary

This is a summary of our
Impact assessment 2019.

You can **download the full
report** on our website at:
www.clinks.org/publications



Photo: Clinks annual conference 2019

Executive summary



Photo: Clinks annual conference 2019

Introduction

This publication reports on the findings of an assessment of Clinks' impact. It looks at Clinks' work since the previous impact assessment in 2016. The assessment was undertaken between March and August 2019. It set out to review:

- 1 Whether Clinks is providing the range of services and activities that stakeholders want and need
- 2 What difference Clinks is making to its members and the wider voluntary sector in criminal justice and, ultimately, to the sector's service users
- 3 Whether Clinks' work is of a good quality.

Over 120 people were involved through three workshops, around 12 mini-interviews, a 'postcard' survey with 92 respondents at Clinks' events, 33 telephone interviews and one email response with a range of voluntary sector, government and statutory sector stakeholders. A review of Clinks' written material, and workshops and interviews with staff, was also included.

Survey responses indicated that:

- **91%** of respondents to the survey strongly (71%) or slightly (20%) agreed that **Clinks keeps their organisation informed** about issues in the criminal justice system that affect them
- **84%** of respondents to the survey strongly (68%) or slightly (16%) agreed that **Clinks is effective in promoting the role and value of the voluntary sector** to decision-makers and funders
- **79%** of respondents to the survey strongly (43%) or slightly (36%) agreed that **Clinks helps their organisation to develop skills, knowledge and relationships** to further their work
- **70%** of respondents to the survey strongly (46%) or slightly (24%) agreed that **Clinks listens to and acts on their needs, concerns and experiences**.

Overall, stakeholders from different sectors were extremely positive about all of Clinks' work, identifying changes that Clinks had influenced, and praising the quality of its policy analysis and development, consultations and collection of

evidence and provision of information in particular. Some interviewees commented that engagement with members and its focus on smaller and specialist organisations had improved over the last few years.

Most of the changes suggested in this report are tweaks to what Clinks already does, with key recommendations including:

- Considering black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) representation and tackling the disproportionality of BAME people in the criminal justice system
- Enabling members to connect and share information more with each other
- Looking at the programme of work of networks and forums in relation to identifying strategic goals.

Attributing impact

In complex systems it is unlikely that any one organisation has influenced an outcome. Government interviewees indicated that it was multiple voices with similar messages that particularly influenced change, and so the ability for organisations to work together is crucial. This impact assessment aims to establish what Clinks' contribution has been, amongst others, to changes in policy, practice, and people's lives rather than claiming sole credit for Clinks.

The difference that Clinks makes

✓ Outcomes

The criminal justice system is improved; voluntary organisations provide the best possible opportunities for individuals and their families; and people's lives are transformed.

What is successful

Interviewees were able to point to a range of changes to criminal justice policy and practice, to voluntary organisations – and ultimately people in the criminal justice system and their families – that had come about, at least in part, because of Clinks' influence. These included:

- The Farmer Review,¹ carried out in partnership with Clinks, the effects of which have been seen over the period of this impact assessment, where attitudes have been changed about the importance of families for people's rehabilitation. There are new family services in prisons and family work is more consistent across prisons rather than being piecemeal, and prisons are inspected on their family work. Voluntary organisations described how they are delivering new family services.
- Transforming Rehabilitation and probation reforms, with government officials citing Clinks' trackTR² and State of the sector³ research, plus the evidence that Clinks brings through coordinating meetings with voluntary organisations, as being influential in changing the original intentions around the new probation structure.
- The *Female Offender Strategy*⁴ was influenced by a range of women's organisations with Clinks being important in coordinating a delegation to the Minister. As a result, the strategy emphasises a move away from prison sentences as well as confirming the vital role of voluntary sector women's centres.
- Raising the profile of arts in the criminal justice system, including getting this into the Arts Council's *Draft strategy 2020-2030*⁵ for the first time.
- Organisations gaining funding and delivering new services, both as a result of opportunities that Clinks has opened up, through information provision and the relationships built at Clinks' events. Brokering access to prisons was mentioned as particularly important.
- Intervention around the collapse of Community Rehabilitation Company Working Links, meaning that voluntary subcontractors were paid following the issuance of a Ministerial Direction and organisations continued to remain in existence when otherwise they could have closed.

