

HM Prison Service  
Reducing Prisoner Reoffending



REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL  
HC 548 Session 2001-2002: 31 January 2002

# Foreword

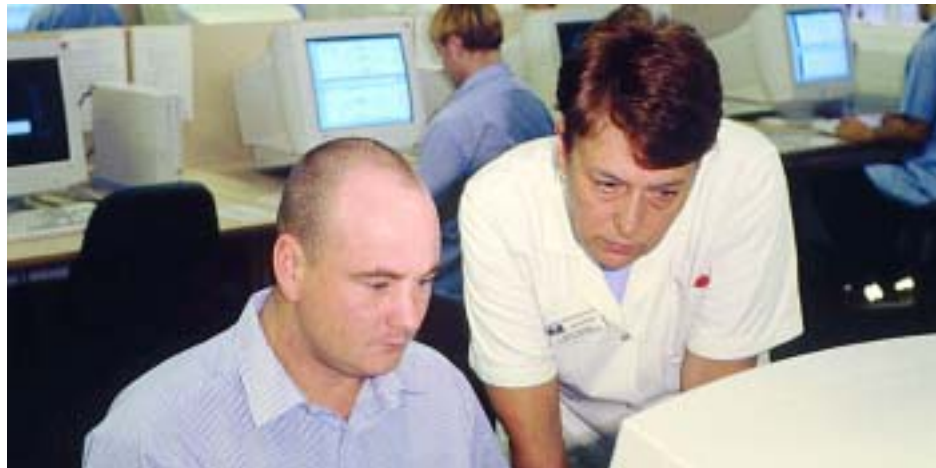
## Foreword by the Comptroller and Auditor General

Currently around 58 per cent of prisoners are reconvicted within two years of being released. Research indicates that factors associated with reoffending include poor reasoning and thinking skills, drugs misuse and low levels of literacy and numeracy. The Prison Service in England and Wales has made good progress in introducing programmes designed to help tackle these factors and in September 2000 established a Strategy Board to provide direction for the further development and delivery of programmes. The Service needs to build on this and:

- improve the planning of prisoners' time in custody including closer working with the Probation Service. Prisoners' sentence plans should identify: the risks of their reoffending and how these risks should be tackled; and what help they need to resettle into the community, including assistance to find accommodation and employment and to maintain family ties;
- ensure that all prisoners who would benefit from attending programmes have the opportunity to do so. At present, provision varies markedly between prisons, and many prisoners leave prison without having had the opportunity to address their offending behaviour. For example, virtually all prisons holding high security risk prisoners had drug treatment programmes by March 2001, whereas provision was less frequent in prisons holding lower security risk prisoners where the risk of reoffending is high;
- ensure that programmes are appropriately targeted at all prisoner groups, including, for example, juvenile offenders (15 to 17 year olds), female prisoners and ethnic minorities;
- strengthen work with prisoners serving short sentences to reduce the risk of their being drawn into a cycle of reoffending. Such prisoners are not subject to sentence planning and because of the length of their sentences will have fewer opportunities to acquire educational or work skills, receive treatment for their drug misuse or undertake offending behaviour programmes. The Probation Service currently has no statutory responsibility or funding for their supervision on release;
- evaluate current programmes at the earliest opportunity to determine whether they do reduce reoffending and to what extent. Develop management information systems that would enable an assessment to be made of: the cost benefit of programmes to reduce reoffending; and the success of individual prisons in reducing reoffending;
- improve the relevance of work experience provided in prison. The kinds of work currently done in prison do not, in many instances, enhance prisoners' prospects of jobs outside;
- provide an agreed minimum level and standard of assistance to prisoners to resettle in the community, based on good practice across the prison estate;
- improve collaboration with the Probation Service, health authorities and voluntary groups so that released prisoners who need continuing support receive it.

# executive summary

- 1 The prison population in England and Wales rose between 1992-1993 and 2000-2001, from 44,600 to 65,000, an increase of 45 per cent. By the end of November 2001 it had risen to an all time high of over 68,400. Many prisoners are involved in a cycle of reoffending. Recent figures indicate that 58 per cent of all prisoners are reconvicted within two years of being released. The problem is most significant amongst young male offenders whose reconviction rate is 76 per cent. Many prisoners also have drug problems. In response to a 1997 survey, 80 per cent of prisoners admitted drug misuse in the year before prison.



