

April 2024



RR3 Special Interest Group on Employment 2023-2024: Report

Opportunity for all – employment and training in prisons and the community

About

The Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group (RR3) provides the key interface between the voluntary sector, and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), in order to increase mutual understanding and build a strong and effective partnership. The group is made up of senior leaders from the voluntary sector and meets quarterly with civil servants to provide guidance and feedback on MoJ policy developments.

The RR3 convenes Special Interest Groups (SIGs) to advise on specific areas of policy and practice as the need arises. This Employment SIG has focused on the barriers to employment faced by people, both in prison and on their release into the community.

This focus has been caveated with the acknowledgement that there are many people in prison who require additional, pre-employment support in order that they can gain the skills and the confidence that they need to secure employment at an appropriate juncture. For this group, the focus has been not on the immediate steps needed to secure employment, either in prison or in the community, but on addressing more complex needs that present obstacles to gaining employment in the future.

Following an introduction into the current employment situation faced by people leaving prison and recent initiatives implemented in prisons to boost employment outcomes, the paper focuses on the following areas:

- 1) Prison workshops**
- 2) The financial security of people in prison**
- 3) Employer and training provider engagement**
- 4) Addressing complex needs**
- 5) Service coordination**

April 2024

RR3
Reducing Reoffending
Third Sector Advisory Group

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Introduction

Accessing secure employment is a key component in the effective resettlement of people leaving prison. Employment also acts as a core component of prison regimes, enabling people to gain skills and earn money while they are serving their sentences.

There has been much, welcome focus by the Ministry of Justice on boosting employment outcomes for people leaving prison, which has resulted in a rise in the number of people employed six months following their release from prison – reaching 30.4% as of March 2023ⁱ. Much of this focus has been based on the creation of new structures and roles across the prison estate – including new Heads of Education, Skills & Work (HESW's), Prison Employment Leads (PELs), Employment Hubs and Employment Advisory Boards attached to each resettlement prison.

Despite this focus, there remains a range of barriers to accessing sustainable employment for people when they are released from prison, and nearly 70% of people leaving prison remain unemployed at the six-month mark post their release from custody.

It is important to acknowledge that employment-related support cannot be offered in siloes. There remains an urgent need to address the often complex and overlapping needs of people in prison, which can range from (but is not limited to) issues related to a person's mental and physical wellbeing, problems with substance misuse and barriers to accessing accommodation on release. As one SIG participant noted – "access to accommodation has a ripple effect on so many different areas", all related to a person's resettlement into the community.

This report – drawing on evidence from 28 voluntary organisations working in the criminal justice sector across two evidence sessions – sets out these barriers, leveraging the expertise of these organisations and seeking to understand them within the context of ongoing Government initiatives aimed at addressing them. The report concludes with a range of practical recommendations designed to mitigate the barriers that have been covered.

Section 1: Prison workshops – what makes a good prison workshop?

Throughout the two evidence sessions, the SIG heard evidence on what prison workshops require to ensure that they are most effective in upskilling and preparing people for their release from prison.

Infrastructure and environment

Considered essential to the structure of any prison workshop was having the right infrastructure in place – in terms of spaces (both inside and outside), equipment, and staffing – alongside environments conducive to impactful and productive work, with the provision of trauma-informed workshops for women specifically highlighted by attendees.

Staffing

The skillset of existing, and future, staff was also considered during the Group's discussions. Concerns were raised that staff are not necessarily equipped with the right skills to support people in prison and consideration should be given to reforming existing training processes.

Ongoing staffing challenges within prisons have also led to instances of a lack of staff available to escort people to prison workshops. Steps to address these staffing challenges, and to reduce the staff-to-participant ratio were considered by the Group to be key to improving the utility and performance of prison workshops. This is as a high staff-to-participant ratio can negatively impact on the quality of work, and the support, that is on offer. By reducing this ratio, more extensive support can be provided to people with particular needs, including those identified as neurodivergent.

Flexible provision, tailored to population need

It was noted that a "one-size-fits-all approach" to the set-up of workshops is counterproductive given the differing nature of prison populations across the prison estate. Some prisons, for example, have a high number of people on remand or a high level of churn, compared to other prisons with a high proportion of people on long sentences. Different populations therefore require different support and provision tailored to their circumstances, and participants urged that these differences should be factored into future planning.

