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COMPTROLLER AND
AUDITOR GENERAL**

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Managing offenders on short custodial sentences

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Managing offenders on short custodial sentences

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Amyas Morse
Comptroller and
Auditor General

National Audit Office

24 February 2010

Over 60,000 adults per year receive custodial sentences of less than 12 months. On any given day they make up around 9 per cent of all prisoners but account for some 65 per cent of all sentenced admissions and releases. This report examines the management of these prisoners by the National Offender Management Service, including how well it assesses and meets prisoners' practical needs and how well it addresses their offending behaviour.

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Summary

Background

1 Over 60,000 adults per year receive custodial sentences of less than 12 months, referred to as short-sentenced prisoners in this report. On any given day they make up around 9 per cent of all prisoners, but account for some 65 per cent of all sentenced admissions and releases. The National Offender Management Service (NOMS), an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice (the Department), is responsible for managing short-sentenced prisoners.

2 The majority of short sentences are for three months or less, whilst only 10 per cent are for more than six months. This means that most short-sentenced prisoners serve less than six weeks as they are automatically released when they have served half their sentence, and only 18-21-year-olds receive statutory probation supervision on release. We estimate that, in 2008-09, the cost of looking after short-sentenced prisoners, not including education and healthcare, was £286 million.

3 Short-sentenced prisoners are most commonly convicted of theft and violence offences. On average, they have 16 previous convictions, which is more than any other group of offenders. They are also more likely to re-offend: around 60 per cent are convicted of at least one offence in the year after release.¹ Based on previous work by the Home Office, we estimate that, in 2007-08, re-offending by all recent ex-prisoners cost the economy between £9.5 billion and £13 billion and that as much as three quarters of this cost can be attributed to former short-sentenced prisoners: some £7 billion to £10 billion a year.²

4 NOMS' goals for custody are to hold prisoners securely, to provide safe and well-ordered establishments in which they are treated humanely, decently and lawfully, and to reduce the risk of them re-offending.

¹ Based on Departmental analysis of those released in the first quarter of 2007.

² See paragraph 1.17.

5 Homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse, mental health and other problems affect short-sentenced offenders more than other prisoners. NOMS has only a short time to try to motivate and support prisoners who may be very needy, unstable from substance misuse, or on remand (thereby delaying the point at which they can start work to address their offending). NOMS addresses these problems through assistance that is organised into seven “Reducing Re-offending Pathways”:

- accommodation;
- education, training and employment;
- mental and physical health;
- drugs and alcohol;
- children and families of offenders;
- finance, benefit and debt; and
- attitudes, thinking and behaviour.

For some pathways, NOMS relies in large part on the efforts of other public bodies that have responsibilities to offenders, for instance, local authorities.

6 The Government has a Public Service Agreement to reduce the frequency of proven adult re-offending by 10 per cent between 2005 and 2011 which it is on course to meet, despite a 3 per cent rise in re-offending (between 2005 and 2007) by those released from short sentences. At the time of our audit the Department was working on a strategy for the short-sentenced prisoner group which it expects to finalise in 2010. Proposals for implementing the strategy’s recommendations will be developed in the light of pilots that are testing and costing some of the emerging recommendations.

7 This report looks at NOMS’ management of adult short-sentenced prisoners including analysis of:

- the offenders who receive short sentences;
- how well NOMS meets their immediate needs in custody; and
- whether NOMS is helping them reduce their risk of re-offending.

Our methods included a survey of 91 prisons holding short-sentenced prisoners, visits to seven prisons, and prisoner interviews and focus groups. In the absence of other sources of quantitative data, we analysed prisoner activity at three prisons and conducted a bottom-up analysis of costs at two prisons. We also interviewed Departmental and agency staff and other stakeholders, and analysed unpublished Departmental data (Appendix 1).

Key findings

Assessing needs

8 Prisons assess the immediate and longer-term needs of most short-sentenced prisoners, but there is wasteful repetition. Processes vary between prisons and assessments are repeated when prisoners move. Background information is usually collected afresh by each prison department as prisoners seek assistance. NOMS does not know the cost of such unnecessary assessments. A simple custody screening tool has been developed which will be tested in Yorkshire and Humberside from April 2010.

Meeting immediate needs

9 The large majority of short-sentenced prisoners feel physically safe in prison. Serious assaults against them are rare and NOMS has improved procedures for identifying those who are suicidal or at risk of self-harm. Nonetheless, more than 1,100 short-sentenced prisoners harmed themselves while in custody in 2008.

10 All prisoners are checked for suicide risk and severe mental illness on arrival. However, only 82 per cent of prisons conduct more detailed assessments of the mental health and emotional needs of all new short-sentenced prisoners. The level of need identified outstrips the supply of care. Departmental data indicate that, while one in three short-sentenced prisoners suffers from anxiety or depression, and one in ten may have a psychotic illness, only one in fifteen receives help for mental or emotional problems.

11 Induction procedures vary greatly between prisons and a significant minority of short-sentenced prisoners find them inadequate. Induction tells most short-sentenced prisoners what they need to know about prison, but some are not in a fit state to take on new information at the start of their sentence, for instance, because of detoxification. A quarter of short-sentenced prisoners said they remained confused after induction, potentially limiting their ability to access prison activities intended to reduce their risk of re-offending.

Providing access to activity

12 The provision of daytime activity for short-sentenced prisoners varies between prisons, but is generally inadequate to meet Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons' standard for a healthy prison. Partly because of overcrowding and the constraints of physical space, there are not enough activity spaces for all prisoners. Between a third and a half of short-sentenced prisoners, including the least motivated, are not involved in work or courses and spend almost all day in their cells.

Reducing the risk of re-offending

13 There is a good match between the Reducing Re-Offending Pathways and the characteristic offending-related needs of short-sentenced prisoners as a group. With the exception of drug services, however, prisons often do not match individual prisoners with appropriate assistance. Prisons were unable to tell us how many short-sentenced prisoners accessed their interventions and assistance; however, the majority of short-sentenced prisoners say they do not get the help they need.³

14 While the primary limitation on what can be done with a short-sentenced prisoner is the time available, prisons are taking too long to give them access to assistance. Even though the majority spend 45 days or less in custody, they wait, on average, for 26 days to get access to an activity in one of the pathways. At male local prisons, where most are held, the average wait is 21 days. The wait is shortest for assistance with accommodation (12 days) and longest for help with their attitudes, thinking and behaviour (57 days).

15 NOMS does not know the cost of its work with short-sentenced prisoners across the pathways, but this is likely to be a small proportion of overall budgets at most prisons.

16 We observed in fieldwork that prisons make a positive difference to some of the short-sentenced prisoners they help, but they do not assess the quality or effectiveness of the activities offered, and there is no evidence that this work reduces re-offending. It is hard to track offenders after release and to connect rates of re-offending with work done in prison. The Department and NOMS are only at an early stage of this analysis. NOMS' new IT system, P-NOMIS, should make it easier to analyse this by keeping better records of the assistance prisoners access.

17 NOMS does not know how many short-sentenced prisoners are having accommodation and employment needs addressed successfully whilst in custody. It is not possible to identify the specific contribution that prisons make to solving these problems by looking at existing Key Performance Targets.

18 Prisons generally provide good joined-up care for short-sentenced prisoners who are illegal drug users, but they do much less with those whose offending is alcohol-related. The prioritisation of help for drug users and the connections made to community services are examples of good practice. However, prisons and their partners put fewer resources into addressing problematic alcohol use, which a third of short-sentenced prisoners said was connected with their offending.

19 Efforts by prisons to link short-sentenced prisoners to other services in the community vary in quality, but tend to be limited and inconsistent. They are made more complex in that prisons may return prisoners to numerous local authorities. NOMS does not provide guidance to prisons on how to develop effective relationships with local authorities and other external bodies, even though all short-sentenced prisoners return quickly to their communities. But we note the plan, published by the Government in November 2009, to improve the way offenders access health services, including mental health and alcohol services.