- 2 Two of the Home Office's principal aims are "to deliver effective custodial and community sentences to reduce reoffending and protect the public"; and "to reduce the availability and abuse of dangerous drugs". The Prison Service, working with other organisations, plays a key role in helping to achieve these aims by providing constructive regimes which address offending behaviour, improve educational and work skills, tackle drugs misuse and promote law abiding behaviour in custody and after release. The Home Office has set the Prison and National Probation Services joint targets to reduce: the rate of reconvictions of all offenders punished by imprisonment or community supervision by 5 per cent by 2004 compared to the predicted rate; and the levels of reoffending by drug misuse offenders by 25 per cent by 2005. As part of its Crime Reduction Strategy, the Government has provided the Prison Service with an additional £155 million to spend over the three years 1999-2002 on programmes aimed at tackling reoffending, and factors which can contribute to reoffending.
- 3 This report focuses on the Prison Service's management of programmes specifically aimed at reducing the risk of reoffending, including the offending behaviour, basic skills education and drug misuse programmes.

## Key findings

- The Prison Service has made a determined effort to develop and deliver its accredited programmes in accordance with the best available research evidence on what works in reducing reoffending. Evaluations of the effectiveness of some early unaccredited programmes suggested a reduction in the risk of reoffending, although further evidence will be needed to judge the full effectiveness of the accredited programmes now in place.
- The Prison Service has rapidly expanded its provision of offending behaviour, drug misuse and education programmes so that more prisoners could benefit. The expansion, however, has been carried out without any clear overall plan for how the programmes should complement other prison activities aimed at preparing prisoners for release. However, in September 2000, the Service established a What Works in Prison Strategy Board to provide direction for the further development and delivery of programmes and activities to reduce reoffending and help ensure that the diverse needs of the prison population are met. The Service expects to publish the strategy shortly. More recently, the Service has decided to implement OASys, a joint development with the Probation Service designed to provide a more strategic and systematic basis for assessing prisoner risks and needs. The Prison Service's timetable for implementing OASys is dependent on the procurement of the IT application, but its current estimate is that implementation could begin in 2003.
- A prisoner's access to programmes still owes much to where he or she is sent. We found that the scale and range of programmes offered within prisons of similar type and size varied significantly. By 31 March 2001, for example, virtually all prisons holding high security risk prisoners had drug treatment programmes whereas only one in three young offender institutions, where the risk of reoffending is high, provided them (although specialist drug workers were operating in all prisons). Similarly, in the case of education programmes, there are large variations in the average amounts spent per prisoner, ranging from £89 to £1,493 a year in male open prisons. The current pattern of provision for the various programmes reflects, in most cases, decisions taken within individual prisons about local priorities although the Prison Service has taken action in recent years to widen availability, for example expanding the number of drug treatment programmes in the north of England. In advance of the introduction of OASys, the Service has undertaken a needs analysis to inform the allocation



of funds for the expansion of offending behaviour programmes from April 2002, based on information provided by prisons relating to such factors as offence type and the length of sentence being served by prisoners.

- The Prison Service has a target to double the number of prisoners getting jobs or training places after release by 2004. It is also seeking to increase the number moving into adequate accommodation. At present, the Service lacks a written strategy detailing how these objectives will be achieved, although it is currently involved in a wide range of pilot projects aimed at identifying good practice. Our examination suggests that the approaches adopted to helping prisoners resettle in the community varied widely between prisons, even between prisons of the same type. When we completed the fieldwork for this examination in June 2001, the Service had no national record of the resettlement activities currently available within prisons at local level, or data on the extent to which individual prison performance on resettlement varies. However, in October 2001, the Service published a Prison Service Order on resettlement. This sets out mandatory requirements for the management and delivery of resettlement for prisoners and gives guidance on good practice. The Service told us that it also planned to publish a Custody to Work strategy which would address the issues of records of resettlement activity and the targeting of resources.

Our detailed findings are set out below.

