

Seventy-eighth report of Session 2022-23

Ministry of Justice

Resettlement support for prison leavers

Introduction from the Committee

Prisons and probation services have two core purposes: to carry out the sentences given by the courts; and to rehabilitate people in their care and supervision to help them lead law-abiding and useful lives and to protect the public. From April 2020 to March 2021, 38% of adults released from prison reoffended in the 12 months following their release. Reoffending has significant costs to society. This includes direct financial losses to victims and the costs that the criminal justice system must meet, from running police investigations and court hearings, to holding offenders in prisons and ensuring their effective supervision in the community. In 2019 the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) estimated that reoffending across all adult offenders identified in 2016 cost society £16.7 billion (in 2017–18 prices).

HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) is an executive agency of the MoJ. It carries out sentences given by the courts, in custody and in the community. It is responsible for operating public sector prisons, overseeing private sector prisons and the Probation Service in England and Wales. When people leave prison, HMPPS aims to protect the public by managing any risks they pose, and to reduce the chances of them reoffending by supporting their resettlement in the community. Prison leavers are more likely to reoffend if they are not resettled into the community, for example if they have nowhere to live, no job or other income, and have poor continuity of healthcare.

Based on a report by the National Audit Office, the Committee took evidence on 8 June 2023 from the Ministry of Justice. The Committee published its report on 11 November 2023. This is the government's response to the Committee's report.

Relevant reports

- NAO report: [Improving resettlement support for prison leavers to reduce reoffending](#) – Session 2022-23 (HC 1282)
- PAC report: [Resettlement support for prison leavers](#) – Session 2022-23 (HC 1329)

Government response to the Committee

1. PAC conclusion: HMPPS's resettlement services are not as effective or consistent as they should be, leading to inequalities for prison leavers.

1a. PAC recommendation: In its Treasury Minute response to this report, HMPPS should set out what steps it is taking to understand the causes of inequalities experienced by prison leavers.

1.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

Recommendation implemented

1.2 Resettlement outcomes such as accommodation and employment are routinely reported against different groups, however, the causes of any disparities between groups are less well understood.

1.3 His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS or the agency) is planning a programme of work to understand disparities in resettlement outcomes, beginning with an assessment of which differences in outcomes are statistically significant. The agency is also conducting an evidence synthesis summarising the internal and external evidence base around potential reasons for variation in outcomes and what the key evidence gaps are. Identifying where meaningful differences exist and the key evidence gaps will ensure analysis is focussed on the right areas. Depending on the emerging evidence gaps, this programme of work may include:

- surveys, interviews and focus groups with target cohorts to understand why outcomes differ between groups;
- quasi experimental evaluation techniques to unpick potential causal drivers in differences between outcomes;
- monitoring information collected through interventions to understand uptake by, and differences in outcomes between cohorts; and
- reviewing existing planned evaluations for opportunities for insights to be gained.

1.4 HMPPS' initial focus will relate to published protected characteristics (gender, ethnicity, age), sentence length and probation region. Where data allows, this will involve exploring interactions with wider characteristics. By April 2025, the agency will deliver this analysis across prioritised thematic areas, which will inform the agency's plans for ongoing monitoring based on these findings.

1b. PAC recommendation: Within six months, HMPPS should write to the Committee setting out an action plan for improved support for those who leave the prison system, including clear steps towards its intended approach of an adequate and consistent resettlement service for all prison leavers.

1.5 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

Target implementation date: May 2024

1.6 HMPPS is committed to ensuring that resettlement services provide consistent and adequate support to prison leavers, to reduce reoffending and protect the public.

1.7 The creation of HMPPS's Area Executive Director (AED) roles in October 2023 will drive increased collaboration and joint working between prisons and probation, a vital component of effective resettlement services.

1.8 HMPPS will agree a plan to improve short term resettlement performance for all adult prison leavers. This will set out key resettlement priorities to ensure that, by April 2025, an adequate and consistent resettlement service is in place for all prison leavers. This work is focused on enabling AEDs and frontline operations. It will set the foundations for longer term continuous improvement, taking into account overall system demand pressures.

1.9 HMPPS will respond to the Committee by the six-month deadline, setting out the agreed approach and action plan.

2. PAC conclusion: We are concerned that government is not doing enough to support prisoners with substance misuse needs before they are released.