Prison workshops also need to be tailored to align with local labour requirements by ensuring that the provision on offer is industry-relevant, whilst catering for existing skills gaps and vacancies in the local labour market. Provision in prison must match what is available in the community, with a recognition that need will vary across prisons. There should also be a more flexible and varied approach to what is on offer across the prison estate, with greater access to a wider range of training providers an important part of such an approach.

Recognising individual need and one-to-one support

Different people require different support and different forms of work and training. Some people in prison require more intensive support to address complex needs and therefore would not benefit from a singular focus on the obtaining of qualifications. Participants highlighted that this necessitates a more individualised approach in which engagement is focused on understanding a person's aspirations, and their skills and strengths, to ascertain whether a workshop is an appropriate setting for them.

Workshop provision must therefore acknowledge and reflect the varied level of skillsets that exist within a prison. For some people, a focus on 'soft' skill development – such as the building of confidence – can be more appropriate and therefore should be supported separate to the requirements of a qualification. This approach should also explore the viability of embedding education provision into workshops given that there will be many people who struggle in classroom environments.

Participation in workshops will not be appropriate for every person in prison, and therefore workshops should not be considered as the sole focus of employment and skills-based initiatives. As one participant noted: "mentoring and coaching is as important as group workshops". It is important that initiatives designed to boost post-release employment outcomes should not be restricted to group work while in prison. This reflected a general consensus that an emphasis on the individuality of people in prison, acknowledging the different skill levels and needs of each person, requires a more personalised and tailored approach reflecting this.

Supporting neurodivergence

Participants specifically highlighted that "issues around neurodiversity are still not understood well' which means that many services within prison are catered towards a small percentage of non-neurodivergent people. Addressing this is vital given that approximately half of all people entering prison "could reasonably be expected to have some form of neurodivergent condition"iii. Therefore, prioritising that staff are equipped with the skills that they need to deliver support for people with a range of learning needs, is essential.

Pathways and accessibility

It is essential to create clear pathways through training and work in prison and then into the community, while making clear how these pathways can be accessed, whether that is through education or employment opportunities. Increasing awareness of how skills gained while in prison can be transferred into the community would have significant benefits in terms of both motivation and confidence. Accordingly, processes must be implemented to ensure that the qualifications and skills gained by people while in prison are easily accessible, for training providers and employers, when they are released.

Information and guidance

Beyond the practical provisions within workshops, there is a range of support that needs to be in place. This includes information and guidance (IAG) services. Participants noted that current IAG services do not always acknowledge the realities that many people leaving prison face when attempting to secure employment in the community. There was a consensus that IAG services do not currently reflect the obstacles that people will face on release on account of the nature of their offence. Effective IAG services must consider each person's previous convictions so as to fully understand what they will be able to do, and won't be able to do, in the community. Realistic information and guidance on career paths will ensure more informed pathways for people in prison, avoiding scenarios whereby people are put on pathways in prison that are then blocked in the community due to the nature of certain convictions. As part of this work, there needs to be more extensive guidance on how and when a person needs to disclose their offence.

"Mentoring and coaching is as important as group workshops"

Recommendations - prison workshops:

1) Undertake an inventory of existing prison workshop infrastructure.

This would be undertaken across the prison estate in order to ascertain gaps in equipment and provision, and support a mapping out of the requirements of each individual prison.

2) Consultation to develop minimum standards across prison workshops.

This would include statutory and non-statutory stakeholders involved in workshop provision with a focus on incorporating minimum standards on infrastructure and staffing.

3) Implement reforms to existing staff training.

This should entail a re-evaluation of the current job specifications of prison staff running workshops to ensure that the appropriate training of staff can be put in place. This should include a focus on ensuring that training most effectively equips staff to support people in the workshops to secure employment in the community, alongside specialised training on working with people who are neurodivergent.

4) Skills audit of the prison population of each prison.

This would establish the existing level of qualifications of people in prison, thereby . Improving literacy levels, in particular, is a key foundation for a person's further learning, meaning that early assessment is vital in preparation for setting out each person's pathway through learning and work while they are in prison.

5) Embedding education into prison workshops.