³ See paragraph 3.11.

The new strategy

20 The Department's intended strategy for short-sentenced prisoners is likely to focus prisons' efforts on what can be achieved in a short time, but the Department has described only in broad terms which types of assistance and which short-sentenced prisoners should be prioritised.

21 The Department and NOMS are also yet to describe how they will monitor the outcomes of work with short-sentenced prisoners, specifically the impact of that work on re-offending rates.

Value for money conclusion

22 NOMS' goals for offenders in prison are to provide safe, lawful custody with humane treatment, to run well-ordered establishments, and to reduce the risk of prisoners re-offending. NOMS is successfully achieving its objectives in terms of keeping the vast majority of short-sentenced prisoners safe and well, a notable achievement in a time of overcrowding, and in this respect it is delivering value.

23 There is, however, little evidence to indicate that NOMS is achieving its goal to reduce the risk of short-sentenced prisoners re-offending, beyond the deterrent effect that prison may have for some of them, and to this extent the delivery of value for money falls short. We recognise that achieving this goal is challenging due to the large size and relatively transient nature of the short-sentenced prisoner population. Nonetheless, it remains NOMS' stated goal, and we consider that more coherent plans, tailored to reducing the risk of re-offending among short-sentenced prisoners, and evidence of progress towards the goal can reasonably be expected.

Recommendations

The draft strategy accepts that NOMS needs to improve its work to address the offending-related needs of short-sentenced prisoners. The challenge is made more difficult, however, because offenders serving longer sentences usually pose a greater risk to the public and, therefore, receive more resources; because NOMS' spend per prisoner is planned to reduce; and because the time that short-sentenced offenders spend in custody is so short. NOMS' focus should be on designing assistance that demonstrably works, rather than the current approach of applying processes to the greatest number of short-sentenced offenders, with little understanding of what the outcome will be.

a **There are weaknesses in how prisons identify and address the offending-related needs of short-sentenced prisoners.** To improve, NOMS should:

- assess short-sentenced prisoners through a single methodology and record the information on a common system that is accessible by all prison departments and by any receiving prison;
- use this information to prioritise which short-sentenced prisoners to focus on;

- define what prisons can expect to achieve in each pathway with offenders serving different lengths of short sentence;
 - streamline the process for allocating prisoners to work and education to reduce average waiting times; and
 - establish a framework for prisons to share good practice.
- b** **There are particular weaknesses in specific pathways.** To address these, NOMS should:
- implement the recommendations of its internal review of prison housing services;
 - provide better access to job-searching tools; and
 - pilot new approaches to alcohol-related offending for short-sentenced offenders.
- c** **There is little knowledge of the outcomes achieved through work with short-sentenced prisoners.** To improve how the effectiveness of prisons' efforts is measured, NOMS should:
- revise Key Performance Targets on accommodation and employment to measure the actual change that prisons effect;
 - set and measure specific targets for other work with short-sentenced prisoners;
 - help prisons form information-sharing arrangements with local authorities and other bodies so they know more about what happens to prisoners after release; and
 - use forthcoming information on the re-offending rates of individual prisons in conjunction with available data about what short-sentenced prisoners do in custody to develop a picture of which interventions are most effective.
- d** **In the coming years, NOMS' resources are likely to remain constrained, and many short-sentenced prisoners, especially those who are unmotivated, will, therefore, spend most of their time in their cells without much purposeful activity.** As resources allow, the Department and NOMS should specifically:
- increase the range of purposeful activities that can be done in-cell; and
 - plan for new prisons to have enough work, educational and other purposeful activity spaces for the maximum population they will hold.

Part One

Background

1.1 In 2008, 61,000 adults were sentenced to terms of imprisonment of under 12 months. In 2008-09, the cost of these sentences, not including education and healthcare, was £286 million.⁴ At any one time, short-sentenced prisoners account for about 9 per cent of the total prison population of 84,000 people (see definition below), but for some 65 per cent of all sentenced admissions and releases. Despite a small increase between 2007 and 2008, the number of people receiving short sentences has declined by 16 per cent since 2002 (**Figure 1**). The volume of prisoners moving through the prison system still creates significant challenges for the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).

What is special about a short sentence?

A prison sentence of less than 12 months differs from longer sentences because, by statute, prisoners, except those aged 18-21, are unconditionally released when they have served half their sentence without further supervision.

In addition, while in prison, short-sentenced prisoners are not subject to Offender Management, where an offender manager formally assesses risk of harm and the factors underlying offending, and plans and supervises the sentence.

1.2 This report examines the management of adult short-sentenced prisoners by NOMS, including how well NOMS assesses and meets prisoners' practical needs and how well it addresses their offending behaviour.

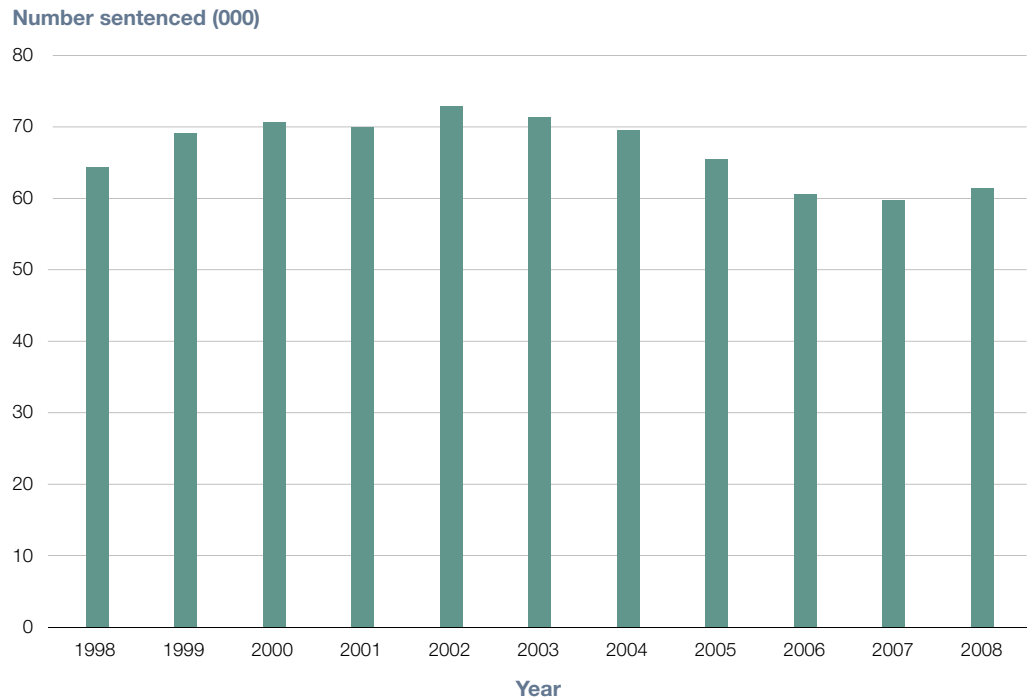
Policy and operational framework

1.3 The Ministry of Justice was created in May 2007 and established the National Offender Management Service Executive Agency in April 2008, incorporating HM Prison Service and the National Probation Service. NOMS is responsible for commissioning and delivering adult offender management services in custody and in the community in England and Wales, and works within a strategic policy and regulatory framework set by the Ministry of Justice (the Department).

⁴ Costs of incarceration only, based on NOMS' calculations of average cost per prisoner at each prison, weighted by the number of short-sentenced prisoners it held in 2008-09.

Figure 1

The number of adult short sentences, 1998-2008



Source: *Sentencing Statistics 2008, Ministry of Justice*

NOTE

Includes a minority of offenders who served their sentence on remand.