Although the impact on beneficiaries was not measured directly, interviewees talked about how these changes in turn had an impact on individuals

and their families through changes in policy and practice and new and improved services.

What Clinks could consider

Some areas of work have not been so successful. Some participants pointed to policy not always leading to implementation as intended, or implementation being slow. A sizeable number of participants mentioned prisons being difficult to access or to work with because of their culture. There were still concerns about the future probation reforms not including small and specialist voluntary organisations.

Many stakeholders were very positive about Clinks but found it difficult to identify the specific impact that Clinks has made on their organisations. The longer-term nature of policy change also makes this difficult to measure; ongoing systematic monitoring would help, with regular reporting so that voluntary organisations understand the value of involvement with Clinks.

The right services at the right quality

Stakeholders were very positive overall about the range and quality of services, with a few suggestions for improvements. These are listed under the outcomes that were used for the impact assessment.

✓ Outcome

The role and value of voluntary organisations is known by stakeholders, opening up opportunities to develop and grow.

What is successful

Providing organisations with a route into commissioners and decision-makers to promote

their services was highly valued. Promotion of the voluntary sector as a whole, and of individual organisations, helped with profile-raising and access to new opportunities nationally and at regional levels where there are area development staff. Government, statutory and voluntary organisations benefited from learning about different ways of working, taking ideas away to implement.

What Clinks could consider

Some organisations would like more opportunities to promote themselves at events, and more clarity about how to get involved. The need for more events in different parts of the country was also frequently mentioned.

Outcome

The voluntary sector has the skills, knowledge and relationships to achieve its goals.

What is successful

Information, policy briefings, networks and forums were the most popular answers in the survey question about what support from Clinks has been most helpful. Having targeted information about the criminal justice system saved organisations time from having to sift for that information themselves, particularly the Light Lunch ebulletin, because it can be quickly scanned and covers a broad range of subjects. Being able to contribute to Light Lunch and other communications was welcomed and organisations received responses as a result. The provision of targeted information for Wales was welcomed. Some interviewees mentioned that the website is now better organised since its review.

Most people felt that staff in Clinks were approachable and accessible, and having named contacts in Clinks for the areas and thematic networks helped. Area development staff helped with promoting the criminal justice voluntary sector locally and linking with other sub-sectors, and this support was requested in regions where Clinks does not currently have a local presence.

Although not statistically significant, regions in which there are area development staff tended to have more positive responses to the outcomes in the survey than those in areas without.

What Clinks could consider

Different ways of delivering information such as blogs, vlogs or podcasts were requested. Some people felt that there was too much information from Clinks and this could be better filtered against priorities, or that it should be clearer why the information was important and relevant. Presentations at networks, forums and events could be more interactive with a clearer 'call to action'. Increasing attendance at events of all types was mentioned. This included an increase in the number of people overall to network, with involvement of a wider cross-section of people (for example from different sub-sectors) and participation of government and other statutory officials.

Outcome

The voluntary sector involves people with lived experience in the design and delivery of services.

What is successful

Promoting the involvement of people with lived experience at Clinks events was important in inspiring people and giving practical ideas. Organisations also had made changes as a result of involvement in the service user involvement managers' network and written resources.

What Clinks could consider

Redeveloping resources around people with lived experience in line with current good practice was suggested. *The state of the sector 2018* report suggests that many organisations do not involve service users in decision making over and above consultation, so this is an area that could be improved. The needs of people with lived experience for support to set up their own organisations – when they may be reluctant to approach mainstream services – could be considered.

✓ Outcome

The voices of voluntary organisations working in criminal justice, particularly small and specialist organisations, are amplified.

What is successful

Providing commissioners and decision-makers with a route into the voluntary sector, and the voluntary sector with a route into commissioners and decision-makers, were both valued highly. Government and statutory officials would not have access to the number and diversity of groups without Clinks. This includes ongoing advisory groups, workshops and roundtables, and steering groups for specific pieces of work. This helps to improve the confidence of policy makers in what they are proposing, and voluntary organisations felt that these groups could help to hold officials to account against their promises. Because of these relationships, organisations felt that being involved with Clinks could really make a difference.