This would enable people who struggle in classroom environments to boost their educational attainment through participation in workshops, and should be developed in collaboration with the voluntary sector.

6) Review of existing Information and Guidance Services.

To ensure more informed, and realistic, pathways for people leaving prison taking into the account the nature of certain convictions. This should be supported by more extensive guidance on how and when a person needs to disclose their offence.

Section 2 - Financial security of people in prison – how can the financial security of people in prison be improved?

Debt and prison pay

Participants noted that many people entering prison find themselves in financial distress. This can be due to a range of factors including rent arrears, utility bill debts or credit card debts. Despite this, there is little focus at the induction stage of a person's custodial sentence on supporting people to get their financial affairs in order.

As one participant told the group: "it's about stopping the mess when they come in. There is now less of a focus on FBD (finance, benefit and debt) services. People get into really messy financial situations when they arrive in prison, meaning there is no incentive to get into work on release as you are faced, potentially, with people coming after you for debt that you owe". The financial focus while a person is serving a custodial sentence should be on getting people "reset to zero", ensuring that their personal finances are up to date ahead of release.

Yet, the financial insecurity faced by so many people in prison is then exacerbated by the low level of prison wages. Nacro, in a briefing published last year, explains that: "pay rates vary within prisons, depending on the type of job or IEP status: for example HMP Pentonville's pay is £13.70, as of September 2022, for standard level IEP and £18.60 for enhanced. At HMP Send the average weekly wage for prisoners in full-time employment in July 2022 was £13.93, an increase from £12.40 in January 2022."

The Prison Reform Trust reinforced the double issue of debt and low prison wages, in its response to the 2021 Prisons Strategy White Paper, stating that "prisoners tell us repeatedly that debt is generated by the low level of wages."iv The Prisons Strategy White Paper (2021) stated that: "over the next two years, we will improve our understanding of debt through a major study." v Though predominantly aimed at understanding illicit debt accrued by people while in prison, such a focus cannot be separated from the financial situation that many find themselves in when they enter prison. Published in December 2021, the sector awaits an update as to the progress of this study.

SPOTLIGHT – BOOSTING PRISON PAY

Recycling Lives & Social Enterprise works with men and women, in prison and in the community, offering work and training opportunities, professional wrap-around support, peer-to-peer support and accommodation opportunities.

Its prison-based workshops enable participants to develop transferable work skills and earn an enhanced wage while receiving wrap-around support to identify and overcome challenges, typically related to housing, finances, mental health, relationships and employment.

Participants are incentivised to earn more than the standard £1 per workshop session. Instead, every participant can earn a maximum of £6 per session, a figure which is based on the number of items that each person dismantles (the workshops are focused on recycling). For participants not necessarily good at dismantling, other opportunities will be found with the same incentivisation.

Participants are then mandated to save 40% of their earnings for their release. Recycling Lives usually works with people in prison for approximately 6-12 months in a prison workshop, enabling people to save a decent sum of money to support in their resettlement.

Universal Credit

There was unanimous agreement among participants that the Universal Credit system currently does not work effectively to support people leaving prison, further exacerbating financial insecurity. People in prison remain unable to submit their claims for Universal Credit ahead of their release, an issue that has been consistently highlighted by the voluntary sector for a number of years.

It is important to acknowledge that there is ongoing work – coordinated by the MoJ and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) – to test approaches for people in prison to start their Universal Credit claim before release in 16 prisons. This work is with a view to a national roll out across the prison estate during 2024 as part of a commitment set out in the Prisons Strategy White Paper.

As people in prison are unable to earn a decent wage while in prison, many are reliant on the support that the benefits system provides when they are released from prison. Instead of providing that safety net, many organisations told us of the barriers that the current Universal Credit System presents.

In addition to being unable to submit a claim ahead of release, people leaving prison are often faced with deductions – of up to 25% - of their standard monthly allowance on account of having previously received an advance payment. This has to be paid back in full and is subsequently deducted from future payments.

The Taper Rate can also act as a disincentive to work on release. This is “the rate at which your maximum Universal Credit award is reduced as your earnings increased.”^{vi} The Work Allowance is the amount someone can earn before it starts getting tapered. At this point, and this figure depends on a person’s circumstances such as whether they receive support with their housing costs, people will start to see their Universal Credit reduced. The Taper Rate is currently set at 55% which means a deduction of 55p from your maximum Universal Credit award for every £1 earned over your Work Allowance.

