

Resettling Adult Offenders - a perfect opportunity for European Collaboration?

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Those familiar with the history of resettlement often remark how approaches seem to develop - and yet remain the same. Unemployment, homelessness, mental health, alcohol, isolation – these were the topics of 19th century reform. And yet they are also the focus of 21st century initiatives, and in virtually every European jurisdiction.

No-one denies that progress has been made - in some of the countries, some of the time. And advancement is sometimes remarkable. The literature on resettlement is full of examples of dedicated staff, far-reaching initiatives, and creative endeavour. And yet there are fewer examples of sustained investment in resettlement and less still of steady and prolonged implementation of effective practice on a significant scale.

This article presents the gaps in understanding and promising practice identified during a conference hosted by the Conference Permanente European Probation (CEP) titled ‘Life after Prison; Resettling Adult Offenders.’ The conference, held in May 2008 at the University of Glasgow, was attended by 90 delegates who had come from 16 countries including representatives from Canada and the USA as well as from across Europe.

The conference presented a valuable opportunity to speak openly about challenges in through-care in Europe informed by a growing body of trans-national experience.

But the conference was ambitious and determined to promote a greater aim: an emerging enthusiasm to work strategically and cooperatively across the European Member States, and with neighbours, to contribute to the common objectives of improved resettlement, inclusion, public protection and reduced re-offending.

A RESETTLEMENT AGENDA

The conference scene was set jointly by Steve Pitts of the National Offender Management Service (“NOMS”) of England and Wales and one of this article’s authors, and by Wolfgang Wirth, Director of the Criminological Service, NRW, Germany.

With a growing prison population (well in excess of half a million in the European Union - far higher if neighbouring countries are included), rates increasing in many jurisdictions, pressure on resources, more mobility, and a complex agenda

for development, it is perhaps surprising that more use has not been made of European funds to support trans-national exchange and development.

In 2007 NOMS looked for an explanation: representatives of a selection of national probation and prison services were asked about their experience of international funds. Whilst funds were sometimes used to promote innovative practice and address diversity, the process of evaluation, dissemination and mainstreaming were often inconsistent. Exchange between projects supported by different trans-national funding streams, for example regarding employment and crime reduction, was sparse. Perhaps most significantly, confidence in using funds was low and senior managers - with the authority to implement change - were often unaware of opportunities available through international funding programmes.

Steve Pitts also spoke about the “Resettlement Pathfinders”, a UK government initiative which from 1999 to 2004 developed and tested approaches to resettlement. Results demonstrated the importance of relationship continuity in resettlement and working holistically with the whole person, in partnership, on practical and motivational needs (see for example Lewis et al, 2003). The pathfinders developed a promising “cognitive-motivational” programme (“F.O.R. a Change”) which has at its core a belief in the individual’s ability to change and to work towards a positive vision of the future – towards a potential they are instrumental in identifying for themselves.

These messages were reinforced by Wolfgang Wirth. Based mainly on European Social Fund experience, he described the “Three Pillars” supporting effective reintegration of ex-prisoners: continuity in vocational training in prison, labour market orientated job placement, and in after-care services. The “Ten Commandments” of effective reintegration conclude with the strategic development of “network management”, the application of systematic evaluation, and purposeful dissemination of results beyond the local level.

An “outline” resettlement agenda might therefore include attention to a wide range of practical needs, to continuity, to involving partner organisations

locally and nationally, to motivation, and to supporting the individual in identifying and achieving their potential. It might also take account of evaluation, and support dissemination of learning and mainstreaming. Not least, attention should be paid to the balance of use of custody and community. With such a complex agenda of need, perhaps it is not so surprising after all that progress has been only modest!

A RESETTLEMENT FRAMEWORK

Conference contributions were varied and wide-ranging. In order to provide initial structure, this article draws on a framework adopted by NOMS. The framework is based on the work of the UK Government’s Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) which in 2002 published a report on the resettlement of prisoners. The report presented a gritty picture of resettlement need and proposed a needs-based “pathway” approach through which offenders’ needs are addressed via cross-government agreement and action.

