

The impact of Covid-19 on the voluntary sector working in criminal justice

Voluntary organisations working in the criminal justice system (CJS) are essential to supporting the government’s response to Covid-19 but they face unprecedented challenges in supporting their service users and their staff during this time and ensuring their long-term sustainability.

To track the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the voluntary sector in criminal justice as the situation evolves, Clinks is conducting a bi-weekly survey of organisations. The survey explores three key areas; service delivery; staff and volunteers; and funding.

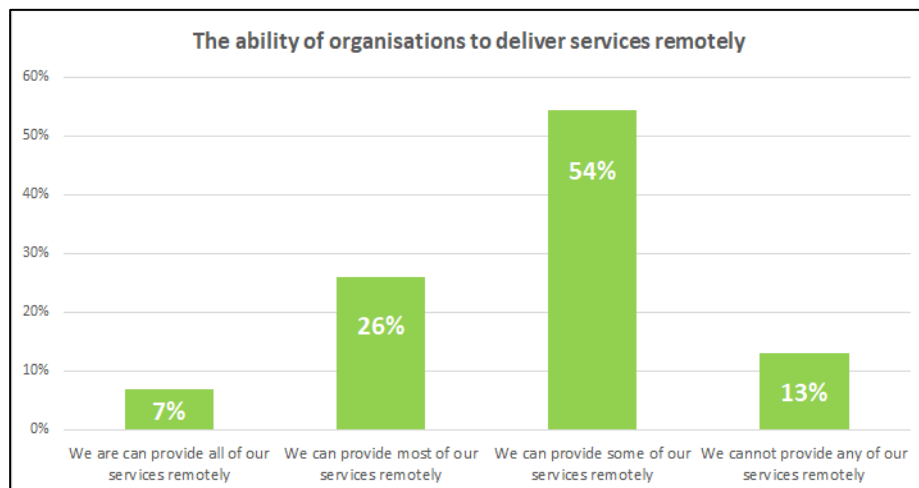
This briefing provides a summary of the key findings from our third survey which had 119 useable responses. We include below a spotlight on organisations that provide arts based provision. While arts organisations are being impacted by Covid-19 in similar ways to the wider criminal justice sector, they also face unique challenges.

The responses continue to demonstrate the flexibility and resilience of organisations in this sector and how tirelessly they are working to meet the needs of those they support in the face of such restrictions. However, as with the previous survey, these results indicate organisations are struggling to maintain service provision remotely and less volunteers are available to support them. At the same time, organisations are grappling with the uncertainty around their financial stability and the long term implications of the pandemic. For the second time we find organisations are experiencing barriers in applying for financial support from the government, finding themselves ineligible.

“We are all concerned for prisoners’ health and wellbeing as well as concerned about funding for the next six months and being able to keep going once lockdown has ended” – survey respondent

Service delivery

- **Most services have had to decrease their service provision and some have had to stop delivering services altogether.** 61% say that their service provision has decreased and a further 18% have stopped services completely.





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- **Most organisations are able continue to delivering their services to some extent remotely.** 54% say that can provide some of their services remotely. 26% feel able to provide most of their services remotely and just 7% can do so for all of their services. However this is not the case for all organisations, and 13% cannot deliver any of their services.
- **Those able to continue with their services to at least some extent, are primarily supporting people in the CJS through telephone or video contact.** Just over half (51%) are continuing with case work via telephone or video conference, 38% are running a telephone advice line; and 33% are providing resource packs to people in prison.
- **Some services must continue delivering services face-to-face demonstrating the vital nature of their work.** This is the case for 18% of respondents.

Staff and volunteers

- **Volunteers are a vital backbone for many organisations, but during this time organisations are experiencing a decrease in this vital source of support.** 44% report that the number of volunteers supporting their organisation decreased slightly or a lot since the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Front-line staff are struggling to do their jobs remotely.** 21% of organisations say their front-line staff are not able to work all in the current environment and 28% say their front-line staff can only do their jobs remotely to some extent.
- **Office staff are more able to continue working from.** 45% of organisations say that all of their office-based staff are continuing to work from home. However in some cases this still isn't possible with 19% saying that only some are continuing to work.
- **Organisations are putting important measures in place to support staff to cope through this time but there is serious concern about the impact of the current situation on their wellbeing.** There is particular concern about the anxiety caused by the lack of certainty for organisations and the added pressures of staff supporting people who are in greater need because of Covid-19 restrictions.

"Difficulties for staff trying to support clients through crisis and this is impacting on staff's mental health." – survey respondent

"There is a great deal of anxiety deriving from uncertainty" – survey respondent

Furlough

- **The majority of organisations are eligible for the government's job retention scheme.** This is the case for 64% of respondents. However there is some uncertainty about eligibility, with 20% unsure if they are eligible for the scheme and 16% saying they are not eligible.
- **Use of the government job retention scheme is low.** 40% say they have not furloughed any of their staff and 37% of organisations have furloughed less than half of their staff.
- **Organisations continue to be unsure whether they should make more use of the government job retention scheme.** 38% say they are unsure whether to furlough staff (or more staff) in the next month. **This uncertainty over whether to furlough staff is being driven by a lack of clarity over the lockdown.** The open responses highlight that a lack of clarity over how long lockdown measures is making too difficult at this stage to make a



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decision on furlough and others are awaiting outcomes of applications for emergency funding.