Incentivising education

The Education Select Committee, in a May 2022 report, highlighted Ministry of Justice data that found that “people who had participated in education whilst in prison were significantly less likely to reoffend within 12 months of release than those who had not.”^{vii} Yet, September 2022 data published by the Ministry of Justice showed that 61% of adult people in prison taking initial assessments had “literacy levels below those expected of an 11-year-old.”^{viii}

This is a particularly stark statistic and reinforces the urgency of implementing a holistic approach to supporting people in prison, beyond a narrow focus on getting people into jobs on their release from prison. Currently there is a disparity in pay between attending education and work., with it paying more to get a job in prison than it does to attend education. This can act as a disincentive to attending education. Reforming the approach to education in prisons by putting education and work on an equal footing can therefore remove the financial disincentive to attending education, boosting attainment levels and subsequently resettlement outcomes.

Recommendations - boosting the financial security of people in prison:

1) Trialling the provision of a Resettlement Access Fund.

This fund would be accessed by people on their release from prison and would be created through a reformed prison pay structure within which people in prison would receive a fair wage for the work that they do.

A proportion of a person's weekly wage – up to 40% - would be mandated as part of the access fund, to be accessed on release to support people with their resettlement. This fund would draw on existing best practice, as highlighted in this report's spotlight on Recycling Lives & Social Enterprise.

2) Provision of dedicated staffing within prisons to support people with tax and debt issues.

With a focus on long-term debt planning while a person is in prison, supported by the rollout of debt advice services across the prison estate. This support must begin with financial health checks at the induction stage, and continue up until a person is released.

3) Provision of in-reach Money and Pensions Service (MaPS) support.

4) Aligning pay for attending education in prison with pay for working in prison.

5) Undertaking research into the viability of a prison-universal basic income.

Through the commissioning of research – similar to the research underpinning the increase in the subsistence payment – to understand how much it costs to live in prison focusing on the costs of goods and the impact of inflation.

6) An update from the Ministry of Justice on its commitment within the Prisons Strategy White Paper (2021) to commission a study into debt in prisons.

7) Ensuring that Universal Credit claims can be submitted in prison, ahead of release.

8) Reducing the current deductions cap of 25%.

9) Reducing the current taper rate of 55%.

10) Implementing a six-month, Universal Credit deductions 'holiday' for people leaving prison.

Ensuring that monthly payments are not reduced in the immediate six-month period following release.

Section 3 – Employer and training provider engagement – how can effective engagement be ensured?

Effective prison-employer engagement is a critical component of the resettlement process. There was broad consensus among the SIG participants that further work is required to educate employers about the reality of working with people coming out of prison, alongside ensuring that employers are supported to work within this context. Additionally, there needs to be a greater recognition, from all relevant stakeholders, of the level of investment needed in people leaving prison in order to ensure success.

The discussions centred on several key areas around boosting employer engagement (which we provide more detail on, below).

- Consistency of access for employers
- Engaging with local employers with realistic and accessible opportunities
- Engaging with training providers
- Enabling greater flexibility in the training provided for jobs in the community
- Bridging the gap between employment in prison and employment in the community
- The voluntary sector's role in bridging the gap between prison and the community.

Consistency of access

Challenges around enabling consistent access to prisons for employers was raised as a specific barrier to boosting employer engagement. Enabling more consistent access was seen as important in ensuring more sustained engagement from employers, allowing people in prison to take advantage of the opportunities provided by current labour market flexibilities. Conversely, obstacles to accessing prisons have the potential to dissuade employers from further engagement.

Engaging local employers with realistic and accessible opportunities:

Participants highlighted the need to ensure a focus on local employers, with vacancies that are accessible and open within a reasonable timeframe. It was also noted that employers need to be open about their intentions and their ability to offer opportunities.

Engaging training providers

Participants stated that the current Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) tendering process can act as a disincentive to smaller, specialist organisations. Currently, tendering is based on 'lots' and a more focused, specialist approach – on a prison-by-prison basis – was called for in order to incentivise a wider range of providers with specific specialisms.