2. PAC recommendation: The Cross-Government Reducing Reoffending Board should agree metrics to measure end-to-end success in treating substance misuse needs in offenders and routinely publish how it is performing against these metrics.

2.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

Target implementation date: Summer 2024

2.2 The government is committed to engaging offenders in substance misuse treatment at all stages of the criminal justice system to reduce reoffending. The [National Combatting Drugs Outcomes Framework](#) sets out the key metrics that the government is using to measure success, but acknowledges there is more that can be done to clearly define success and how this links to wider resettlement outcomes.

2.3 The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Department for Health and Social Care will develop a proposal, including highlighting any critical gaps in current metrics and subsequent plans to fill them, to be reported through the established cross-government drugs governance and agreed by the Cross-Government Reducing Reoffending Board. The government will publish these metrics routinely, through existing publications such as the Drugs Strategy Annual Report.

3. PAC conclusion: We are concerned that HMPPS is not doing enough to retain the experienced probation workers needed to safely manage its large and increasing caseload.

3. PAC recommendation: In its Treasury Minute response, HMPPS should set out what additional steps it will take to retain and incentivise experienced staff over the next 12 to 18 months and what targets it has for doing so.

3.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

Recommendation implemented

3.2 HMPPS will take a number of additional steps to retain and incentivise experienced staff over the next 12-18 months.

3.3 The agency will:

- continue the work of its retention strategy and accompanying toolkit, which identifies local, regional and national interventions against the drivers of attrition, as well as reviewing findings from the retention oversight process, which targets sites with the highest attrition, and determines how local challenges can be tackled;
- refresh the Career Pathways Framework, which aims to improve retention of experienced staff by showing the many career opportunities available in HMPPS, in particular for Probation staff reaching retirement. The agency has seen an increase in interest from frontline staff, and is committed to updating this regularly (next in January 2024, and quarterly thereafter);
- build on the Prison Officer Alumni scheme, which fast-tracks former staff back into the service, by launching an equivalent for Probation by January 2024. This will attract experienced probation staff back into the service through a streamlined recruitment process;
- pilot a level transfer scheme for prison officers to move between establishments, launched in October 2023, which creates opportunities for personal development and flexibility following changes in personal circumstances;
- continue the national HMPPS brand campaign, launched in September 2023, to build pride and morale in the agency's staff, raising the profile of the work they do; and
- continue to promote the Probation Pathway initiative which encourages unsuccessful candidates for trainee probation officer and probation service officer roles to consider alternative roles also assessed during the same recruitment process where they are deemed appointable.

3.4 HMPPS has committed to improving retention through setting a target of a year-on-year decrease in the proportion of staff leaving the organisation, from 2022-23 to 2024-2025. This may be seen in the staffing levels tracked through the [HMPPS workforce statistics publication](#), which recently saw a decrease in the leaving rate of 1.9 percentage points across the organisation. This is in the context of a net increase in the total number of staff employed by HMPPS; as of September 2023, there were 64,168 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff in post across HMPPS, an increase of 4,856 FTE compared to September 2022.

4. PAC conclusion: HMPPS is still not getting all the basics right when commissioning resettlement services.

4a. PAC recommendation: In its Treasury Minute response, HMPPS should set out how it will ensure good quality outcomes for prison leavers under its existing Commissioned Rehabilitative Services contracts.

4.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

Recommendation implemented

4.2 HMPPS is reviewing its approach to ensuring good quality outcomes for prison leavers and people on probation are both achieved and evidenced.

4.3 HMPPS has taken a number of actions to improve achievement of outcomes. These include;

- significant enhancements to the digital referral tool;
- working with providers to improve services; and
- making contract changes to increase accommodation and women's services support to include remanded people in custody and increased finance, benefit and debt provision in more prisons.

4.4 HMPPS has evidence of successful improvements from a recent internal audit of Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS). The audit reports for Personal and Wellbeing and Education, Training and Employment contracts show that most CRS providers are:

- better at delivering activities that are likely to meet user's needs;
- making reasonable efforts to engage users;
- making positive progress to support successful outcomes;
- finding that session attendance and content delivery are better supported by the improved staff guidance and digital referral tool updates; and
- finding that improvements in the Accommodation Contracts have been slower and are therefore yet to meet all of the required standards.