1.4 NOMS' principal aims are to protect the public and reduce re-offending. As regards prisons, this means:

- holding prisoners securely;
- providing safe and well-ordered establishments in which prisoners are treated humanely, decently and lawfully; and
- reducing the risk of prisoners' re-offending.

All three aims apply to all sentenced prisoners, irrespective of length of sentence. Security is not covered by this report, which focuses on the other two objectives.

1.5 NOMS also contributes to a cross-Government Public Service Agreement target relevant to short-sentenced prisoners: to achieve a 10 per cent reduction in the number of proven offences committed by adult re-offenders between 2005 and 2011. It was on course to do so when last assessed in 2009, but not for short-sentenced prisoners specifically.

1.6 The Department's priority in reducing re-offending has been to tackle the most dangerous and prolific offenders. Recently, however, it has started work on a reducing re-offending strategy for prisoners serving less than 12 months. The strategy will build on current projects which test new approaches to assessing and managing short-sentenced offenders in prison (Layered Offender Management) and supervising prolific offenders on release (Integrated Offender Management). During our audit, there was no specific mandated approach for prisons to follow to reduce the risk of re-offending by short-sentenced prisoners, although all establishments were expected to meet Key Performance Targets on employment and accommodation.

Profile of short-sentenced offenders

Offenders and offending

1.7 The purpose of imprisonment is threefold: punishment, rehabilitation, and public protection. Individuals sentenced to prison usually have committed more numerous or more serious offences than those given community sentences. This makes it difficult to determine whether one sentence type is more cost-effective than another. For example, in 2008, short-sentenced prisoners had, on average, 16 previous convictions,⁵ whereas those receiving community sentences had eight.

1.8 Prison, however, is the more costly option. We estimate a six-week stay in prison to cost, on average, £4,500. In 2008, we estimated that a highly intensive two-year community order, involving twice-weekly contact with a probation officer, 80 hours of unpaid work and mandatory completion of accredited programmes would cost £4,200 per offender. The estimated cost of a more typical one-year order involving probation supervision and drug treatment was £1,400.⁶

1.9 The number of adults given short prison sentences peaked at 73,000 in 2002. The main factors determining the numbers sentenced are the amount and type of offending brought to court, guidelines from the Sentencing Guidelines Council, alternatives available to sentencers, and decisions made by magistrates and judges on the seriousness of individual offences and the circumstances of each offender. In recent years, new legislation has enabled community sentences to be made more onerous and, therefore, more attractive to sentencers. NOMS is currently trialling new intensive alternatives to custody.

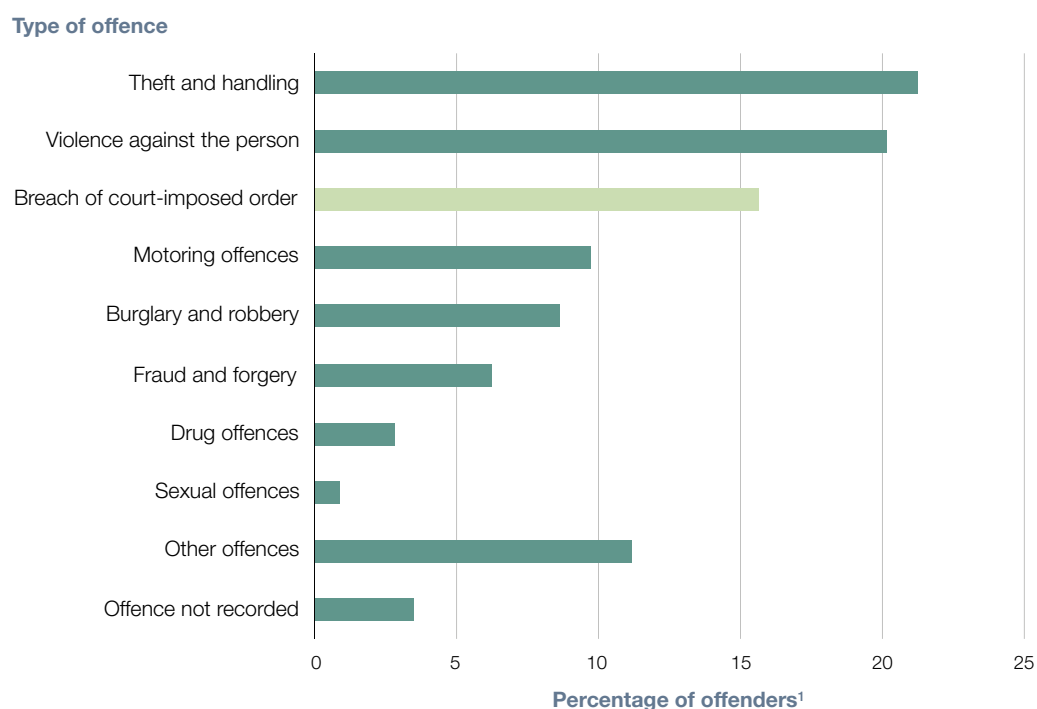
1.10 The extent to which offenders are returned to court for breaching the terms of their community sentences also affects the volume of offenders entering prisons. Almost one in six (16 per cent) of the short-sentenced group is imprisoned for breaching a court-imposed order allowing them to be in the community. **Figure 2** shows how the population breaks down by type of offence.

⁵ Including those who served their time on remand.

⁶ C&AG's report, *National Probation Service: The supervision of community orders in England and Wales*, HC 203, 2007-08.

Figure 2

Offences committed by short-sentenced prisoners in custody in June 2009



Source: National Audit Office analysis of Offender Management Caseload Statistics, Ministry of Justice

NOTE

¹ Offender Management Caseload Statistics measure the characteristics of the prison population on a given day in June each year.

1.11 Theft and violence are the commonest types of offence committed by short-sentenced prisoners. Motoring offences account for 10 per cent. An unpublished Departmental analysis in 2007 found that most short-sentenced prisoners had, on average, more previous convictions for theft and handling than for any other type of offence, irrespective of their current offence. Based on a Departmental survey of 1,400 short-sentenced prisoners in 2005-06, some 75 per cent have been in prison before.⁷

Time in custody

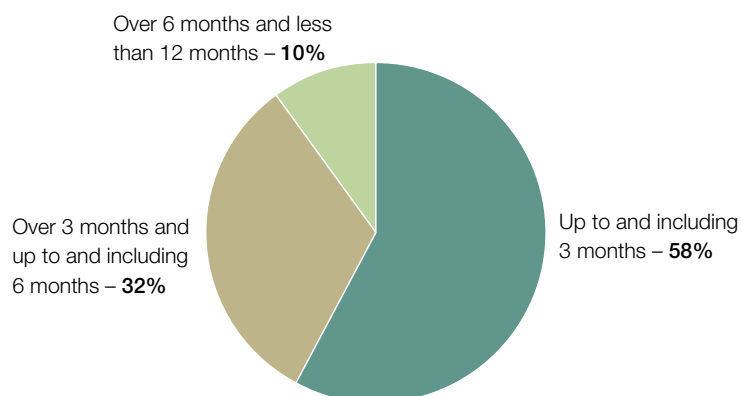
1.12 Over half of short-sentenced offenders receive sentences of three months or less (35,700 people in 2008) and only 10 per cent receive sentences greater than six months (**Figure 3**). Since short-sentenced prisoners are released when they have served half their sentence, most serve fewer than six weeks. In a minority of cases, part or all of the sentence will be served on remand. To reduce overcrowding, between 2007 and April 2010, some offenders have also been released 18 days early under the End of Custody Licence scheme. In 2008, approximately 40 per cent of short-sentenced prisoners (25,000 people) were released early under this arrangement.