As noted by Maguire and Raynor (2006), the SEU’s organisational setting within the office of the Deputy Prime Minister gave the recommendations political weight and allowed development of a cross-departmental approach to social inclusion and reducing re-offending. A national strategy and action plan on reducing re-offending (2004) extended the pathway approach to community sentences.

The pathway structure also owes much to the development of the NOMS risk and needs Offender Assessment System “OASys”. OASys informs individual action planning and, at a strategic level, the risks and needs addressed inter-departmentally along each pathway. Action planning and delivery along each pathway is underpinned by the Offender Management Model. This model provides “end to end” coordination and continuity of approach, and where possible, of staff members, across prison and community boundaries.

This framework comprises seven rehabilitation “pathways”, underpinned by four cross-cutting themes:

REHABILITATION PATHWAYS

Employment, Learning and Skills
Children and Families
Drugs and Alcohol
Attitudes, Thinking and Behaviour
Physical and Mental Health
Accommodation
Finance, Benefit and Debt

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

Case Management
Equal Opportunities and Diversity
Risk and Public Protection
Partnership, including Voluntary and Community Sector

The model is of course intended to be no more than a starting point – a possible “language” for sharing ideas between CEP member countries and organisations and for developing priorities for collaborative action. The model is returned to in the final part of this article and linked to potential funding streams – an initial “Matrix” for matching identified development needs with opportunities for collaboration.

PATHWAYS, THEMES AND PROMISING PRACTICE – EXPLORING THE RESETTLEMENT AGENDA

Cross-cutting Themes

One of the themes raised most frequently at the conference was the need for **continuity of care** - including for prison walls to be “permeable” to services on the outside. It was felt and evidenced that the most effective programmes and work with offenders had begun early in their sentences and continued as seamlessly as possible when they returned to the community. Pitts’ summary of key findings from the resettlement pathfinders included development of a plan of work based on a sound assessment of risks and needs, beginning as soon as possible after sentence and with case management of the action plan, developed with the offender, and delivered “through the prison gate”.

In many jurisdictions the gap in provision across the transition from prison to the community is becoming increasingly clear. **A number of**

vulnerable and neglected groups were identified where gaps in provision are undeniable. Firstly short term offenders were regarded as ‘revolving door’ offenders carrying out a “life sentence” in instalments. They often have multiple complex needs but due to the length of their sentences and subsequent restriction of time there were only certain programmes that they could access and complete. **A more imaginative way to deal with the restrictions of time** needs to be undertaken. Wolfgang Wirth explained how any prisoner who begins a programme of education in NRW and who is on a short sentence is offered the option of continuing this programme of education and completing it in the community.

Ethnic minority prisoners, and in particular Muslims in Britain and Moroccans in the Netherlands, were said to be **difficult groups to access in the community** with a resulting too frequent break down in continuity of care from prison to the community. There was much discussion about how to interact and be able to connect with these groups and it was suggested that services need to find more creative ways of doing this. For example, Dr Gabriele Marranci said that it should not simply be the Muslim Probation worker, Muslim or otherwise, who works with Muslim clients and that in general there could be considerably more engagement and interaction with the wider Muslim population, for example by working with Mosques and speaking with elders.

Being able to connect with offenders and build a meaningful working relationship is imperative but can be difficult. An area of best practice highlighted within the conference was that of employing **peer support**. The Routes out of Prison Project (RooP) set up in Scotland, employed ex-offenders to help offenders to connect with services in the community. The evaluation showed that peer support workers are able to connect with clients relatively easily as they themselves have ‘been there’ and this ability to empathise was respected. Work began with clients in the prison, was followed through into the community, with clients signposted to services and offered support to address their needs.

A major theme which continually arose in the conference was that **prisoners were often not aware of what they could access in the**

community. An ‘import’ model such as that adopted in Scandinavian countries whereby services from the outside were also placed within the prison was advised as promising practice by Professor Andrew Coyle. In Scotland, each prison now has a Links Centre which means that offenders can make connections with services on the inside before they leave prison. However, a gap in current provision is that short term offenders only make this contact four weeks before they leave prison. Links are therefore often not sufficiently robust enough to be sustained when the offender leaves prison. The RooP evaluation has been able to show that having a worker who is able to help offenders to continue to make these connections can prove invaluable. The conference heard that in Denmark rehabilitation and support are put in place at the beginning of the prisoner’s sentence with all prisoners assessed on their first day. From the second day they are able to access modular education programmes that will lead to a certified achievement before they leave prison.