## Developing effective prison programmes

- 4 In 2001, the Home Office set the Prison and Probation Services a joint target to reduce the rate of reconvictions of all offenders punished by imprisonment or by community supervision by 5 per cent by 2004 compared to the rate that might be expected, taking account of the age, sex and offence and previous criminal history of discharged sentenced prisoners. Whilst the Home Office has established mechanisms to monitor progress in reducing reconvictions at national level, there are no plans yet to publish information on reconviction rates for prisoners discharged from individual prisons and therefore no ready means of scrutinising local performance. The major practical problem is that many prisoners serve their sentences in more than one prison. In the Prison Service's view, it would be difficult therefore to attribute any reduction in reconvictions to particular prisons. However, the Service is keeping the possibility of producing rates for individual prisons under review.





- 5 The Prison Service has adopted a rigorous approach to the design and development of its programmes to ensure that they reflect the best available research evidence of what works in reducing reoffending. In 1999, building on earlier arrangements introduced by the Service, the Home Secretary established an independent Accreditation Panel to accredit the design and delivery of programmes for both the Prison and Probation Services. Prison Service staff, and representatives of other bodies to whom we spoke, were supportive of these arrangements but concerns were raised about the time and resources required to gain accreditation. It is exceptional for programmes to be accredited first time round, reflecting the rigour of the process, and our estimates suggest that the minimum elapsed time for a new programme to achieve accreditation is just over three years.
- 6 The Prison Service does not have reliable information on the unit cost of delivering its offending behaviour, drug and education programmes and the cost effectiveness of the programmes. Estimates prepared by the Service for its offending behaviour programmes suggest that the cost varies between £2,000 and £7,000 depending upon the programme. The Service expects that a new IT system, due to be introduced, under what is known as the Quantum project, will provide fuller and more accurate cost data in due course. In the meantime, it is difficult for the Service to assess the full cost of providing programmes across the prison estate and whether the current mix of offending behaviour, drug misuse and education programmes provide the best value for its investment.
- 7 The Prison Service is seeking a more strategic approach to planning the provision of programmes through its What Works in Prison Strategy Board. The Board's role is to identify and prioritise the development of programmes; ensure effective coordination internally and externally with interested parties; and identify and deal with gaps in provision. Current accredited offending behaviour programmes are directed largely at male, adult prisoners serving sentences of one year or more, around 56 per cent of the prison population. There are currently, for example, no accredited offending behaviour programmes directed at the specific needs of young prisoners, short term prisoners serving less than 12 months, or female prisoners. (Although the Service points out that some existing accredited programmes appear to work well for these groups.) In April 2001, the Service identified a number of priority programmes for development based on work carried out by the What Works in Prison Strategy Board, and is currently piloting programmes targeted at the needs, for example, of short term prisoners.
- 8 Our survey found that 90 prisons were providing other programmes, courses and activities described as reducing reoffending but which were not accredited. These programmes have been developed locally, are funded from local prison budgets and are usually unique to a particular prison. The Prison Service does not have any central record of what these programmes involve, their target group, their objectives and costs, and who is providing them. Non-accredited programmes can be a source of innovation and often offer prisoners a variety of help, for example on health issues, maintaining family relations and managing money, but some programmes may duplicate courses already available elsewhere and may not meet acceptable quality standards. The Service told us that it is planning to introduce a National Framework for approving and setting standards for work with prisoners designed to change their attitudes and/or behaviour and a draft framework is under consultation.



## Recommendations

- 9 We recommend:
- i) the Prison Service develops its management information systems so that, in due course, it can provide reconviction rates at area or prison level. The need to wait until reconviction data is available means that such rates will always be reflecting performance some years previously. Other indicators will be required, therefore, to assess current performance on a prison by prison basis. These might include, for example, numbers of prisoners completing programmes, numbers failing to complete programmes, waiting times to get on programmes and size of waiting lists;
  - ii) the Prison Service, working with other relevant agencies, should develop a methodology for assessing the cost benefit of programmes to reduce reoffending so that it can better appraise the policy options of investing in different types of programmes;
  - iii) the Prison Service should monitor closely the impact of its planned introduction of a National Framework to set standards for its work with prisoners, including non-accredited programmes. A key aim should be to ensure that programmes that have proved their worth in helping to prepare prisoners for their eventual release are not lost because resources are devoted exclusively to developing and running accredited programmes.