Where sentences are served

1.13 Eighty-five per cent of male short-sentenced prisoners serve their sentences in local prisons, located near courts in major centres of population. Female prisoners are more likely to be kept away from their home area, because of the smaller number of female prisons: 63 per cent of female short-sentenced prisoners serve their sentences in local prisons. Some short-sentenced prisoners are moved during their sentence because of prison overcrowding. We were unable to determine the full extent of transfers for this group because NOMS does not record the information. Research by NOMS in 2009 showed 17,000 inter-prison transfers between local prisons over a year. Most will have been short-sentenced prisoners, since those on remand cannot usually be moved and long-sentenced prisoners are normally sent to training prisons.

Figure 3

The length of short sentences in 2008



Source: National Audit Office analysis of Sentencing Statistics, 2008

Previous criminal history

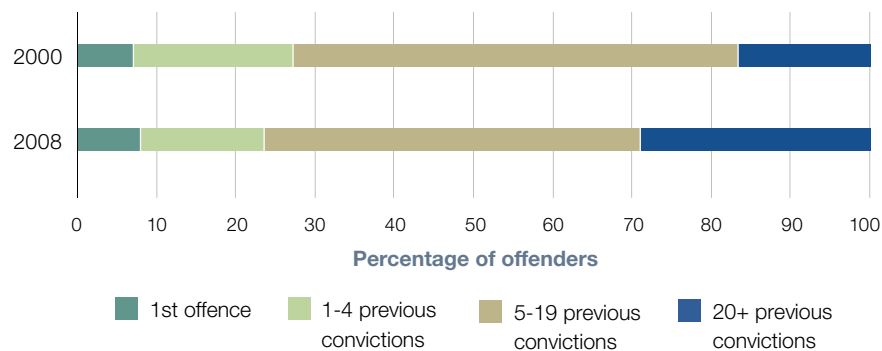
1.14 The average age of a short-sentenced offender is 28. Nine per cent are women, who make up only 5 per cent of the overall prison population. Our analysis of Departmental data (**Figure 4**) found that between 2000 and 2008 the short-sentenced population became increasingly differentiated: the proportions of first offenders and individuals with 20-plus previous convictions increased by 13 per cent and 74 per cent respectively, whilst the number with between one and 19 convictions fell by 17 per cent.

1.15 We found that offenders receiving short sentences have also become older (**Figure 5** overleaf). These trends may relate to changes in sentencing practice linked to initiatives such as electronic tagging and the introduction, in 2005, of the new community orders and suspended sentence orders. Another factor may be the greater success agencies are having in tackling problem drug use amongst younger people, resulting in an ageing group of drug-using offenders for whom prison is the default sentence.⁸

Re-Offending

1.16 Re-offending by short-sentenced prisoners is greater than by offenders receiving any other sentence, with 60 per cent being convicted for another offence within one year of release (**Figure 6** overleaf).⁹ Whilst the overall volume of proven re-offending reduced by 11.1 per cent between 2005 and 2007, the volume recorded for those released from short sentences increased by 3.2 per cent. Each short-sentenced prisoner who re-offended after release in 2007 was convicted, on average, of five further offences within the year. The Department is currently working to establish re-offending rates for individual prisons and expects this work to be completed during 2010.

Figure 4
Criminal history of cohorts of short-sentenced offenders in 2000 and 2008

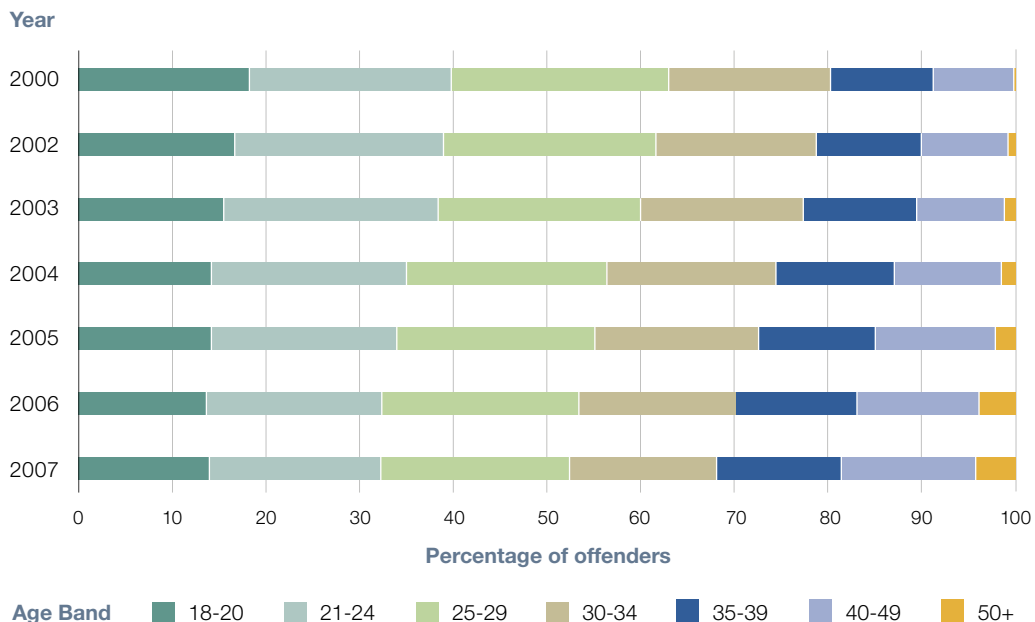


Source: National Audit Office analysis of Sentencing Statistics, 2008

⁸ National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse, Annual Report 2008-09, p.13.

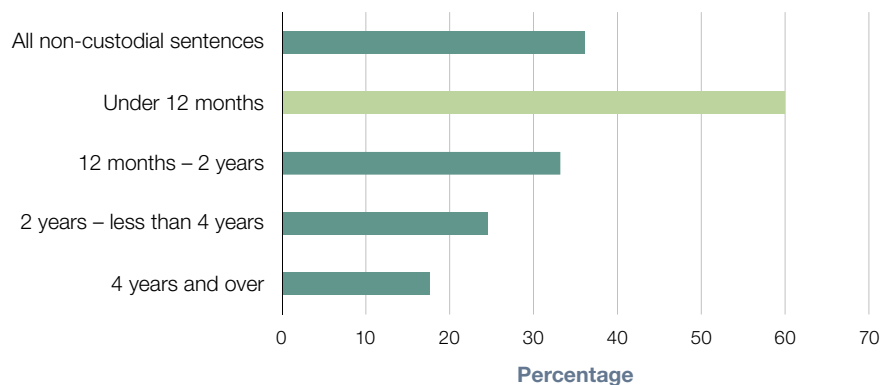
⁹ Re-offending is measured by tracking a cohort of released offenders for 12 months to see how many times they are charged with further crimes; a further six months are allowed for the courts to process these offences.

Figure 5
Age profile of cohorts of short-sentenced offenders



Source: *Re-offending of Adults: results from the 2007 cohort England and Wales, Ministry of Justice, 2009*

Figure 6
Actual proven re-offending rate of a cohort of 50,000 offenders, 2007



Source: *National Audit Office analysis of Re-offending of Adults, 2007*

1.17 The Home Office estimated in 1999 that the annual economic and social cost of crime in England and Wales was some £60 billion; in 2002, the Social Exclusion Unit estimated 18 per cent of this was attributable to re-offending by recent ex-prisoners.¹⁰ Adjusting for inflation and changed crime levels, we estimate that, in 2007-08, re-offending by recent ex-prisoners cost between £9.5 billion and £13 billion. There is good reason to believe that short-sentenced offenders are responsible for as much as three quarters of this: some £7 billion to £10 billion a year. This is because:

- between 2005 and 2007, although comprising two thirds of all released prisoners, they were responsible for 85 per cent of all proven re-offences committed by former prisoners in the year following release; and
- although their crimes tend to be less serious and therefore less costly, over the same period, they were responsible for some 75 per cent of severe proven re-offences, some 100 individual offences a year in the annual cohort study. This category includes murder, rape and grievous bodily harm.¹¹

Short-sentenced prisoners' needs

1.18 Short-sentenced prisoners are sometimes characterised as leading “chaotic” lives and having a higher level of need than other offenders, although many do not fit this profile. A Departmental research project, Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction, interviewed over 1,400 newly-sentenced prisoners and found a higher level of homelessness, joblessness and drug and alcohol abuse amongst the short-sentenced group compared to those sentenced to between one and four years (**Figure 7** overleaf).¹² Thirty-five per cent of the short-sentenced sample had used heroin in the previous year compared to 22 per cent of the others. 29 per cent had experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse, and 32 per cent had another family member who had been to prison.