Flexibility in training provision

It was noted that there is a lack of flexibility in terms of how people in prison are being engaged with, regarding the training required for future jobs in the community. It was suggested that there needs to be greater access to practical training, outside of workshops and the classrooms, with more consistent access for employers helping to facilitate this. Alongside this, the provision on offer needs to be designed to generate the skillsets needed for people in prison to secure opportunities in the community, whilst acknowledging that there will be people in prison who are not 'work ready'.



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Bridging the gap between prison and employment in the community:

Pivotal to the resettlement process is support that begins while a person is in prison, that then follows them through-the-gate and into the community. In this instance, the focus was on the need to “bridge the gap” between a person being offered a job ahead of their release, and then the point at which they start the job in the community.

The support that needs to be in place varies from the practical – such as assistance with travel and appropriate clothing – to the more pastoral, such as mentoring and general guidance on how to sustain work in the community, with support around expectations and behaviour. To ensure the effectiveness of this support, there must be effective coordination between the PELs in prison and the voluntary sector working both in prisons and in the community.

The voluntary sector’s role in bridging the gap between prison and the community:

There are a range of voluntary organisations working to support people leaving prison into employment, who have well-established and wide networks with employers in the community. Their work is grounded in extensive experience of working with people leaving prison, resulting in hugely positive outcomes – not just in securing employment, but in sustaining that employment too.

PELs are a welcome addition to the support on offer for people in prison. Yet, these roles are only one component of a system that needs to be in place in order to ensure that the transition from prison into the community is successful. This is as PELs do not operate outside of the prison estate and will therefore play a minimal role in the development and sustainment of employer relationships in the community, which is currently a vital missing part in the prison-to-employment pathway.

In many instances, the staff of these voluntary organisations are predominantly drawn from commercial and recruitment consultant backgrounds, which is key for driving employer relationships. It is these relationships that drive not just job ‘offers’, but ‘starts’, and create the foundations for secure, sustained employment. On this note, the SIG heard that opportunities are often offered to people in prison by employers, yet the translation to a job start in the community does not always transpire. It was also noted by SIG participants that the pathway from a job being offered to a job being started is not being tracked by Government agencies.

The experience of these organisations is in having a meaningful knowledge of the true career aspirations and abilities of their candidates, alongside an understanding of the complexities that will impact their work readiness. They also benefit from an understanding of the obstacles that people can and will face on their release.

‘relationships drive job ‘offers’, and create foundations for secure, sustained employment’

SPOTLIGHT – BEATING TIME, INSIDE JOB

Beating Time runs a programme called 'Inside Job' that helps people in prison to find work on release. It is run in four prisons in the Midlands, as well as being piloted in HMP/YOI Isis and in HMP Northumberland. It is a peer-led programme – designed, and largely run by, people who are serving or who have served a prison sentence.

Its model has three steps:

- 1) Recruiters – people serving sentences are trained and paid to recruit candidates. £60 per week is saved in Beating Time's accounts for each recruiter, which can then be accessed on their release from prison.
- 2) Employers – are taken into prisons every month to interview candidates
- 3) Specialist support – both practical and emotional, on release, to secure and sustain employment; the community team is made up of consultants, with each consultant responsible for one prison. They support the recruiters in prison to build a pipeline of candidates and prepare them for interview. The same consultant then supports all of the candidates coming out of that prison into work.

Based on figures dating from 2021, 76.2% of Inside Job candidates are still in work after 9 months and there is a reoffending rate of just 5%.

SPOTLIGHT - POST-RELEASE EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT - THE RECRUITMENT JUNCTION

About: the Recruitment Junction supports people with convictions into paid work across the northeast. It has placed 560 people into sustained work across the last three years, with a 71% job retention rate, and only a 2% reoffending rate. Its staff – their 'recruitment consultants' – provide sustained and face-to-face support throughout every stage of the recruitment process.

Practical support: this includes help with a range of practical necessities required to begin the process of seeking employment, including: securing ID and bank accounts, and drafting CVs and disclosure statements. This also includes working closely with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Probation.

Getting the foundations in place: to ensure that employment can be sustained. This includes support with: rent deposits, utility bill top-ups, GP registrations, child social services liaison and probation officer advocacy.

Intensive, pre-employment support: this includes support with interview travel costs, clothes for interviews and for work, alongside travel costs.