### Matching prisoners to programmes

- 10 All prisoners have a healthcare assessment on reception. Prison staff then begin to assess them for drug treatment, education and resettlement needs. The process of matching prisoners to programmes continues with the preparation of a sentence plan for each eligible prisoner to help prepare them for their eventual release. The plans we examined varied markedly in detail and in the extent to which they involved third parties who could contribute to planning prisoners' time in custody. Ninety six per cent of prisons responding to our survey said that Probation Service staff were involved in the production of sentence plans. However, this level of involvement was not always reflected in the individual prisons we visited. In one prison, none of the sample of 20 plans we examined had any evidence of a contribution from the Probation Service.
- 11 At local level, prisons do not keep, in a standard format, information on the overall level of need amongst prisoners for individual programmes. The Prison Service, therefore, has no routine mechanism for forming an overall assessment of the range, nature and extent of prisoners' needs and any potential mismatch between need and provision. The Service believes that its planned introduction of OASys will improve its assessment of risk and the needs of prisoners; improve targeting of resources to address offending behaviour; and make available better management information to inform strategic planning in relation to needs and provision. The Service's timetable for implementing OASys is dependent on procurement of the IT application, but its current estimate is that implementation could commence in 2003. OASys will replace the existing sentence planning system.
- 12 The Prison Service is seeking to improve the availability of places on programmes across the prison estate, but access to them still varies significantly between prisons. The Service has rapidly increased the capacity of its offending behaviour programmes but there are still marked regional differences in the proportion of prisons running, for example, the thinking skills programmes - ranging from 40.6 per cent in Lancashire and Cumbria to 100 per cent in Manchester, Mersey and Cheshire, Wales and East Midlands (South). Likewise, by the end of March 2001, drug treatment programmes were available in

50 (43 rehabilitation units and seven therapeutic communities) out of the 135 prisons. Although steps have been taken to improve the geographical distribution of drug treatment programmes across the country, provision was much less frequent amongst prisons holding prisoners who had been categorised as a lower security risk. Similarly, annual average expenditure per prisoner on education varied significantly within prisons of the same category ranging, for example, from £89 to £1,493 amongst male open prisons.

- 13 The Prison Service does not routinely monitor the success of different ethnic groups in gaining access to programmes accredited as reducing reoffending. However, the Service's research suggests that ethnic minority participation in non sex offender accredited programmes is in proportion to the ethnic make-up of the prison population as a whole, although black Caribbean and other black ethnic groups (but not prisoners from an Indian sub-continent background) are under-represented on the sex offender treatment programme. The Service has set up a sub group of the What Works in Prison Strategy Board to tackle the issue of diversity and equality across the whole range of prison programmes and activities. The Joint Accreditation Panel is also considering how to ensure that the accreditation process is sensitive to diversity and equality issues.
- 14 The Prison Service has a Key Performance Indicator target which measures the time prisoners spend on "purposeful activity" but this includes, for example, cleaning work on prison wings, use of library, religious activities and family and social visits as well as attendance on programmes. The Service recognises that the Indicator offers little insight into prisoners' activities and is seeking to develop a measure that focuses more directly on the time that prisoners spend on activities which contribute to reducing the risk of reoffending.

## Recommendations

- 15 We recommend:
  - iv) the Prison Service should, pending the introduction of OASys, take steps to raise the standard of sentence planning. As a minimum, Prison Governors should be reminded of the importance of involving the Probation Service in the process and all relevant prison staff;
  - v) also pending the introduction of OASys, the Prison Service should continue to refine its methodology for matching the provision of programmes to tackle reoffending to the needs of the prison population as a whole so that any gaps, inconsistencies and excesses can be addressed;
  - vi) the Prison Service monitors the success of prisoners from different ethnic groups in gaining access to programmes to prepare them for release. The results should be published annually in Prison Statistics once the Prison Service has adequate data collection systems in place which can provide reliable data;
  - vii) the Prison Service introduces, as planned, a measure for the average amount of time prisoners spend in prison on activities aimed at reducing reoffending and publishes this in its Annual Report.