NOMS' approach to reducing re-offending

1.19 Almost all short-sentenced prisoners say they want to stop committing crime. In the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction survey in 2005-06, 97 per cent agreed that they wanted to stop offending. Only a minority (39 per cent), however, said that fear of returning to prison would be important in stopping them re-offending. More said that addressing specific problems in their lives would be an essential part of becoming crime-free (see **Figure 11** on page 27).

¹⁰ Home Office Research Study 217, *The economic and social costs of crime*, 2000. Social Exclusion Unit, *Reducing Re-offending by ex-prisoners*, 2002, p.125. The estimate included the costs of anticipating crime and dealing with its consequences, including prison sentences.

¹¹ *Re-offending of Adults: Results from the 2007 cohort*, Table A5. In 2005, the Home Office estimated that, at 2003-04 prices, the average cost of a murder was £1.5 million and of a serious wounding was £21,000. The cost of the average theft was £600.

¹² Data from Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction are provisional, as data cleansing is still to be completed. Any changes, however, are likely to be minimal.

Figure 7

Life problems of newly-sentenced prisoners

Type of need	Percentage of sentenced prisoners	
	Under 12 months sentence	1 to 4 years sentence
Drug use in year before custody	71	66
Unemployed or long-term sick	52	44
No educational qualifications	49	40
Heroin use in year before custody	35	22
Anxious or depressed	34	39
Long-standing illness or disability	26	27
Alcohol drunk daily	24	13
Homeless or in temporary accommodation	17	9

Source: *Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction*

1.20 People stop committing crime for a range of reasons. NOMS and most independent experts agree that it is important to address factors which link directly to criminal behaviour, such as attitudes, lifestyle, and substance abuse, and indirect factors such as problems with family, education and accommodation. Collectively, these are referred to in this report as offending-related needs. The 2002 study by the Government's Social Exclusion Unit, *Reducing Re-offending by ex-prisoners*, explains why short-sentenced prisoners, with their greater problems, are more likely to re-offend than other groups and has provided the framework for reducing re-offending since. It sets out seven 'pathways' to reducing re-offending:

- accommodation;
- education, training and employment;
- mental and physical health;
- drugs and alcohol;
- children and families of offenders;
- finance, benefit and debt; and
- attitudes, thinking and behaviour.

Two additional pathways support women prisoners who have been abused or raped, or involved in prostitution. In most prisons, a member of staff is assigned responsibility for coordinating interventions and assistance within each pathway.

1.21 NOMS intends its work in the pathways to solve specific problems that short-sentenced prisoners have and, thereby, make it less likely that they will re-offend. If it can be successful with even a small number of prisoners, the savings made within the Criminal Justice System, in other Government Departments and in the economy as a whole will be substantial.

Part Two

Providing for immediate needs

2.1 One of NOMS' objectives for all prisoners is to keep them safely, humanely and decently and provide them with purposeful activity. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons examines these issues at each prison it inspects as part of its healthy prison tests. In this section, we look at how they are experienced by short-sentenced prisoners.

Addressing urgent problems

2.2 Offenders arriving at prison are often disorientated, ill-prepared and unable to engage effectively with the prison regime. They may have practical matters needing attention, as well as emotional or health problems. In a NOMS survey, Measuring the Quality of Prison Life, carried out between 2005 and 2009 at all prisons, a large proportion of those with short sentences reported feeling worried or confused (45 per cent) or extremely alone (42 per cent) during their first few days. In addition, in the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction survey, 8 per cent reported they had attempted suicide in the year before coming to prison and 6 per cent that they had self-harmed.

2.3 At reception, staff are required to screen incoming prisoners for a range of risks including suicide and self-harm and, at most local prisons, new prisoners are placed in a dedicated First Night Centre. Healthcare staff should assess immediate physical and mental health needs within a few hours of arrival and specialist drug and alcohol services staff aim to identify substance users within 24 hours, providing supervision and stabilisation medication, as appropriate. New prisoners can telephone home and also advise prison staff of children or pets that need looking after. Nevertheless, the first few days in custody remain stressful and, in Measuring the Quality of Prison Life, 23 per cent of short-sentenced prisoners said they did not feel "looked after".

Addressing practical issues arising from leaving home

Assessment

2.4 Most prisons have screening tools to gather information about incoming prisoners' immediate and longer-term needs. Assessments vary in terms of the breadth and depth of information sought and are almost always repeated when prisoners move to another prison. In addition, they are often repeated by different professionals working within prisons (**Figure 8** overleaf). To reduce waste and improve efficiency, NOMS is currently developing and testing a standard assessment system for short-sentenced prisoners to include electronic transfer of the information gathered between prisons.

Figure 8
Prisons' assessment of short-sentenced prisoners' needs

Area of need	Issue assessed	Percentage of prisons surveyed, where			Percentage where this issue assessed more than once
		all short-sentenced prisoners (over 90 per cent) are assessed	between 50 per cent and 90 per cent are assessed	less than 50 per cent are assessed	
Health and addiction	Drug or alcohol addiction	86	5	9	68
	Physical health	82	11	7	61
	Mental health	82	7	11	60
	Gambling addiction	30	5	65	12
Housing, job and money	Accommodation	87	6	7	61
	Employment	83	11	6	59
	Benefits	77	14	9	54
	Debt and other finance	67	14	19	48
Education	Literacy/numeracy	88	9	3	67
	Poor English/English for Speakers of Other Languages	83	8	9	57
	Academic/vocational skills	79	14	7	41
	Learning difficulties	69	8	23	51
Behaviour and relationship	Relationships, family, children	67	12	21	43
	Attitudes thinking and behaviour	42	21	37	30

Source: National Audit Office prisons survey

NOTE

A small number of prisons did not respond to some of these questions.

Taking action to deal with tenancies, jobs and benefits

2.5 All new prisoners should be asked about their accommodation, employment and benefits status, although, as Figure 8 shows, not all prisons meet this requirement. NOMS recognises the need for action to protect tenancies and employment, but we found that the timeliness and quality of assistance varies greatly. Prison Service Orders, for example, require that prisoners have access to appropriate advice to enable them to secure or transfer their ownership or tenancy. Convicted prisoners serving less than 13 weeks may continue to claim housing benefit. In several prisons we visited, however, housing advice personnel were either unavailable or overwhelmed with work.

2.6 In most prisons, it is the responsibility of Jobcentre Plus employees to terminate Jobseeker's Allowance. Whilst there was a problem with this in HMP Belmarsh when we visited, it appeared to be a problem peculiar to this prison: procedures were in place at the other prisons we visited and prisoners told us they had had benefits maintained or closed, as appropriate.

Effectiveness of actions

2.7 Overall, we have been unable to assess how effective NOMS is at preserving tenancies and employment because it does not record either its workload or success rate. Prisoners we spoke to in focus groups and interviews gave both positive and negative examples of help they received in relation to housing and employment needs. The predominant view expressed, however, was that assessment was not followed by action.