Continuity of care means that further modules and support are available post-prison. The Danish system builds particularly strong links with community-based training and employment facilities. The need for communities to be involved in the offender’s re-settlement was a consistently recurring theme – although a theme with very real challenges. Gabriele Marranci, building on his earlier points, argued that for Muslim offenders who may feel ostracised from their families or communities there were sometimes only two apparent options - to return to the re-offending that previously led to prison, or perhaps to establish and reinforce an identity that might lead to a more radical faction. Community reintegration must occur in every sense of the word. However stigma and isolation may make it difficult for the offender to change and lead a meaningful crime-free life. Although the media often portray the public as uncaring and punitive towards offenders, Chris Wilson from the ‘Circles of Support and Accountability’ was able to show that this perception is not always accurate. The Circles initiative was set up in Thames Valley and is able to provide sex offenders with a supportive circle of people from the local community. Chris argued that it works because the community are involved and the offender is supported; to date no one has been reconvicted. Chris felt that the willingness to believe in change was what had

inspired him to be a social worker and it was also evident in the workers that volunteered: he felt that the community at large also had a willingness to believe in change which was essential in giving offenders a chance to move beyond offending.

REHABILITATION PATHWAYS

Evidence shows that **employment and training** help resettlement in the community. However this must be meaningful for people as only then will it be sustained. Bernadette Monaghan, the Chief Executive of APEX which is an organisation helping offenders in Scotland connect with training and employment talked about the need for the Criminal Justice System to be aware of the needs of employers. Both Wirth and Monaghan argued that there is a need to adopt a more corporate way of **engaging employers** to create a win-win situation for all. Moreover, there were many barriers to an offender being able to achieve a job, with housing provision; legal disclosure and stigma were particularly identified.

Assessment processes and evaluations repeatedly demonstrate the complex needs of individuals. It was reiterated by each speaker that there was a need to address ALL of the needs that an offender presents. Other side progress could not be sustained. In addressing needs, services should work together in partnership and this demanded effective communication, as was highlighted by the example of Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) in the UK.

Offenders’ **families** were highlighted as a too often forgotten group. Dr Nancy Loucks, the Chief Executive for Families Outside spoke about how the wider public often don’t see that the family also needs support, that prison is a “family experience”, and that there are clear benefits to maintaining family ties. She said that, for example, evidence shows that if the links between the family and the offender are maintained they are six times less likely to re-offend. Overall Dr Loucks felt that that there needed to be more work on this pathway, both in acknowledging the position of offenders’ families and also in creating ways of supporting them and making them aware of the help that they could access.

Housing provision was highlighted as an area of need and a gap in service provision for many countries with not enough resources allocated for housing. One example of good practice identified was the ‘Prison Gate Model’, set up by the Salvation Army in the Netherlands. Dr Jaap Van Vilet and Janne Zwemmer spoke about how this facility is directly attached to the prison and how it allows those who are homeless to have somewhere to stay, food and help to move on into longer-term accommodation. Although this was shown to work exceptionally well it did not have reliable core steady funding. The lack of stable funding was a gap highlighted in much current provision with many ‘pilot’ projects being funded for only a very short period of time. Moreover, Wirth argued for caution when attempting to ‘roll out’ pilot projects as the conditions, and funding are often different during the pilot stage compared to when it is being extended.

Professor Andrew Coyle argued that criminal justice systems now operate increasingly in areas such as **mental health** yet for this they are frequently ill-equipped. Offenders with mental health needs are amongst the most likely to commit future offences. Insufficient account is taken of the reality that the prison service is not always equipped for the offenders it has to deal with. Coyle called for more effective communication between health services and the criminal justice system to address the area of mental health in particular.