4.5 HMPPS is committed to gathering, analysing and using better evidence on outcomes in the future, and is assessing the options available to improve data on outcomes including a tool to measure progress from the start of the order to completion. The Area Executive Directors (AEDs) will consider which models are best for their region, working with frontline teams to develop more locally tailored services. AED is a senior, operational delivery role, that brings together leadership of both prison and probation services. They are responsible for driving up operational performance and increasing collaboration across HMPPS and with partners.

4b. PAC recommendation: HMPPS should also set out in the Treasury Minute how it will apply the lessons learned from the procurement of these services to its future commissioning exercises.

4.6 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

Recommendation implemented

4.7 HMPPS intends to apply learning from the procurement of previous Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) to future commissioning.

4.8 Based on these lessons, HMPPS has already taken steps to improve the CRS Dynamic Framework to facilitate greater involvement of voluntary, social, and community enterprises (VSCs); and to introduce a grant process specifically for CRS developed in consultation with third sector representatives.

4.9 HMPPS is working closely with the third sector to support strong VCSE involvement and delivery in future contracts and is undertaking wider market engagement to capture their insight.

4.10 HMPPS has made changes to current services including:

- enhancements to the digital referral tool;
- contract changes to include accommodation and women's services support to remanded people; and
- increased finance, benefit and debt provision in more prisons.

HMPPS will continue to inform the next generation of contracts through detailed user and market research to make sure the design of future services fully reflects the breadth of available evidence on user experience, efficacy and cost.

4.11 An evaluation has been commissioned, looking at process, implementation, impact and value for money. HMPPS will use learning from this between June 2023 and March 2025 to make positive changes to future services.

4.12 A robust lessons learned exercise has taken place to learn lessons from other major programmes, including the Electronic Monitoring Programme.

5. PAC conclusion: It is vital that HMPPS understands more about what works best if it is to get the best outcomes from its limited funds for prisoner resettlement work.

5. PAC recommendation: In its Treasury Minute response, HMPPS should set out its plan for evaluating its current resettlement initiatives, including confirming how its evaluations for resettlement programmes will inform its approach in the next spending review.

5.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

Recommendation implemented

5.2 Detailed evaluation plans, based on best practice set out in HM Treasury's [Magenta Book](#), are now in place to assess the effectiveness of HMPPS investment across key elements of resettlement activity. The agency is taking a proportionate approach where interventions are subject to evaluation, prioritising those where existing evidence is limited, sample size is sufficient, and cost is high.

5.3 By summer 2024, impact evaluations are expected to be complete, and findings will be available to inform planning around key interventions. Interim findings will also provide insight into the effectiveness of HMPPS's Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS), to inform future service development.

5.4 For some initiatives, findings on impact will only be available beyond 2024, due to the time required to reach a sufficient sample size and for sufficient time to pass once someone has been released from prison in order to measure whether they have reoffended. In these cases, the MoJ will use monitoring data and process evaluations to provide interim findings. By autumn 2024, outcomes data will inform early findings on the effectiveness of resettlement initiatives such as Prison Employment Leads, Employment Hubs and Resettlement Passports.

5.5 The agency is continuously developing and improving its evidence base on what works to reduce reoffending, which will inform the next spending review. Where impact and economic evaluations have concluded, the MoJ and HMPPS will consider whether the evidence supports continued investment. For interventions where evaluation is ongoing, it will review whether emerging evidence supports continuing the intervention until evaluation evidence is available to support ongoing investment.

6. PAC conclusion: unprecedented pressures on the prison estate threaten the quality of resettlement services today and in the future.

6. PAC recommendation: The Ministry of Justice should write to us within six months with its latest 5 to 10 year projections for:

- **its prison population and its safe prison capacity;**
- **bringing six new prisons online; and**
- **the level of demand for resettlement services**

6.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

Target implementation date: May 2024

6.2 The MoJ will respond to the Committee by the six-month deadline, setting out the projections for its prison population, bringing six new prisons online, and the level of demand for resettlement services.

6.3 In addition, the department will be publishing a new annual statement into prison capacity and an update on prison build, as announced to Parliament on 16 October 2023. This will include a clear statement of current prison capacity, future demand, and a forward pipeline of prison build, which will be independently scrutinised. Following publication of the annual statement, HMPPS will write to the Committee with further information in response to the recommendation above.

6.4 The department will also consider the level of demand for resettlement services alongside the National Audit Office report recommendation for longer term strategy on resettlement provisions.