

The future of the probation service – Catch22 follow-up to Oral Evidence session attended by Mat Ilic

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What should we be looking out for to ensure that the Enhanced TTG model has been ported over into the future structure?’

It’s vital that third sector providers are able to continue to have influence in the future structure, using their expertise to carry across the best points of innovation.

The Basic Custody Screening Tools (BCSt) processes introduced through Transforming Rehabilitation provided screening tools to identify the holistic resettlement needs of all prisoners entering and exiting prison. Whilst quality of assessments varied, the concept ensured for the first time that a universal process was in place for prison and Through The Gate (TTG) staff to conduct face to face assessments to identify needs and put individual plans in place to address these needs. This has proven particularly useful for the short sentence and remand population, who often had unmet needs pre-Transforming Rehabilitation due to the lack of process.

The porting over of the service offers a new opportunity to see how the screening tools could be improved or streamlined e.g. the BCSt1 & 2 tools are currently conducted by two separate organisations which often causes duplication, confusion and a resulting lack of ownership. There must also be a concerted effort to prevent any blurred lines between the work completed by the in-house resettlement teams and the Dynamic Framework providers, in understanding where one provision starts and the other stops.

Prior to the Enhanced TTG model being introduced in 2019, our TTG teams were often consumed by the work involved in reaching transactional milestones i.e. screenings/assessments as opposed to focusing on achieving meaningful outcomes for those we are trying to help. The enhanced funding allowed TTG providers sufficient resource to dedicate to delivering more impactful interventions.

It is difficult to know what the percentage increase in funding has been between the original and enhanced TTG model for multiple reasons, firstly being that the budgets to CRC’s have changed more than once. Secondly, it is difficult to find an overall figure as to what percentage of the overall TR money went to TTG (we expect this differed between each CRC). However, ETTG brought an additional £43 million over 2 years to employ an additional 500 TTG staff across the picture. In our London services it resulted in an additional 60% staff.

When porting over, it is important to ensure that the outcome focused element is not lost and that the inefficiencies are addressed to allow teams to focus on doing the relational work which has the biggest impact on helping someone to lead a safe and fulfilling life away from crime on release, rather than being consumed by paperwork.

What innovations which have come about as a result of COVID?

Pre-COVID the prison system was painfully slow to embed technology within the prison estate. Instead, the estate was highly risk averse which meant that offenders were being deprived of technological advances routinely available in the community, and those which could support with rehabilitation and connection to their communities – both essential for the prevention of reoffending.

The COVID pandemic has accelerated some technological advances and this has, in turn, had a positive influence on changing the view of HMPPS. Such examples have included seeing roll out of in cell telephony and the Purple Visits video conferencing facility which allows prisoners to speak to their families. Although this is currently only in some prison settings, there has been a huge acceleration in the roll out of both.

The technology already exists to enhance the offering to prisoners – which would allow for the expansion of education material, offending behaviour interventions and supporting with resettlement preparations. In-cell phones, access to a computer/tablet for education/training purposes and the ability to allow video visits when visits from family and friends need to be restricted. Such approaches, with the necessary safeguards, would increase offenders' access to meaningful activities to support rehabilitation and ultimately reduce reoffending.

In relation to TTG, there is a real opportunity to capitalise on some of these advances. We have been exploring the opportunity to use tablets to allow distance learning and maximise our offering with companies such as Socrates360. There is still work to be done to enable this to happen but there has definitely been more progress in this area. This would be invaluable in both the current prison environment where access to pretty much all meaningful activity is heavily restricted, but also in a post Covid environment which will allow greater access to wider resources and allow time spent in cells to be productive.