Stakeholders said that Clinks is good at managing complex situations and relationships with multiple stakeholders and interests, presenting a range of views rather than focusing on one solution, and is good at working collaboratively with frontline organisations, other voluntary sector influencers and commissioners and decision-makers. Not seeking funding for frontline services was important to some officials in trusting Clinks to be part of the policymaking process. Clinks' staff were described as being responsive, open, sensitive, empathetic and showing passion for their work, and that they were a nice and likeable organisation to deal with. Clinks' policy information, including bulletins, briefings and blogs were praised for summarising policy so that it was easy to understand and use, which helped organisations to plan for the future and liaise with commissioners and decision-makers with confidence.

How Clinks manages different relationships was highlighted. This included the sometimes-conflicting interests of larger and smaller organisations, with most respondents feeling that Clinks handles this well. Tension between Clinks being funded by the

Ministry of Justice, whilst Clinks may sometimes need to criticise government policy, was also questioned. Again, most participants felt that Clinks took the right approach to gain the most influence, although a few people felt that Clinks could on occasion be more assertive. Government officials felt that Clinks were robust in their analysis and contributions and weren't afraid to give constructive criticism.

What Clinks could consider

There could be more publicity about what happens as a result of Clinks' policy work to ensure that people know what has happened with their information, plus greater use of ICT to develop policy collaboratively. Clinks forums and networks could have more of a strategic focus to better influence policy. They could look at particular problems identified by attendees in a geographical or thematic area.

✓ Outcome

Disadvantage, discrimination and inequality in our criminal justice system are tackled.

What is successful

Representation of the small and specialist organisations was evident across all Clinks' activities, and the focus in the State of the sector research on organisations that work with people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act (2010) has highlighted issues for these groups. Interviewees were optimistic about Clinks' merger with Women's Breakout and how the women's sector influenced the *Female Offender Strategy*.

What Clinks could consider

Although people were positive about Clinks' work around BAME people and their disproportional representation in the criminal justice system, it was felt that there hadn't been much progress in changing practice, for example with outcomes of the Young Review⁶ and the Lammy Review.⁷ There were some suggestions that Clinks needed to be more representative of BAME people, and that addressing this issue should be a specific area of work for Clinks and its members.

✓ Outcome

The voluntary sector is aware of and able to respond to opportunities and challenges.

What is successful

Many organisations mentioned that, through Clinks, they had developed relationships with others, which had enhanced their services. These included better referral networks and publicity directly to beneficiaries, gaining access to prisons, and gaining funding leading to new services.

What Clinks could consider

People wanted more ways to connect and collaborate with others, both inside and outside of meetings, including within regions and at levels smaller than regions. Many organisations are still struggling to access opportunities through unrealistic or inaccessible procurement practices, and it was suggested that Clinks could recruit a procurement expert to support this work. Participants from the voluntary and statutory sectors felt that there wasn't enough practical support for smaller organisations to access opportunities, which may impact on those dealing with disadvantaged communities in particular.

✓ Outcome

There is accurate, timely and comprehensive intelligence on the needs and challenges in the voluntary sector.

What is successful

The quality of Clinks' evidence was raised by government officials in relation to how it had influenced their thinking, particularly in the trackTR research, but also in the State of the sector research. Organisations had plenty of opportunities to feed in their experiences. Voluntary organisations used Clinks' evidence to help with funding applications and influencing decision-makers, and many commented how responsive Clinks is to their requests for evidence. Working with academics has helped to bring extra capacity, rigour and the ability to take a longer-term view.

What Clinks could consider

How to increase response rates for surveys and requests for information to better enable busy organisations to participate.

✓ Outcome

The voluntary sector is treated as an equal partner in the design and delivery of services.

What is successful

There is some optimism that the voluntary sector is treated as an equal partner in some areas. It is valued that Clinks has been invited to sit around the table by the government regarding probation reforms. Reports from officials that Clinks' contribution has made a difference is further evidence of this.

What Clinks could consider

Despite some optimism, most voluntary organisations still don't feel as if they are an equal partner. They feel that decision-makers could be more collaborative at national and local levels, they could understand their work better and take more of a partnership approach – and less of a transactional approach – to developing services.