2.8 From 2010, NOMS will require local prisons to record the number of offenders needing a housing-related intervention, but currently it only measures whether prisoners have housing or employment on release – which is no guide to the specific contribution made by prisons. In the case of housing, there has been an added complication because End of Custody Licence provided an incentive for prisoners to disguise their accommodation needs as eligibility required a release address.

Induction

2.9 Around a third of short-sentenced prisoners have never been in prison before. Most assessment of prisoners' needs takes place during a structured induction which is designed to explain the prison's regime, how to access prison services, including education and workshops, and prisoners' rights and responsibilities. Induction varies in the length and breadth of material presented. For example, induction at HMP New Hall (a women's prison) takes five days but at HMP Lincoln takes two days.

2.10 In both major prisoner surveys, around 60 per cent of short-sentenced prisoners reported that induction helped them to know what to expect from the daily regime although around a quarter disagreed. Some find it difficult to concentrate and around one in seven, for example prisoners on drugs wings, miss the whole process including their needs assessment. NOMS is currently standardising induction procedures and, in future, will require that all prisoners achieve a minimum level of understanding.

2.11 Induction information is widely available through other means: either written information displayed on the prison wing or given to each prisoner, or through in-cell television. Nevertheless, some prisoners remain confused, potentially limiting their ability to access relevant courses. We were told of difficulties, after induction, in getting help and information from wing staff who, with exceptions, were described as not having the time or inclination to assist. In *Measuring the Quality of Prison Life*, only 45 per cent of short-sentenced prisoners said that most prison staff showed concern and understanding towards them.

Keeping prisoners safe and well

Physical safety

2.12 Prison is generally a safe place most of the time; only 13 per cent of short-sentenced prisoners surveyed said they feared for their physical safety.¹³ Serious assaults are rare: in 2007, NOMS recorded that 0.4 per cent of short-sentenced prisoners were victims of an assault.¹⁴ NOMS' data show that the proportion of short-sentenced offenders who self-harm, at 2 per cent, is smaller than the proportion (6 per cent) reporting instances of self-harm in the year before custody (paragraph 2.2). Nonetheless, 1,154 short-sentenced prisoners harmed themselves in 2008. An average 3-4 per year commit suicide.

Healthcare

2.13 The adequacy of healthcare provision within prison was not covered in depth by our audit. Mental healthcare, in particular, has been the subject of reports by others: for example, the 2008 Bradley Review concluded that prisons are struggling to provide the range of services needed.¹⁵

2.14 Data from Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction suggest that about one in ten short-sentenced prisoners suffers from a psychotic illness and one in three from an anxiety-related or depressive disorder. It is a concern, therefore, that, apart from brief, first-night health screenings, only 82 per cent of surveyed prisons (holding some 80 per cent of short-sentenced prisoners) said they routinely assessed all short-sentenced prisoners' physical and mental health needs. Prisoners with emotional issues can ask to see a Samaritans-trained prisoner, called a Listener, and, if severely disturbed, may be placed on a Vulnerable Prisoners wing. Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction found that only one in 15 of short-sentenced prisoners who had been in prison before reported receiving help with their mental or emotional problems during their previous sentence.

Access to activity

2.15 NOMS' principal way of managing prisoners' emotional well-being is to give them something to do and to allow reasonable social interaction through association. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons said in December 2007 that 'the amount of time prisoners are allowed to spend out of their cells is a key determinant of the overall health of a prison... is crucial to rehabilitation, [and] to the mental health and well-being of prisoners'.¹⁶ Its recommended standard for a healthy prison is nine hours out of cell per day.

¹³ Measuring the Quality of Prison Life.

¹⁴ National Audit Office analysis of NOMS self-harm and assaults data.

¹⁵ *Bradley Report*, 2009, para.40.

¹⁶ Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, *Time out of cell: a short thematic review*, 2007, p.5.

2.16 NOMS sets targets for the amount of purposeful activity each prison should provide, which includes work, education and physical education, but not periods spent out of cell on association. In local prisons, this is usually around 18 hours per prisoner per week, about three and a half hours every weekday. In theory, sentenced prisoners who are capable are required to work or undertake education. Local prisons, however, lack sufficient capacity to offer enough activity to everyone.

2.17 Our analysis of data drawn from IT systems at three prisons shows that, after reception and induction, short-sentenced prisoners do very little during their sentence.¹⁷ We found that:

- at Lancaster Farms Young Offender Institution, short-sentenced prisoners undertook an average of 14 activity sessions over their first four weeks, the equivalent of approximately one hour and 34 minutes every weekday;
- at HMP Doncaster, short-sentenced prisoners undertook an average of 31 minutes of purposeful activity every weekday during their sentence; and
- at HMP Belmarsh, the average short-sentenced prisoner had spent 74 per cent of weekdays unemployed during their sentence.

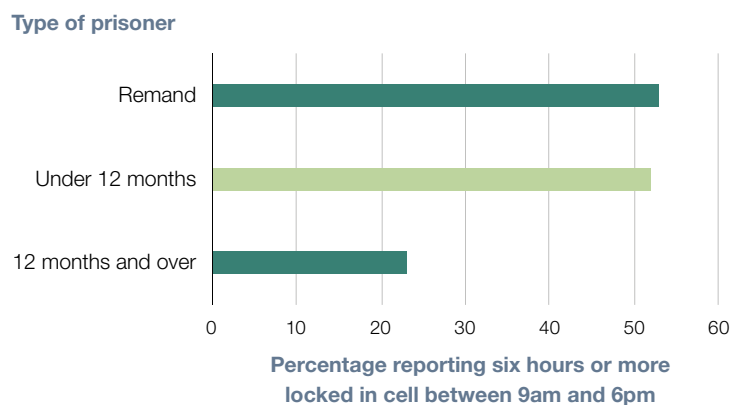
2.18 Our findings are corroborated by data from Measuring the Quality of Prison Life, where:

- 30 per cent of short-sentenced prisoners said they did nothing all day, 30 per cent worked and a further 30 per cent undertook educational activities. The remainder were either on induction, the drug wing or sick; and
- half of short-sentenced prisoners reported spending most of the day in their cell, compared to 22 per cent of prisoners given longer sentences (**Figure 9** overleaf).

¹⁷ Analysis of management systems designed to track prisoners' whereabouts. Each system was different and only permitted limited analysis of activities undertaken off the wing. A new information system, P-NOMIS, currently being rolled out, will create opportunities for standardised reporting on how prisoners spend their time.

2.19 Many prisoners we met were frustrated by the lack of purposeful activity. At most male local prisons we visited, prisoners spoke of making repeated applications to get work without knowing if they would be successful; prison staff agreed that this was often the case. Only at HMP New Hall, a women's prison, was there enough work for everyone, part of an explicit strategy to reduce self-harm. To overcome the shortage of activity, some prisons offered in-cell education packs of basic literacy and numeracy materials, although these were not always well-targeted on the illiterate and innumerate. NOMS is examining the possibility of using in-cell televisions to broadcast educational programmes.