“It depends how much longer the lockdown continues and whether we run out of tasks for people to do from home.” – survey respondent

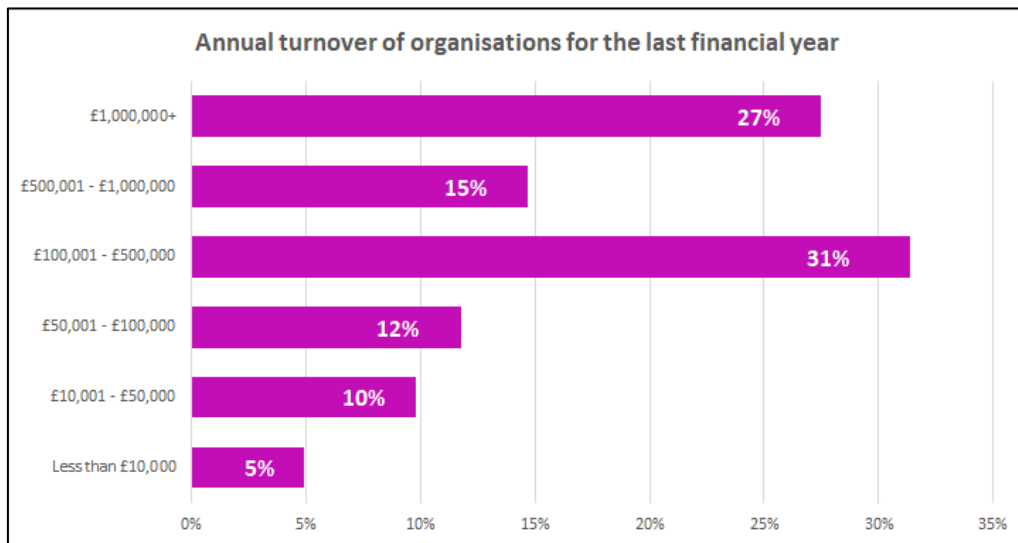
- 38% of organisation say they do not intend to furlough more staff. This appears to be linked to funding. **Organisations face restrictions on furloughing particular staff where they receive statutory funding for the posts.**

“Furloughed approx. 20% so far, who are not funded via Government contracts” – survey respondent

“our trainers are on a government contract and cannot be furloughed” – survey respondent

Funding and financial stability

Income



- **Covid-19 is impacting organisations' income generation.** Whilst the majority (60%) of organisations who took our survey do not have a social enterprise or trading element to their organisation, of the 43 that indicated their organisation does, 70% say this element is no longer able to operate.

“Our capacity to fund raise and sell our products is severely curtailed and it is difficult to apply for long term funding from trusts in this period of uncertainty” – survey respondent

“With the closure of our social enterprises there is a significant loss to our income this financial year.” – survey respondent



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- **Organisations are using their reserves during this time.** 40% say they have had to use their reserves due to the Covid-19 pandemic and a further 18% were not sure if their organisation had done so. Our state of the sector research has consistently shown specialist criminal justice organisations to have far lower levels of reserves on average – just 1.4 months – than the wider UK voluntary sector which has an average of 6.3 months of reserves.¹

“We have been able to keep going on our reserves however, these will start to run out in the next month” – survey respondent

- **Organisations are anticipating cash flow problems.** 42% expect this to be the case and of those, most (27%) anticipate this will happen in six months. The responses also demonstrate how much uncertainty there still is about the financial impact of Covid-19 on organisations, with 40% saying they are not sure whether they will experience cash flow problems.

“It is too early to tell whether COVID will impact upon our reserves as we have discussions ongoing to alleviate financial pressures. However we are aware that is these discussions do not come to fruition we will be in have to eat into reserves within 2 months and which would impact on reserves dramatically after that period.” – survey respondent

Contracts and grants

- **We continue to find that organisations are struggling to fully deliver on their grant or contract requirements.** Only 14% of respondents say that they can completely deliver on their grant and/or contract requirements. Whilst 36% say they can deliver on just some of the requirements and 8% cannot deliver on their grants or contracts at all.
- **Organisations are positive about the communication and flexibility of grant and contract managers during this time.**
- There is mixed picture from the sector about their capacity to engage in a new commissioning process for future services after the Covid-19 pandemic (for example for the new probation programme or education services). Whilst 44% say they could engage in such a process, 23% do not feel able to do so at this time and 17% are unsure.
- **Further responses highlight capacity - particularly for smaller organisations - as one of the biggest concerns organisations have that is preventing them from engaging in a commissioning process for future services.**

“too much uncertainty at this moment in time to start a long hard tendering process” – survey respondent

“small charity, limited resources, staff deployed to service delivery/supporting service delivery as a priority during this time.” – survey respondent

“There is little time to invest in future processes while we are managing operations day to day.” – survey respondent

