



Through the Gate: the implementation, management and delivery of resettlement service provision for short term prisoners

Executive Summary

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Introduction

In 2013, the UK government published plans to reform resettlement provision for (short-term) prisoners via a Through the Gate (TTG) scheme introduced as part of its Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) agenda. The plans proposed two key changes to the structure and delivery of resettlement services. Firstly, that a network of resettlement prisons would establish an integrated approach to service delivery; secondly, that the management and provision of resettlement services would form part of the contractual obligations of the newly formed Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC). Furthermore, an extended 12-month period of post-release community supervision would become mandatory for all offenders serving custodial sentences of under 12-months.

This research project focused on the implementation of TTG arrangements in HMP XXXXX where resettlement services were contracted to XXXXX CRC but delivered by XXXXX on a sub-contractual basis. The study attempted to provide an empirical insight into the operational deployment of practice reform from the perspectives of those most intimately effected; the staff, prisoners, and their families. The research sought to explore how the structures, processes and operation of in-prison based resettlement service provision changed over time; examine the views of those charged with implementing and managing these interventions; and gauge the experiences of those inmates (and their families) who engaged services both within and outside the prison estate. The project documented the changing structure of in-prison based resettlement services; explored how working alliances/relationships were formed; and examined how partners negotiated/reconciled operational priorities and mutually developed new ways of working.

The project adopted a partial ‘action research’ design in that the research team provided reports at designated stages of the project’s development whilst simultaneously facilitating forums which engaged partners with the emergent findings and enabled collaborative discussion of future policy and practice. This ‘real-time’ feedback aided the on-going delivery of resettlement orientated service provision. This executive summary provides a brief overview of the project including; key research questions; research methodology; findings; and recommendations.

Research questions

- How is the TR resettlement model being implemented within one prison establishment?
- How is the resettlement model perceived and experienced by both the individuals charged with making it function, and with the individuals who are passing through it?
- How are relationships formed, negotiated and maintained in new working structures?
- What engagement strategies and interventions function best to strengthen individual inmate's ability to develop their efforts to resettle back into the community?
- How do the families of inmates prepare for and experience the release and resettlement of their loved ones?

Methodology

This exploratory case study consisted of three distinguishable phases of fieldwork over an 18-month period (Jan 2016-June 2017). Each phase involved observational and interview/focus group based research with those directly involved in the delivery/consumption of resettlement services; professionals, inmates and inmate's families. A total sample of 154 individuals engaged with the research, the data collection comprising;

- 39 interviews with professionals involved in the management/delivery of resettlement service provision;
- 5 focus groups with 34 professionals involved in the management/delivery of resettlement service provision;
- 18 tracker cases of inmates serving sentences of 12-months or under where each individual was interviewed twice during the final 12-weeks of their time in custody and where possible, once on their release in the community;
- 15 interviews with NPS Probation Officers and/or CRC Case Managers (responsible for supervising the individual tracker cases);
- 11 members of the tracker cases families (interviewed once whilst their family member was in custody and, where possible, once on their release);
- 15 focus groups with 78 inmates, all of whom were serving sentences of 12-months or under and who had entered the final 12-weeks of their sentence.

Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts enabled the identification of prominent topics within each sample group during each phase of the fieldwork. The sample sizes were modest (as a balance was struck between a representative sample and the ability of the institutions to

manage the resource implications of the study) and the findings represent a time-limited account of a single prison/CRC area during a transitional period; issues which potentially limit the wider applicability of the findings. Nonetheless, the longitudinal nature of the study, the scope of the sample and the use of a tracker group provided a unique insight into the resettlement service landscape. Furthermore, the emergent themes resonated with those identified by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Joint Inspectorate's national review of TTG (Joint Inspectorate, 2016), indicating that the findings highlight localised concerns yet also relate to wider systematic issues.

Findings

All those involved in the management and delivery of resettlement services reported how fraught with challenges the implementation of TTG provision has been. The embedding of new working arrangements and uncertainty around contractual boundaries coupled with significant structural issues specific to HMP XXXXX (a lack of staff and resources, the physical condition/environment of the prison, the high number/turnover of prisoners) meant that new models of operating were slow to materialise. Professionals continue to consider resettlement provision within the jail as a fragmented jigsaw where more robust co-ordination and demarcation of partner responsibility, disconnects in inter/intra-agency communication, and tackling the duplicity of working is required to renew a more coherent resettlement journey/pathway.

The latter stages of the fieldwork indicated some positive development around these issues with the rolling out of the key-worker model generating an optimism that further progress was possible. Many professionals spoke of improved knowledge of partners activities and of building relationships with counterparts in the prison service, XXXXX, CRC or NPS. Recent increases in staff numbers and the sense that the prison felt a little calmer were helping to extend capacity and enable blockages to be addressed more expediently. However, these positive overtones were not universal and many provided detailed commentary on what they saw as embedded systemic problems with the models of working where extensive partner engagement and training was still required.