Getting work ready: this, more bespoke, support involves preparing people for interview, working to build their confidence, sourcing suitable training courses, followed by employer introductions and job brokerage. Support is provided for both parties – the employer and the employee – to ensure the greatest possible chance of success, and requires ongoing contact with the both the employer and the employee to mitigate against any issues that arise. In-work support can be provided for up to one-year.

Recommendations – improving employer engagement and support in the community:

1) Each resettlement prison to publish an employment register.

These registers would contain the details of employers that will hire people leaving prison.

2) Development of a new engagement strategy between the Ministry of Justice and its relevant bodies, including the New Futures Network, and employers considering hiring people coming out of prison.

This engagement must be based on transparency around the support that many people leaving prison will require, and the level of investment in people that can be required to ensure successful, and sustainable employment outcomes.

3) Incorporating prisons and probation stakeholders into the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) process.

This would help to ensure that training provision within prisons is designed to align with local need.

4) Provision of wraparound, employment-focused support from prison into the community.

This would follow people through each stage of the process – from education and or/employment in prison through to securing employment in the community and then onto sustaining that employment. This should explore replicating the support on offer in prison Employment Hubs, but in the community.

5) Commissioning of community employment brokers.

To support employers with sustaining a person's employment beyond 12 months; this support would include sustainment checks at appropriate intervals.

6) Exploring the viability of creating an employment fund within the current Dynamic Purchasing System.

Allowing autonomy for each resettlement prison, to ensure that this provision is in place.

Section 4 - Addressing complex needs – how can we most effectively support people with complex needs?

A singular focus on securing employment opportunities for people in the immediate period following their release is not an appropriate one. This is given the vast range of need, skill levels and educational attainment that can be found across all prisons, alongside the general dysfunction of many parts of the prison system which create further barriers to resettlement for people leaving prison. Instead, government policy has to recognise and provide genuinely person-centred support for people in prison who require help addressing a range of complex needs, taking into account the challenges that so many people leaving prison face.

There was a clear consensus that service engagement needs to be more “joined-up” and “sustainable”. In practice, a more joined-up approach requires long-lasting engagement that incorporates support tackling previously unmet needs, such as mental health or substance misuse issues, alongside practical, skills-based work. It is important to note that, fundamentally, the prison release process causes people anxiety. Mental health and wellbeing challenges on release are therefore an entrenched part of the process, and do not necessarily mean that someone is suffering from a mental health condition. This should not exclude them from receiving the support that they may need.

Short-termism also continues to impact on supporting people with complex needs, with short-term contracts a significant issue for the delivery of services and for the participants themselves given that short-term contracts do not cater for the extensive support that some people will require.

Long-term support and delivery

Considered, structured work over a longer-term period is required with no time-limit on support. Impact needs to be sustained, built through human relational connections, and that can require extended support. Short-term engagement, though it can be impactful, does not produce the same benefits as long-lasting engagement, with a consistent, key point of contact for each person in prison acknowledging that progress will not always be linear.

Holistic support

Given the large number of people in prison with mental health needs, any practical, skills-based work must be delivered alongside properly resourced mental health support, which is a necessity both for people serving custodial sentences but also for people on suspended sentence orders.

A focus on neurodiversity

Neurodiversity remains “new” to many people working within the prison and probation service, as well as to potential employers. As a result, agencies are not necessarily aware of how to effectively engage and work with neurodivergent people. Yet upcoming tenders still do not have a primary focus on neurodiversity, as well as mental health and wellbeing. Placing the addressing of these needs at the heart of the commissioning process is essential to supporting people with complex needs

“... service engagement needs to be more “joined-up” and “sustainable”

Raising aspirations

There is too often a lack of ambition offered by policymakers when it comes to the aspirations and potential of people in prison. People in prison need to be asked: what do they want to achieve when they are in prison? What do they want to achieve when they are released? It is vital to ensure people have the agency to make choices and to give them hope.

Supporting people with sexual offences

Nearly 30% of people in prison have sexual-related offences, a significant group of people leaving prison who will continue to need support securing employment. As a sector, there is a need to engage extensively with employers who will consider hiring people with sexual offences. These employers will need the right support so that they can be in a position to hire people with sexual offences, alongside greater education of employers (recognising that these offences do not just apply to older people). This is as the category of sexual offences is so broad and often employers can reach certain conclusions about the nature of a person's sexual offences instead of understanding the specifics of each case.