Impact report 2016 pledges

Clinks made 10 pledges as a result of its last impact report.⁸ There has been progress on most of these, for example:

- A comprehensive series of consultation events took place during 2018 and Clinks' strategy for 2019-22, *Creating change together*,⁹ was developed and promoted, with most stakeholders clear about Clinks' role
- A communication strategy guided the redesign of communications, giving the voluntary sector multiple ways to engage

- Area development roles have had an impact in five areas, providing information, support, and linking people up
- Clinks has worked effectively with other partners to achieve shared aims across a variety of activities
- The learning from past work has been applied to influence change, particularly in discussions around the probation reforms.

Areas still for development or further development include:

- Increasing the profile of more of Clinks' staff, and ensuring that staff are not over-stretched
- Considering whether information needs to be streamlined and more focused
- Building relationships and gaining funding for area development officers in the remaining regions
- Further reviewing the membership offer, the distinction between members and non-members and the benefits of being a member, not just to individual organisations but to Clinks and the wider criminal justice system
- How to communicate what Clinks is working on and what it has achieved.

2019 recommendations

Key recommendations for action by Clinks include:

- Undertaking ongoing impact measurement and promotion of the difference Clinks makes
- Identifying how organisations can communicate and network more with each other
- Greater online communication and collaboration
- Working with the government to ensure that when Clinks has successfully influenced policy, it is then implemented
- Continuing to promote the voices of small and specialist organisations in the probation reforms

- Making forums and networks interactive and more strategic, including more involvement of the government and statutory services, and increasing attendance
- Working with commissioners and decision-makers to improve access to prisons and the procurement processes of prisons
- Meeting the different needs of organisations in Wales
- Increasing the representation of BAME people and organisations, and addressing the problems of disproportionality
- Redeveloping lived experience resources and encouraging organisations to involve people with lived experience more.

Notes

- 1 Lord Farmer (2017) *The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners' Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime*, available from www.gov.uk/government/publications/importance-of-strengthening-prisoners-family-ties-to-prevent-reoffending-and-reduce-intergenerational-crime
- 2 Clinks (2018) *Under represented, Under pressure, Under resourced: The voluntary sector in Transforming Rehabilitation*, available from www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/2018-10/clinks_track-tr_under_final-web.pdf
- 3 Clinks (2018) *The state of the sector 2018: Key trends for voluntary sector organisations working in the criminal justice system*, available from www.clinks.org/publication/state-sector-2018
- 4 Ministry of Justice (2018) *Female Offender Strategy*, available from www.gov.uk/government/publications/female-offender-strategy
- 5 Arts Council England (2019) *Draft strategy 2020-2030*, available from www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/draft-strategy-2020-30
- 6 Clinks and BTEG (2014) *The Young Review: Improving outcomes for young black and/or Muslim men in the Criminal Justice System*, available from www.clinks.org/publication/young-review
- 7 David Lammy (2017) *The Lammy Review: An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System*, available from www.gov.uk/government/publications/lammy-review-final-report
- 8 Clinks (2016) *Our impact: Findings from an independent impact assessment*, available from www.clinks.org/publication/impact-assessment-2016
- 9 Clinks (2018) *Creating change together: Our strategy for 2019-2022*, available from www.clinks.org/publication/creating-change-together

Clinks' view

Responding to the impact assessment's recommendations



CLINKS
at
20

Photo: Clinks AGM and 20th anniversary celebration 2018

Clinks welcomes the findings of this impact assessment. We are an ambitious organisation keen to know what we need to do to best achieve our goals. Considering our impact and where we might have room for improvement is an essential part of that.

In April 2019 we launched our new three year strategy, *Creating Change Together*.¹³ This strategy, developed following a consultation programme with the organisations we serve, sets out five strategic objectives and five goals we aim to achieve by 2022.

We are confident that this strategic approach aligns well with the findings of this impact assessment and that we have work planned to address the areas identified for further consideration.

Recommendations and Clinks' response

Ongoing impact assessment

- Building upon our three-yearly impact assessments, in this strategic period we will focus more on understanding the difference we make and making that clear to a wide range of stakeholders. Clinks is committed to undertaking impact measurement on our policy work and to consider how we communicate that to our members. We will take what we learn from the policy work and explore how to apply this to the rest of the charity.
- Our forthcoming communications strategy will identify the range of stakeholders we need to reach and the approaches we'll use to ensure that we are able to speak to those who need to know how our work makes a difference.