Figure 9
Reported time in cell by prisoner type



Source: *Measuring the Quality of Prison Life*

Part Three

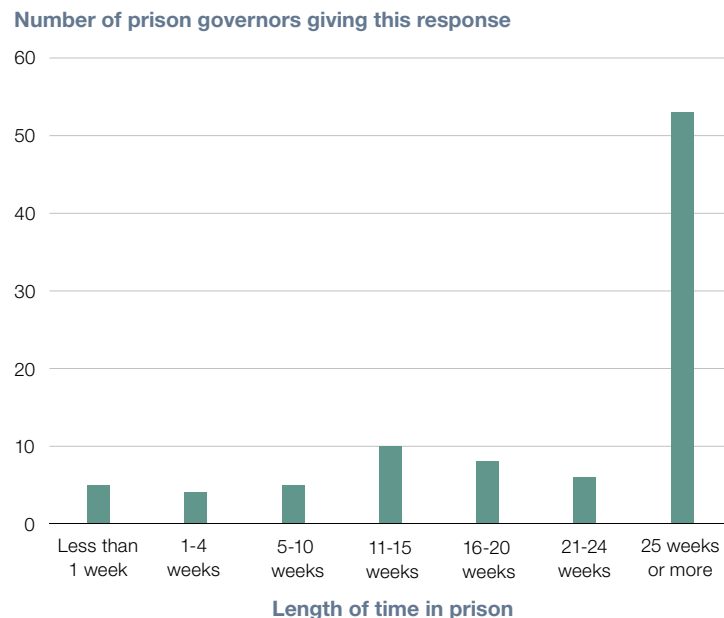
Making a difference

Practical barriers to rehabilitation

3.1 The primary limitation on what can be done with a short-sentenced prisoner is the time available. Most receive sentences of three months or less, of which they serve half, and other factors such as time spent on remand, early release schemes and inter-prison transfers also reduce the time available to address re-offending. Only seven of the 91 governors we surveyed said that they could assist prisoners to address their offending behaviour in four weeks or less (**Figure 10**).

Figure 10

Minimum length of time needed to assist prisoners in addressing their offending behaviour



Source: National Audit Office prisons survey

3.2 Many prisons lack sufficient work spaces, classrooms and interview facilities. Additionally, security and safety needs:

- create barriers to working with external agencies;
- require additional security checks on prisoners before assigning them to work, even though most short-sentenced prisoners are classified as low risk at reception; and
- mean that prisoners cannot usually search the internet for job vacancies.

Finally, although NOMS has taken significant steps to reduce levels of staff sickness absence in prisons (from an average 15 days per person in 2002 to 10.8 days in 2008-09), absence levels in a minority of prisons remain too high, which can adversely affect staff availability for escorting and supervising prisoners. A lack of cover for annual leave and the diversion of resettlement and offender management staff to other duties can also affect services. Staff shortages were making it more difficult to do resettlement work at HMP Belmarsh and Lancaster Farms Young Offender Institution when we visited.

What prisons offer

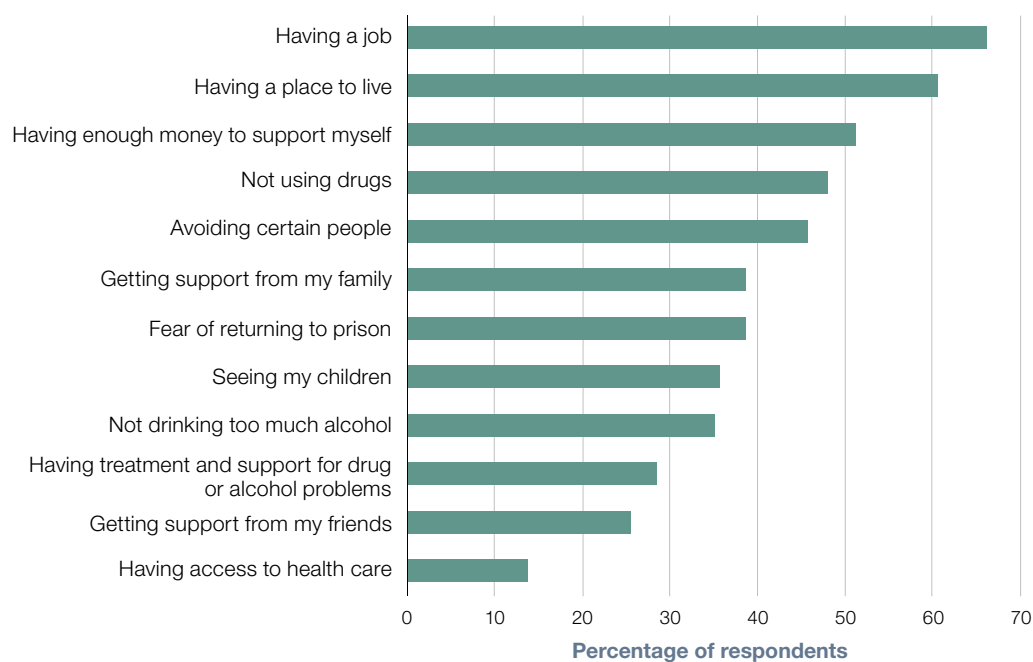
3.3 Nevertheless, there is, on the whole, a good match between what prisoners say they need to prevent re-offending and the kinds of assistance prisons try to provide. As shown in **Figure 11**, short-sentenced prisoners judged the most important factors in reducing re-offending to be having a job, having somewhere to live and having enough money to support themselves. Not abusing drugs and alcohol were also important issues for many. Prisoners in our focus groups and interviews expressed identical views.

3.4 In some of the re-offending pathways (paragraph 1.20), prisons offer a standard range of activities. There are well-established frameworks for healthcare and education, delivered by the National Health Service and the Learning and Skills Council's Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) respectively, and for family visits and drug services. NOMS has also developed a number of Offending Behaviour Programmes, accredited by experts, which seek to challenge the way offenders think. The level of resources committed by important local bodies varies widely and is beyond NOMS' control.

3.5 Prisons still have a lot of freedom, however, to decide how to help short-sentenced prisoners stop re-offending. Indeed, in some of the pathways, for instance, Finance, Benefit and Debt, individual prisons determine most of what happens. Even when there are mandatory or centrally organised elements, many prisons offer additional courses or assistance, either to tackle specific local problems, or because the overall level of need is so great. There is, therefore, a wide variation in the number of forms of assistance that different prisons offer in each pathway.

Figure 11

Factors in stopping re-offending as reported by short-sentenced prisoners



Source: *Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction*

3.6 In the Drugs and Alcohol pathway, users of illegal drugs get the majority of the help available, rather than those with alcohol problems, but this is also true in community services. Beyond facilitating visits, most prisons do little in the Children and Families pathway. Some allow prisoners who are parents to make recordings of bedtime stories for their children. At Lancaster Farms Young Offender Institution, the chaplaincy arranged longer visits for prisoner fathers of newly-born children.

3.7 Training and employment provision varies greatly from prison to prison. Some establishments offer workshop-based vocational training, which prisoners in custody for more than a few weeks may be able to access, sometimes as their first experience of work. For instance, HMP New Hall offers training on how to work in a call centre and HMP Hull offers a scaffolding course. There are very few opportunities to learn genuinely new skills, however, as most of the work available is unskilled or semi-skilled, such as sorting recycled waste and cleaning.

Taking up assistance

3.8 Most prisons have taken sentence length into consideration when designing their activities. For example, local prisons we visited focused on modular courses, with individual elements lasting as little as a week.

3.9 Prisons could not tell us how many short-sentenced prisoners made use of interventions and assistance, because neither the prison nor external providers record the sentence of their clientele. It is clear, however, both from data on waiting times and surveys of prisoners, that the majority of short-sentenced prisoners do not get the help they need. Waiting lists are the norm for most forms of assistance. Across all the prisons we surveyed, the average waiting time to take part in a suitable activity was 26 days, and at male local prisons the average was 21 days. Over half of short-sentenced prisoners spend less than 45 days in custody.

3.10 **Figure 12** shows how average waiting times vary across the seven re-offending pathways, the lowest being for accommodation. They are longest in the Attitudes, Thinking and Behaviour pathway, which includes most Offending Behaviour Programmes. With a few exceptions, such courses are too long for short-sentenced prisoners to complete anyway, meaning that they are very unlikely to receive any course or treatment specifically focused on the attitudinal reasons for their offending: for instance, anger management for violent criminals, or impulsivity reduction for acquisitive criminals.