Throughout the research period, prisoners expressed resentment (towards the prison and probation) due to the 'inhumane' physical environment of HMP XXXXX and the perceived absence of service provision. They reported 'no strategy' being in place to support them with release, describing instead feelings of abandonment. None of the prisoner sample could name an individual who was overseeing their resettlement, and very few could identify which

organisation was responsible for this. Similarly, no prisoners reported knowledge of having a resettlement plan whilst only a small number acknowledged having been offered/attended a pre-release course. Instead of inmates feeling that they were at the centre of a seamless, supported resettlement journey, they expressed feelings of isolation within the malaise of the prison regime. This prompted a range of anxieties, including concerns over release, licence and potential recall.

Concurrently, prisoner's families reported not feeling as though they had a role in the resettlement process or that their views, feelings or knowledge of the person were important. The majority of family members claimed that they had received very little or no contact regarding their family members – they were not aware of release dates or the details of the release plan. They spoke of an isolation from the process and a conflict between care and responsibility in terms of what they were willing/obligated to do to support their loved one.

Implications and recommendations

Enhancing partnership work

- Greater transparency of the CRCs contractual obligations to address existing operational ambiguity. This will ensure that professionals and service users alike better understand a model that they can more clearly position themselves in and that delineates clearer roles and responsibilities. This is of upmost importance given the roll-out of the key worker model and peer mentor scheme.
- Multiple providers duplicate questions during induction whilst the Basic Custody Screening Tool (BCST) represents a box ticking exercise rather than a meaningful method of engagement. A streamlined process, with a single assessment which all referrals subsequently stem from, appears worthy of consideration.
- All organisations who feed into resettlement should share an IT database. The ability to access information in real-time would avoid duplication whilst also allowing a clearer picture to emerge of what work is being undertaken, when and by whom.
- HMP XXXXX should consider establishing a hub whereby all partners are co-located (or at least have representatives). This would encourage closer joint working and enhance channels of communication. This could be co-ordinated alongside a resettlement wing (see below).
- Services continue to be 'to the gate' rather than 'through the gate'. Consideration of how prison based providers co-work with community-based staff is required.

Developing a resettlement identity

- HMP XXXXX does not operate as a resettlement prison in practice. As part of a strategic consultation of the structural framework of services consideration needs to be given to a specific resettlement wing allowing all those within 12-weeks of release to receive tailored support with ready access to partner services.
- The establishment of a more definitive resettlement brand that encourages prisoners to view their sentence as part of an orchestrated resettlement journey. Potential solutions are a resettlement passport (mapping out planned/undertaken activities) and a resettlement refresher programme (taking place sometime after induction, allowing individuals to re-visit the process and available services).
- Enhancing knowledge of resettlement services. The first point directory provides a comprehensive overview of services but individual prisoners would benefit from a specific document which maps out the resettlement process and available provision.
- Keeping resettlement ‘active’ throughout a sentence. It is crucial that once the BCSTs are completed, resettlement work is ongoing and not left until the commencement of the 12-week resettlement period. Whilst the keyworker model should allow this ambition to be partially realised, the providing of timely support (particularly in relation to accommodation) requires attention. A strategic consultation of the structural framework of resettlement would identify how earlier interventions can be undertaken and actions agreed.
- A need for prisoners to be allocated a named CRC/NPS supervisor at the earliest opportunity and for communication (throughout the sentence) to be both meaningful and consistent. If relationships are built, prisoners should feel more invested in this process, both during their time in custody and on release – the latter of which may address feelings of hostility and anxiety towards licence.

Engaging prisoners

- The physical conditions within HMP XXXXX require urgent attention.
- A streamlining and restructuring of the induction process. A gentler, extended induction period could encourage prisoner buy-in whilst allowing more meaningful work to be undertaken.
- Prisoners identified a number of areas to enhance engagement. At a basic level, this concerned raising awareness of services and addressing resettlement prior to the final weeks of their sentence. Of more substance was the need for a named person within both the prison and community to support the management of their resettlement; to maintain

routine dialogue; and to increase the reliability of referral processes. These should be elements of good practice for all providers.

- Key worker and peer mentor models. These schemes offer great potential for both engaging prisoners and developing a seamless transition through the gate. There is a need, however, to establish methods of co-working in terms of how and when partners will feed into these frameworks, and for boundaries of responsibility between the prison, the CRC and partners to be drawn.

Engaging families

- How to involve families in the resettlement process remains a moot point. Consultation activity amongst partners and families themselves should consider whether further developments (such as structured pre-release family days, where inmates, their families, their offender manager and partner agencies come together) are feasible. Such activity should also consider the recommendations of the Farmer Review, 2017.

Developing an empirical evidence base

- The rolling out of the key worker model should be accompanied by research activity scrutinising its implementation, operation and performance. Similarly, an empirical insight into peer mentoring would also seem prudent.

The Report Authors

The research team comprising of Stuart Taylor, Lol Burke, Matthew Millings and Ester Ragonese (all Liverpool John Moores University) received internal funding from LJMU for this project. If you wish to discuss the contents of this report, please contact the Project Leader in the first instance:



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