## Preparing prisoners for release

- 16** The Government has now set the Prison Service the target of doubling the number of prisoners getting jobs or training places after release by 2004. Whilst the Service can obtain reliable information on what happens to longer term prisoners who are usually released under the supervision of the Probation Service, there is currently little information available on what happens to short term prisoners when they are discharged - accounting for 60 per cent of all prison discharges. The Prison Service intends to strengthen its data collection systems to facilitate improved compliance by prisons in collecting information on prisoners' employment and accommodation status, and thereby establish a baseline for measuring performance against the target.
- 17** Our examination suggests that resettlement practices vary widely, even amongst prisons of the same type. Historically, the extent and nature of resettlement work at local level has reflected governors' assessment of priorities, the differing needs of prisoner populations and local circumstances. At the end of June 2001, the Prison Service had no national record of the resettlement activities currently available within prisons at local level, nor data on the extent to which individual prison performance on resettlement varies. The Service told us that this will be addressed in its Custody to Work strategy document, currently in draft.
- 18** The Prison Service recognises that substantial improvements are needed to its approach to resettlement and has embarked, with others, upon a series of projects to enable it to identify best practice. In June 2000, the Home Office established the Strategy Board for Correctional Services to secure more effective working between the Prison and Probation Services. In November 2000, the Prison Service issued a Service Standard on resettlement. This seeks to ensure, in collaboration with the National Probation Service, that prisoners have the opportunity to maintain and develop appropriate community ties and prepare for their release. The Standard is supported by a Prison Service Order on Resettlement, published in October 2001. This sets out mandatory requirements for the management and delivery of resettlement for prisoners and provides guidance on good practice.
- 19** One of the Prison Service's main aims in refocusing its education programmes on basic literacy and numeracy skills has been to help enhance prisoners' employment prospects. The Service is making progress and in 2000-01 prisoners gained more than 12,500 literacy and numeracy Level 2 qualifications, (85 per cent of the target set) the level significant for opening up employment opportunities. In 2000-01, the Service did not achieve its targets for the proportion of prisoners who were discharged at Level 1 (the performance of an average 11 year old) or below for basic skills in literacy and numeracy: 76.5 per cent of prisoners were discharged at Level 1 or below for literacy against the target of 52.8 per cent; whilst 67.6 per cent of prisoners were discharged at Level 1 or below for numeracy against the target of 61.9 per cent.
- 20** There is a mismatch between the type of work available within prison and the employment opportunities available outside. Few of the sentence plans we examined contained any evidence of consideration of the prisoners' suitability for different types of prison work, which can vary from working with textiles to industrial cleaning. An evaluation of prison work and training in 1998 by Brunel University commissioned by the Home Office found that less than half its sample of 88 former prisoners obtained work in the months following release, and in only five cases did it bear any relation to their jobs in prison workshops. The Service told us that, alongside a range of other initiatives, it is seeking to ensure that prison industries prepare prisoners more effectively for

available jobs, for example by improving the Service's knowledge of the labour market and, where possible, targeting its activity on skills shortages and job vacancies in the areas to which prisoners are released, for example shortages in the catering, cleaning and construction industries. The Service stressed, however, that workshops have objectives other than helping prisoners to get jobs including, for example, providing them with an active working day.

- 21 The Prison Service is a partner in the Government's Welfare to Work Initiative, which aims to help long term unemployed people into work. The Initiative provides prisoners with training and support based on their individual needs and aptitudes with the objectives of improving their employability and increasing their chances of getting a job. Prisoners' completion of the Welfare to Work programmes is intended as preparation for participation in the New Deal, a government programme to tackle unemployment. New Deal starts with up to four months of individual help, known as Gateway. A Home Office evaluation of the Service's Welfare to Work programme in 2000 found that three to four months into the former prisoners' release only a minority had entered the New Deal Gateway although it was double the number from the control group. Of the 931 prisoners who completed the programme who were in the evaluation, 38 per cent were in employment, 15 per cent had entered the New Deal Gateway and 7 per cent had obtained education and training.