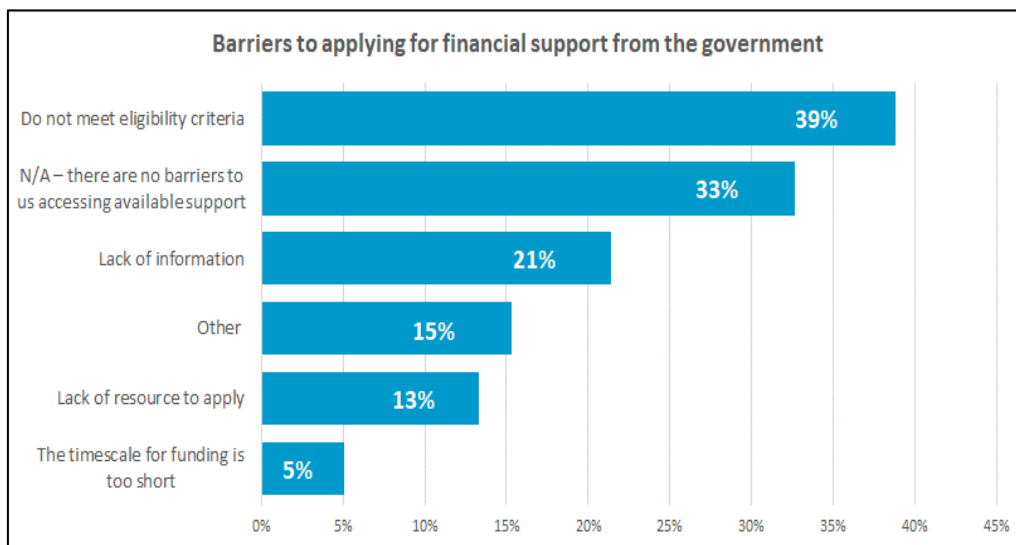
“We do not have the staff to complete procurement application or tenders.” – survey respondent



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Financial support

- The vast majority of respondents have not applied for financial support from the government. Excluding furlough (see above), when asked if organisations had applied for any other government support, 79% say they had not.
- Organisations continue to be unsure whether to apply for financial support from the government. Of those who have not applied for financial support, 45% say they are not sure whether they will apply within the next month and 45% say they won't be applying for support.
- Organisations are still not confident that they have a full understanding of the financial support available from the government. 43% say they are only slightly confident that they have a full understanding of the financial support available; 21% are not very confident and 12% are not confident at all.
- Eligibility criteria continues to be the largest barrier facing organisations in accessing financial support from the government, with 39% saying they do not meet the eligibility criteria for support.



Arts organisations

Clinks manages the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance (NCJAA), a national network of over 800 artists, arts organisations and criminal justice practitioners using creative approaches to reduce reoffending. NCJAA exists to promote the specific role of arts, and arts organisations, as a springboard for positive change for people in contact with the CJS.

NCJAA has been working to support the criminal justice arts sector during the pandemic and to understand the impact of Covid-19 on its members. They have also spoken to over 60 of their network members, including artists and arts organisation representatives. 21 of the organisations that took this survey indicated their primary area of activity included arts-based provision.



The overarching trends for organisations providing arts-based provision mirror those outlined above for the criminal justice voluntary sector as a whole. Below is a brief summary of the findings which differ from the wider sector and indicate the distinct experiences of arts organisations. These reinforce the issues arts organisations have been raising with the NCJAA throughout their meetings and engagement with the sector.

Service delivery

A higher proportion of organisations providing arts-based provision say they are providing resource packs to people in prison and delivering virtual group sessions compared to the wider criminal justice voluntary sector responses. There has been huge demand for arts and creative activity at this time and arts organisations are responding innovatively.

- Arts organisations, whose work is usually highly interactive (specifically theatre, dance and performance based activity), face distinct barriers in adapting their services for remote delivery and ensuring alternatives are effective and meaningful. A higher proportion of organisations providing arts based provision say that none of their services can be delivered remotely and or that only some of their services can be.
- A higher proportion of organisations providing arts-based provision say that their service provision has decreased a lot when compared to the criminal justice voluntary sector responses as a whole.

Financial support

- A higher proportion of organisations providing arts-based provision are anticipating cash flow problems in 6 months' time when compared to the criminal justice voluntary sector responses as a whole.

"While we have quite a bit of secure funding we have a significant funding gap. Usually we would fill that with grant funding, income from our social enterprise, individual and corporate donations but we are expecting very low or no income from those streams this year. We will feel the effects of this gradually through the first half of the year." – survey respondent

- A higher proportion of organisations providing arts-based provision say they are ineligible for the government's job retention scheme, compared to the wider criminal justice voluntary sector. This may in part be linked to the fact that arts organisations are more likely to work with freelance arts practitioners, as indicated by some of the open responses;

"We are all freelancers so we will qualify individually" – survey respondent

"All staff are freelancers" – survey respondent

- When asked about the barriers that organisations might be facing in accessing government support (in addition to furlough), a higher proportion of organisations providing arts-based provision say they do not meet eligibility criteria for the support when compared to responses overall.



¹ Clinks (2019) *State of the sector*. Available at: <https://www.clinks.org/publication/state-sector-2019> [accessed 4th May 2020].