



Submission

Support for ex-offenders inquiry: Work and Pensions Committee April 2016

Executive summary

- The evidence obtained by HM Inspectorate of Probation through recent inspections and observations indicates clear room for improvement in terms of the help provided to both young and adult offenders in accessing employment and accommodation services and addressing relevant needs.
- We will evaluate whether systems and services are beginning to improve for adult offenders, following the recent Transforming Rehabilitation reforms, through a thematic “Through The Gate” inspection, to be conducted with HM Inspectorate of Prisons. Fieldwork commences this month (April) and we will report by the end of 2016.

About HM Inspectorate of Probation

1. We are an independent Inspectorate, funded by the Ministry of Justice and reporting directly to the Secretary of State. Our purpose is to report on the effectiveness of work with adults and children who have offended.

Evidence

How are prisoners helped to find employment; is support available both pre and post-release?

2. In our latest inspection of the early work of Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) and the National Probation Service, we examined 311 community and released on licence cases which had been running for three to six months (“Transforming Rehabilitation - Early Implementation 4”, January 2016; hereafter “TR4”).
3. We found that sufficient help was provided in finding employment, training or education (ETE) in three out of every five cases in which help was needed. Examples of good ETE work by probation officers included:
 - ensuring the offender attended Job Centre appointments and following up the appointment to check progress;
 - helping with writing CVs and advising on interview techniques;
 - consolidating a referral to an ETE agency with motivational work; and

- liaising with a prison governor to amend Home Detention Curfew hours to enable the offender to take up a job.
4. We found demonstrable improvement in the offenders' employment, training and education position (at the point of inspection) in three out of every ten cases.
 5. In our early observations of Through The Gate services (hereafter "TTG services") we found that CRCs were playing a minor role of referral and signposting opportunities for employment, training and education on release. There was little evidence of improvement on previous pre-CRC arrangements. This may not be surprising given the pace of change of the TR reforms, and we will evaluate whether systems and services are beginning to improve through the thematic TTG inspection.

What support do offenders receive to help them find suitable accommodation on leaving prison?

6. In our TR4 report we found that sufficient help was provided in addressing accommodation needs in seven out of every ten cases in which help was needed. Accommodation support included making referrals to local homelessness voluntary agencies and assisting offenders with applications to the social housing waiting list.
7. We found that offenders' accommodation circumstances had improved at the time of inspection in two out of every five cases.
8. In our early observations of TTG services, we found that CRCs had only a basic referral process in place for accommodation services. We found few examples of active advocacy on behalf of prisoners and little evidence that housing agencies were feeding back outcomes of referrals to CRC staff. Accommodation work for prisoners did not yet appear to have improved from the introduction of TTG services, but we will evaluate further through the thematic TTG inspection.

What are the impacts of factors such as homelessness and unemployment on the propensity to reoffend?

9. As demonstrated through the development and validation of risk assessment tools such as the Offender Assessment System (OASys), accommodation and employment are risk factors for reoffending alongside other factors such as relationships, lifestyle and associates, drug misuse, alcohol misuse, thinking and behaviour, and attitudes. The greater the problems across all these risk factors, the greater the propensity to reoffend.
10. In the second iteration of the OASys General reoffending Predictor (OGP), 'suitability of accommodation' and 'employment status' are both scored items, but these are not scored as highly as some other items, notably those relating to drug misuse.

How does benefit and employment support integrate with other services for ex-offenders?

11. In our early observations of TTG services, we found that pre-release work was not yet sufficient – most 'actions' in resettlement plans consisted of little more than a referral by email. We saw little evidence of improved outcomes for prisoners from the TTG resettlement services. We will evaluate further through the forthcoming thematic TTG inspection.

Is there specific support for different groups such as young offenders and female offenders?

12. In our joint thematic inspection of resettlement work by Youth Offending Teams and partners (March 2015) we found that employment, training and education was too often not in place at all or was due to be arranged following release from Young Offender Institutions – plans for college and placements were too often tentative and there had not been enough active work on applications, interviews and visits prior to release.
13. We will set out further evidence in forthcoming thematic publications (June/July) on:
 - (i) work with women who have offended; and
 - (ii) accommodation of homeless 16 and 17 year olds working with Youth Offending Teams.

What recommendations should be made to improve support for ex-offenders?

14. Based upon on our early observations of TTG services, we recommend that:
 - CRCs should produce clear written information for prisoners in each resettlement prison that clarifies exactly what services are available to prisoners and how they can access those services.
 - CRCs should actively follow up the progress of referrals they have made to accommodation and employment, training and education services and feedback on progress to prisoners and ex-offenders in the community.
15. In the joint thematic inspection of resettlement work by Youth Offending Teams and partners, we set out the following recommendations:
 - Enable and direct the Youth Justice Board to provide accommodation retainers where necessary, for at least two months prior to the earliest release date for children leaving custody.
 - Change legislation so that all children leaving custody are entitled to receive a sufficient statutory period of support, even if their order has finished.
16. In our forthcoming report on the accommodation of homeless 16 and 17 year olds, we are likely to recommend that planning for accommodation of detained 16 and 17 year olds starts upon sentence.

References:

“Transforming Rehabilitation - Early Implementation 4”, January 2016 HM Inspectorate of Probation <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/inspections/tr4/>

“Joint thematic inspection of resettlement services to children by Youth Offending Teams and partner agencies”, March 2015
HM Inspectorate of Probation, Care Quality Commission, Ofsted
<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/inspections/youthresettlementthematic>

“A compendium of research and analysis on the Offender Assessment System (OASys) 2009 – 2013”, July 2015
National Offender Management Service
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/449357/research-analysis-offender-assessment-system.pdf

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