## Recommendations

- 22 We recommend:

- viii) the Prison Service should monitor the impact of its Order on resettlement. In particular, it should hold prison governors accountable for: establishing effective working partnerships with other bodies - statutory, voluntary and private sector - who can assist in the successful resettlement of discharged prisoners; and implementing guidance on good practice in resettlement practices;
- ix) the Prison Service should introduce from April 2002, as planned, a Key Performance Indicator for measuring its success in getting released prisoners into jobs. Information on the success of individual prisons in delivering targets under the Key Performance Indicator should be published in the Service's Annual Report. A similar Indicator, if practicable, should be introduced for measuring success in getting discharged prisoners into accommodation and should also be published;
- x) prisoners' resettlement needs should be covered fully in their sentence plans, for example by identifying work needs both inside and outside prison, housing needs and arrangements for maintaining family and community links. All prisoners should have their own action plan for resettlement. These should be monitored jointly by the Prison and Probation Services reflecting their shared responsibilities for resettling prisoners into the community.

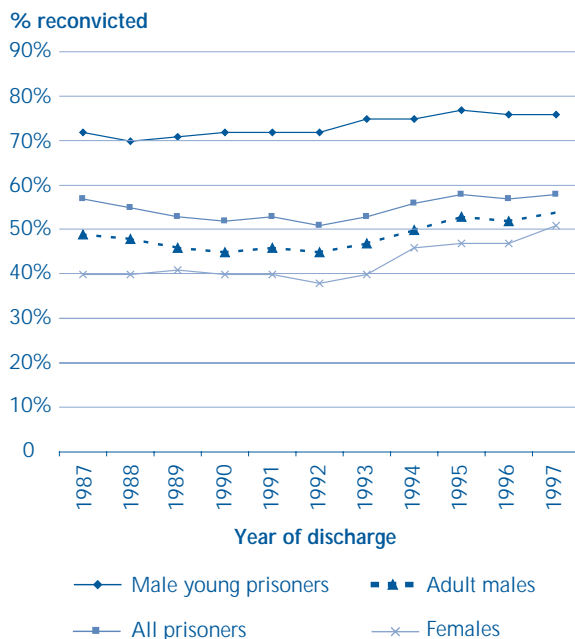
# Part 1

## Introduction

### Background

1.1 The prison population in England and Wales rose between 1992-1993 and 2000-2001, from 44,600 to 65,000, an increase of 45 per cent. By the end of November 2001 it had risen to an all time high of over 68,400. Many prisoners are involved in a cycle of reoffending. The most recent statistics indicate that fifty eight per cent of all prisoners are reconvicted within two years of being released, whilst for those serving sentences for burglary and theft the figures are even higher, 78 and 73 per cent respectively, (Figure 1). The problem is most significant amongst young male prisoners aged under 21 whose reconviction rate is 76 per cent.

#### 1 Prisoners reconvicted within two years



Source: Home Office

1.2 The cost of reoffending is significant, both in terms of the impact on victims and local communities and the cost borne by the public purse. The Home Office's estimate of the average cost of a prison sentence

imposed at a crown court is £30,500, comprising court and other legal costs, whilst the Prison Service puts the average cost of keeping an offender in prison at around £22,900 a year.

### Responsibilities for reducing prisoner reoffending

1.3 Two of the Home Office's principal aims are "to deliver effective custodial and community sentences to reduce reoffending and protect the public through the Prison and Probation Services, in partnership with the Youth Justice Board" and "to reduce the availability and abuse of dangerous drugs". Figure 2 summarises the roles and responsibilities of the various players that have an important part in helping to tackle factors that increase the risk of reoffending including drugs misuse.

1.4 The Prison Service is an Executive Agency of the Home Office with an annual expenditure of around £2 billion. At 31 March 2001, it operated in England and Wales through 126 directly managed prisons and nine run under contract by private sector companies. At that time, these 135 prisons held some 65,000 prisoners.

### The Prison Service has developed a series of programmes aimed at reducing the risk of reoffending

1.5 In addition to its principal aim of protecting the public by holding prisoners in a safe, decent and healthy environment, the Prison Service aims to reduce crime by providing constructive regimes which address offending behaviour, improve educational and work skills and promote law abiding behaviour in custody and after release. As part of its Crime Reduction Strategy, the Government has provided the Service with an additional £155 million, through the Comprehensive Spending Review, to spend over the three years 1999-2002 on programmes which are accredited as reducing reoffending and those which tackle factors which research has suggested can contribute to reoffending, specifically drugs misuse and poor literacy