

Clinks' response to the Government's proposals for a 'Rehabilitation Revolution'

Clinks welcomes this opportunity to contribute to developing proposals for the Coalition government's Rehabilitation Revolution ahead of a White Paper in the Autumn. We identify some key issues for the voluntary sector in terms of capacity and voice, argue for the greater involvement of ex-offenders in delivering the rehabilitation revolution, and point out some of the challenges in relation to the emerging regime of payment by results.

Clinks is a national voluntary sector infrastructure organisation supporting Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) agencies that work with offenders and their families.

We are particularly focussed on the role of small and medium size organisations in the Criminal Justice System. Our main activities include:

- Representation and voice
- Partnership and collaboration
- Capacity Building
- Volunteering and mentoring

Our manifesto commitments include a greater focus on rehabilitation of offenders, a more proportionate and rational use of imprisonment, promoting a focus on local delivery, and a commitment to tackling inequality and racism in the Criminal Justice system.

Increasing VCS involvement

There are a number of barriers to greater involvement of the VCS in working with offenders and their families.

These include:

- Lack of investment by prison and probation services arising from poorly developed commissioning arrangements.
- Previous attempts to increase investment through setting targets of percentage expenditure on VCS services by probation areas, and subsequently via a Best Value regime have failed to achieve any significant gain to date.
- HM Prison Service has committed very little of its core funding to investment in VCS delivery, with the majority of investment achieved through funding from European Social Fund (ESF) or drug treatment funding channelled through the prison service.
- Regional commissioning, where it occurred, tended to favour larger VCS organisations that had the capacity to prepare large scale bids and deliver over a wide area.
- The arrangements necessary for smaller organisations to collaborate to bid at this level were difficult to put together in the relatively short time frames available.

Supporting innovation

The creation of 3SC (www.3sc.org.uk), a voluntary sector management company set up to bid for large government contracts, is a promising initiative which could address the issue of involving smaller organisations in delivering to large scale contracts.

Although commissioning to deliver public sector services has contributed to growth in the sector (notwithstanding the aforementioned problems), there remains a role for grant funding in the Criminal Justice System. This is where innovation can flourish and it is an effective way of addressing gaps in provision which may not be achievable by a commissioning approach.

Relationships with the Prison Service

The role of HM Prison Service Voluntary Sector Co-ordinators has been eroded in recent years, resulting in diminishing relationships between local VCS organisations and individual prison establishments. The revised PSO 4190 will hopefully give a renewed impetus to these arrangements. It is important that there remains a mechanism within prisons to bring VCS organisations together, raise awareness of their services, and improve relationships between them and prison service staff, especially in the resettlement and education departments.

Relationships with the Probation Service

Probation Trusts have now been reconfigured into Local Delivery Unit (LDU) structures, and this holds some promise for a greater local focus. However, this primarily involves enhancing relationships with Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) and other public sector

arrangements. Some Probation Trusts have designated staff roles with a specific remit to engage with local VCS organisations, including local infrastructure organisations and networks.

Obligation to engage

In relation to both prison and probation, there may be scope for including in their contracts and/or service level agreements with Director's of Offender Management a requirement that they demonstrate how they have engaged with the VCS in terms of investment, relationship building, and involvement in the design of services.

Other Government departments

However, it is not only the NOMS agencies that need to change their approach in relation to VCS delivery to offenders. Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and the Department of Health (DH) are also key departments in delivering services to offenders and their families, and their ability to effectively engage with small to medium VCS organisations needs to improve. This is especially the case in relation to the recent NOMS ESF Co-financing tenders for offender employment, and current OLASS contracts which have favoured large providers delivering over one or more regions.

Mechanisms need to be found that incentivise sub-contracting to small, local VCS organisations that have the reach and flexibility necessary for engaging with vulnerable groups.

Integrated Offender Management

There is significant potential for VCS involvement within Integrated Offender Management (IOM) arrangements.

These schemes bring together police, probation, local authority and health agencies to manage persistent offenders, and there are examples where VCS providers have been commissioned to deliver specific mentoring, drug, or accommodation services.

This should be encouraged and perhaps guidance developed to help IOM schemes to effectively engage the VCS.

Rehabilitation

Successful rehabilitation of offenders depends crucially on raising their motivation to change.

For many offenders, their ability to see beyond their immediate circumstances and develop a sense of hope and optimism that their lives can change is limited. This is understandable given the levels of deprivation and disadvantage they experience.

The levels of illiteracy, poor health, and substance misuse are particularly acute among the offender population. Progress towards overcoming these difficulties is often slow and incremental. Strategies to tackle these often inter-connected issues, as well as addressing their anti-social attitudes and behaviour, need to be flexible, holistic and individualised.

Offenders value having someone who takes a sustained and personal interest in their

welfare, and who will support them in their struggles to overcome their problems.

Investing in high quality mentoring schemes which provide, among other things, support in prison and subsequently into the community can deliver reductions in re-offending.

There is also evidence to support the effectiveness of employing ex-offenders to undertake this work as they understand how difficult the journey to rehabilitation can be and they embody a level of authority and legitimacy that ordinary professionals may not possess.

VCS organisations, including those that deliver arts-based interventions and programmes, are effective in finding innovative ways of motivating offenders to learn, engage with drug treatment, and gain the hope and confidence that they can acquire skills and achieve objectives.

These interventions and services can support work undertaken on accredited programmes which address problematic behaviour.

Successful rehabilitation is invariably a result of a holistic approach to interventions. Obtaining employment often depends on successful drug treatment, and both of these objectives depend on having stable accommodation. Often the difficulty in bringing all these elements together for individual offenders lies in the 'silo' approach to delivery.

It is hoped that recent initiatives such as 'Total Place', which seek to bring together separate funding streams and pool essential rehabilitative budgets, will go some way to

address this problem. It is not only important to bring these funding streams together but there also needs to be a way of effectively managing individual cases, which in turn requires protocols and agreements that support joint working.

Incentivising performance

Developing mechanisms that encourage beneficial outcomes, rather than simply requiring delivery of specified processes or outputs, will hopefully drive innovation.

There remain, however, problems for smaller VCS organisations in particular which arise from a lack of capital to invest, up front, in delivery prior to receiving payments for any success in achieving the desired outcomes.

This is further exacerbated by the amount of time that needs to elapse before re-offending outcomes can be proven (two years is the standard).

This could be addressed by perhaps providing part payment near the beginning of a contracted period to facilitate initial delivery and establishing of delivery systems, with further staged payments dependent on outcomes. This process could also be enhanced by including 'bonus' payments for certain successful outcomes.

There needs to be a process which prevents 'cherry picking' of cases that are easier to work with, as opposed to working with more difficult and intractable problems. This could be achieved by attaching differing levels of payment depending on the degree of criminality (or other similar criteria) which would make successful outcomes a greater challenge.

There are additional difficulties related to identifying the impact of one particular agency where there a number that may be involved with an offender. There needs to be criteria to determine who can 'claim' the outcome.

And finally, there are a range of outcomes that are not specifically tied to re-offending but are crucial to successful reductions in re-offending. VCS providers, especially smaller ones, will have to evidence these 'softer' outcomes and there must be agreed metrics established to support this. It may be necessary to construct a different funding regime to support this work.

More information

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