Information and communication

- In our strategy we have committed to assessing the need for, and then establishing and maintaining, up to six distinct specialist networks to support organisations working with people with protected characteristics, or working in ways which are often harder to fund and get support for.

- Clinks is committed to developing a communications strategy to support our strategy to 2022. We will ensure timely, accessible information delivered to the sector – aiming to create and offer user focussed communications products.
- We will explore the potential of technology to deliver our services and to add value to what we can offer. We will explore the potential of digital tools to promote the services on offer in the sector and make the most of technology to help people get the help they need from the sector taking into account barriers to access.

Influencing policy and practice

- Clinks will consider how we influence, monitor and communicate the implementation of policy and how our national policy messages need to be adapted and utilised in local and operational delivery contexts. We will explore our capacity to support implementation and keep the sector up to date about what we are doing, including through our area development team and our specialist networks.
- As the probation review develops, we will continue to engage with the government's probation review team to advocate for a central place for the voluntary sector, in particular the small and specialist organisations, in the delivery of future probation services and commissioning processes and regional structures that facilitate this. We will engage with and build relationships with the new National Probation Service structures, their teams and local partners.
- We will work to encourage a more strategic approach to the voluntary sector in Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, including through the use of grants and the development of commissioning principles which better enable the voluntary sector to work effectively with people. We are also committed to continuing to explore how our Good Prison model can be adopted in more prisons and better support how organisations work with and within prisons.

Forums and networks

- We will ensure that our forums and networks are more interactive and strategic and explore other ways of bringing the sector together. As we're committed to collaboration, we will work with partners where possible to ensure that the organisations we support are able to link with others they need to know and work with in order to have best impact.

Area development work

- We aim to maintain a regional presence, where possible, and grow our area development team, as well as consider how our area development team enables local and regional joint working.
- We are delighted to have been able to reinvest in staffing in Wales but we are acutely aware of the limitations of the resource we can dedicate. Whilst recognising that we do not have the capacity to produce the same level of response in Wales, we will have a Welsh focussed workstream in our State of the sector work in 2020. We will learn from that information as to the needs of the sector and how we can better meet them, working with our partners in Wales.

Tackling disadvantage, discrimination and inequality

- We will continue to work with specialist organisations to maintain pressure on the government to implement the Lammy Review and *Female Offender Strategy*, and ensure that meeting the specific needs of women and addressing race inequality remain a priority for criminal justice policy.
- Our strategy commits us to assessing the need for an additional specialist network to support organisations working with particular groups including BAME people. We will do this through coproduction, working with BAME organisations to understand their needs and how our support can best add value.

Lived experience

- Our strategy reaffirms our commitment to support the sector to be better at service user involvement. We will continue to develop our service user involvement managers network, providing access to tools and resources to support effective service user involvement across the voluntary sector working in criminal justice.

The voluntary sector as equal partners

- Through all our work we will continue to promote the sector and call for it to be treated as an equal and valued partner. Through our policy impact activity, we will seek to identify when this has been successful and build on that learning.

Membership, training, conferences and events

- Our forthcoming communications strategy will identify how we can best communicate our membership offer.
- We will review our training and events offer and coproduce programmes of support with the sector, connecting the sector to available evidence and good practice.

Clinks organisational development

- We aim to continue to be a strong and well run organisation, with access to resources to meet emerging needs in an impactful way. We will continue a focus on attracting multi-year funding for core activity to allow us to concentrate efforts on priorities as we identify them. We will also model excellent working practices including recruiting and retaining a skilled staff team sought from the widest pool of talent, removing barriers to full participation for those who most appropriately represent the diversity in our sector.



Photo: Clinks conference and AGM 2017



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Clinks member

Our vision

Our vision is of a vibrant, independent and resilient voluntary sector that enables people to transform their lives.

Our mission

To support, represent and advocate for the voluntary sector in criminal justice, enabling it to provide the best possible opportunities for individuals and their families.

Join Clinks: be heard, informed, and supported

Are you a voluntary organisation supporting people in the criminal justice system?

Join our network of over 500 members.

Clinks membership offers you:

- A voice to influence change
- Practical assistance to be effective and resilient
- Support from a community of like-minded professionals.

Membership starts at just £20 per year and is free for organisations with little income.

www.clinks.org/membership

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