DESISTANCE, MEASURING SUCCESS, AND SENTENCING PRACTICE

Many conference speakers reflected the reality that **offenders were sometimes not seen to be rounded human beings** but rather as offenders to be ‘managed’. It was strongly argued that there is too much focus on the risks offenders present and on their weaknesses as opposed to their strengths. It was put by Dr Fergus McNeil that an over-emphasis on risk could be counter-productive. For example research on desistance argues that offenders need to be given hope and confidence: an over-focus on negative factors therefore makes it less likely that an offender will be able to turn away from offending. McNeil argued that probation workers can provide a way for offenders to gain

hope and confidence by reducing a pre-occupation with risk and taking account of strengths. He also argued that the assessment of offenders’ needs should take account of potential sources of strength and support such as family, community and wider social networks.

Bernadette Monaghan from APEX emphasised that reoffending as a way of measuring the success or otherwise of services was unrealistic particularly as relapse into offending through addiction or otherwise was quite common. Relapse was often an almost inevitable part of recovery and therefore **more effective ways of measuring ‘successes’ should be established.**

Finally, the conference considered questions of sentencing practice. Professor Andrew Coyle reflected that despite the fact that the number of offences recorded was in general falling, the number of people being sent to prison in many countries was at an all time high. This punitive trend had been successfully challenged in Finland through a joint approach by the Government, courts, academic community and the media. A need to re-brand community sentences was highlighted by Kenny MacAskill, the Scottish Government Justice Minister. He saw this taking place through six principles of effective practice: Quality, Effectiveness, Immediacy, Visibility, Flexibility and Relevance. Professor Coyle believed that if the political will was there then there could be real change.

CONCLUSIONS – AN OPPORTUNITY FOR COLLABORATION

Conference participants left with an enriched understanding of promising practice and of work still to be done. Resettlement has been perhaps too “prison-centric”. But participants left knowing that opportunities can be created to work through the prison gate with continuity, to work holistically towards more positive futures, to engage families and communities, and to work constructively with all groups of prisoners. Most notably of all, participants left enthused with opportunities for action.

This article proposes an “outline” resettlement agenda addressing a wide range of practice and organisational issues. It also suggests an initial

framework for developing strategic collaboration between countries and across funding streams, including a focus on evaluation and the dissemination of results. The synergy inherent in collaboration should help a systematic focus on priority areas, reduce duplication of effort, increase the benefit from available funds, and offer increased opportunity to share results.

Work has already begun to identify trans-national funds available, such as those within the EU's

Criminal Justice and Crime Prevention programmes, and to match these in a more methodical way under the auspices of the CEP to areas for development. Indeed, an initial "Matrix" of needs and opportunities first presented at this conference has since been revisited at a more recent CEP conference "Funding Innovation and Collaboration in Probation" held in Cambridge in March 2009. Further drivers for collaboration are the European Commission frameworks on transfer of prisoners and community sentenced offenders.

FIGURE 1 – NEEDS-FUNDING OPPORTUNITY MATRIX (SIMPLIFIED - SOME EU DG FUNDS ONLY)

Pathways and Themes: ---	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	A	B	C	D
European Funding Stream											
European Social Fund	X	x					x		X		x
Life-long Learning Programme	X								X		x
JLS Drugs Prevention			X		x						x
JLS Criminal Justice								X			
JLS Violence Prevention		X		X					X		x
JLS Crime Prevention	x		x	X		x				X	x
Health			X		X				x		x

JLS = Justice, Liberty and Security

X = High relevance; x = some relevance

PATHWAYS AND THEMES:

- 1 Employment, learning and skills**
- 2 Children and Families**
- 3 Drugs and Alcohol**
- 4 Attitudes, thinking and Behaviour**
- 5 Physical and Mental Health**
- 6 Accommodation**
- 7 Finance, Benefit and Debt**

- A Case Management (organisation, content, approaches)**
- B Equal Opportunity and Diversity**
- C Risk Management and Public Protection (serious and prolific offenders)**
- D Partnerships including Not-for-Profit and Community**

As noted by Dr Fergus McNeil in his summarising comments, much valuable work has been done in this area but there is still much more to do!

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