Recommendations

1) Ensure that commissioned services are of an appropriate length.

In order to ensure the provision of the extensive, holistic support that some people will require to address unmet needs.

2) Ensure that all relevant, upcoming tenders incorporate a focus on neurodiversity, mental health and general wellbeing.

Section 5 - Service coordination – what does successful service coordination look like?

The final section of this paper looks at the need to more effectively coordinate existing services – both within prisons and in the community – as a key component in boosting employment outcomes. The SIG heard that central to effective service coordination was “more consistent planning where everyone works together”. The discussion also referenced ongoing issues around staffing as an impediment to effective service coordination. High staff turnover was said to significantly impact upon the consistency of service provision. This is as less experienced prison officers will have less awareness of the services that exist in and around the prison and will have more limited knowledge as to how to help the people in prison to engage with these services.

The Group proceeded to discuss the benefits of a voluntary sector coordinator role, based within prisons.

Voluntary sector coordination

Voluntary sector coordination within prisons can play a vital role in ensuring that any gaps in provision are highlighted and subsequently filled. Such coordination:

- Enables any organisation delivering services to be made aware of other services being delivered, which would then drive more effective collaboration between services and coordination of support for people leaving prison
- Allows for more effective signposting of people to different organisations to support with their resettlement needs leading to more holistic support where required
- Can enable more innovation from service providers, particularly if they have a broader view on the range of services that are working with people in prison and coming out of prison.

SPOTLIGHT – THE GOOD PRISON PROJECT

Between September 2016 and October 2017, Clinks supported voluntary sector coordinators to implement a bespoke model of voluntary sector coordination in three prisons – HMP Dartmoor, HMP Exeter and HMP Guys Marsh. ix The objective was to support a voluntary sector member of staff to implement a bespoke model of voluntary sector coordination that reflected the needs of the prison population.

The staff member acted as a single point of contact in each prison and undertook activities to:

- Map existing services to improve to them and identify gaps in provision
- Ensure voluntary sector staff and volunteers understand the prison environment, population and regime adequately in order to deliver their services efficiently and safely
- Enhance knowledge of and access to voluntary sector support amongst people in prison
- Develop a strategic role for voluntary organisations working prison

This model has been built upon through a recently funded voluntary sector coordinator role in HMP/YOI Isis providing the effective coordination of voluntary services, and to fill gaps in service provision that are reducing the effectiveness of interventions in the prison.

Ultimately, the work is intended to boost the outcomes and opportunities for the young men in Isis by identifying and facilitating voluntary sector services that can provide them with the skills and support that they need to thrive.

Recommendations

Service provision:

1) Embedding voluntary sector coordinators across all prisons.

Through having a single point of contact to coordinate voluntary sector engagement, and by adopting the voluntary sector coordinator model as highlighted by the Good Prison Project

2) Increased 'voluntary showcases' within prisons.

Building on the work of the proposed voluntary sector coordinator, and to ensure that prison staff, including governors, are aware of the entire breadth of services that exist in and around each prison

3) Greater incorporation of staff with lived experienced.

Conclusion

Getting in place the support required for people in prison to gain the confidence and the skills that they need to succeed on their release from prison is not simple. It is a complex ecosystem that has to acknowledge the vast differences and levels of need among people serving custodial sentences. A one-size-fits-all approach is therefore inappropriate.

Through consultation across the voluntary sector working in criminal justice, the SIG has established that the offer in prisons must be varied and tailored on a prison-by-prison basis, as well as on an individual basis, acknowledging the wide-ranging requirements and differences of people in prison.

Subsequently, the recommendations drawn from these discussions – set out at the end of each section of the report – reflect the need for a more tailored approach that focuses on mitigating barriers to securing employment on release, with a focus on sustained support throughout a person's time in prison that will follow them into the community.

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RR3 Special Interest Group on Employment 2023-2024: Report 1

Opportunity for all – employment and training in prisons and the community

End notes

- i Ministry of Justice. (2023). Employment on Release statistical release to March 2023. Available online: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/646b794c382a51000c9fc520/Employment_Ad-Hoc_publication.pdf
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