3.11 The Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction survey, which is the only large-scale source of information about the help prisoners have received through the seven pathways, reinforces evidence from other sources. As shown in **Figure 13** on page 30, drug treatment and accommodation services appear to be the most readily available. A comparison with data in **Figure 7** shows disparities between need and supply. For example:

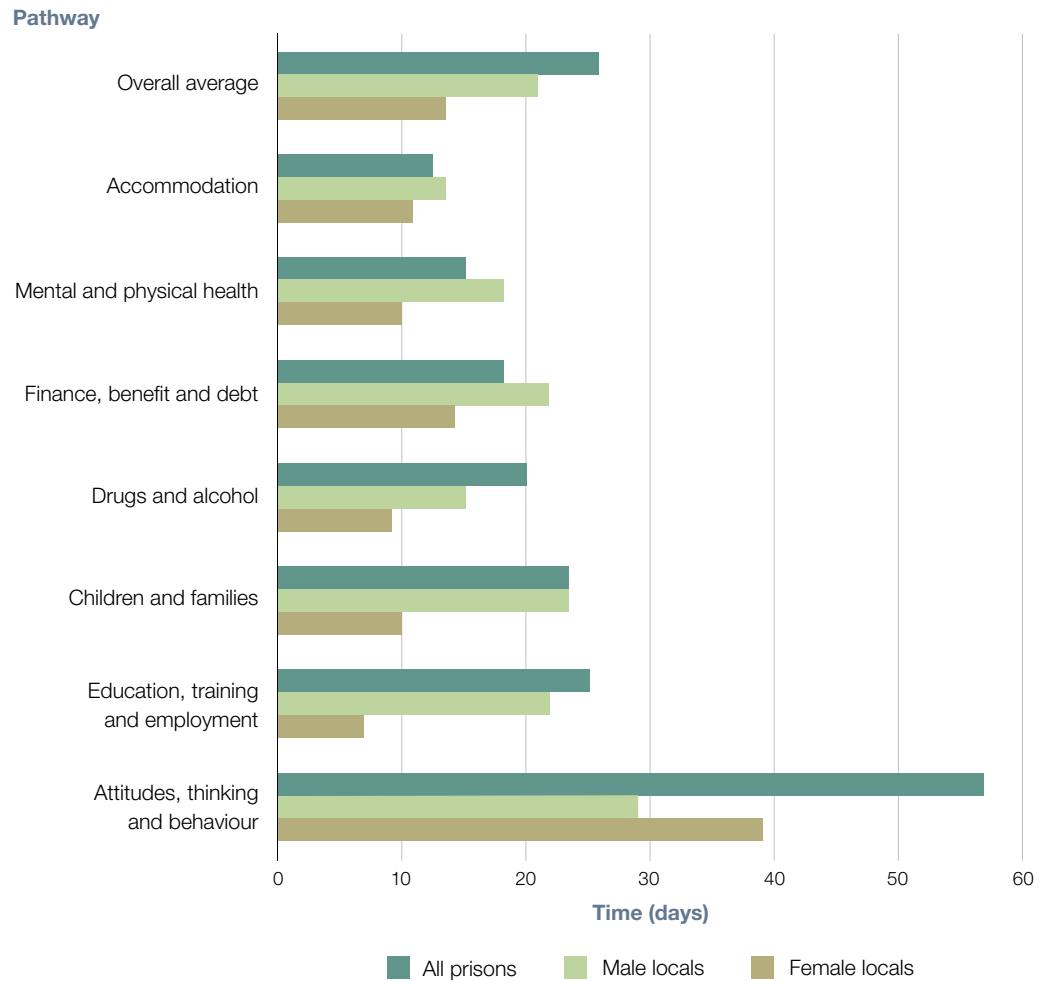
- 52 per cent were unemployed or long-term sick, but only 8 per cent reported help to find a job during their previous sentence;
- 34 per cent were anxious or depressed, but only 6 per cent reported help with a mental or emotional problem.

Our analysis also shows that over 40 per cent of the short-sentenced prisoners said they had received no help during their most recent previous sentence compared to 30 per cent of those sentenced to 12 months or more.¹⁸

¹⁸ These findings refer to short-sentenced prisoners' experiences during a previous custodial sentence, which in some cases will have been a longer sentence. As analysis progresses, the Department will be able to check these results against more recent information.

Figure 12

Average waiting times for activities suitable for short-sentenced prisoners



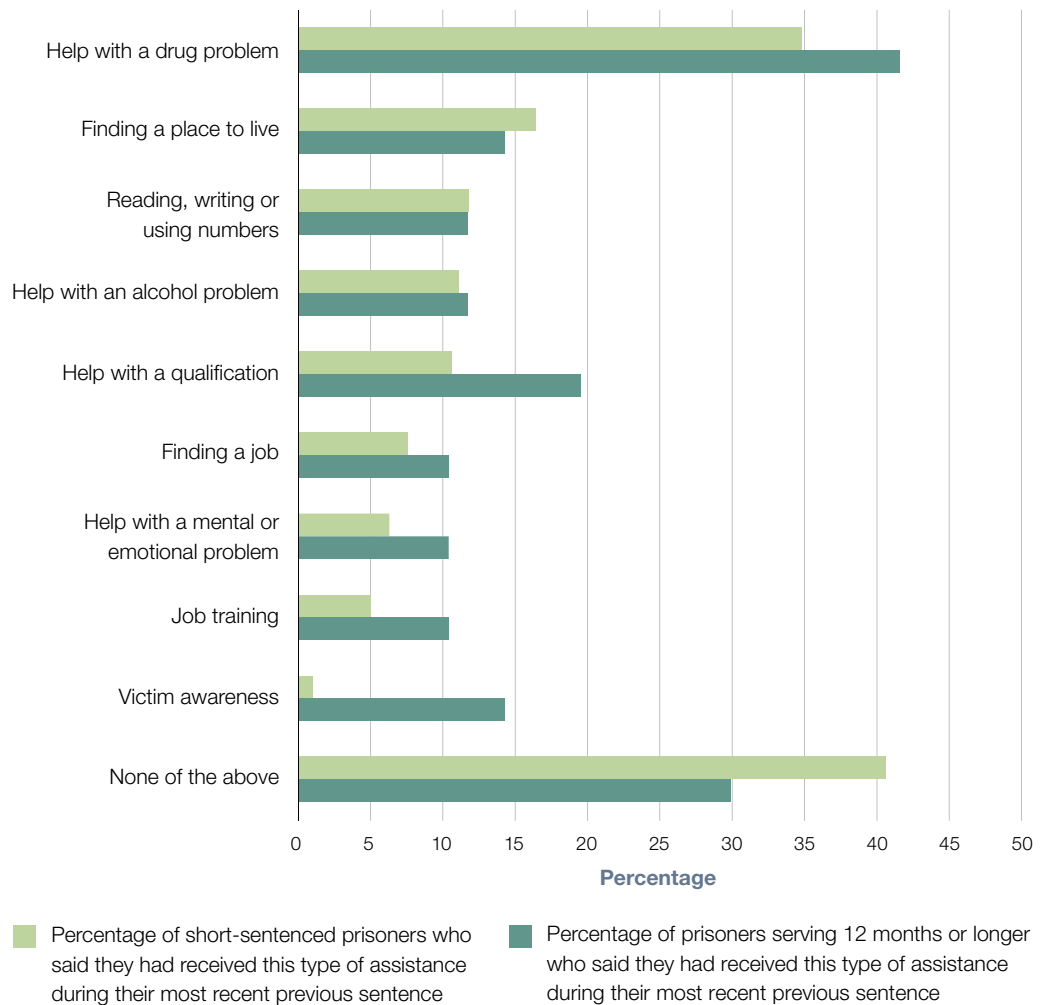
Source: National Audit Office prisons survey

NOTE

The average waiting times for help with Drugs and Alcohol do not include detoxification and stabilisation services, which are available as needed.

Figure 13

Activities undertaken by a group of prisoners during sentences before 2007



Source: *Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction*

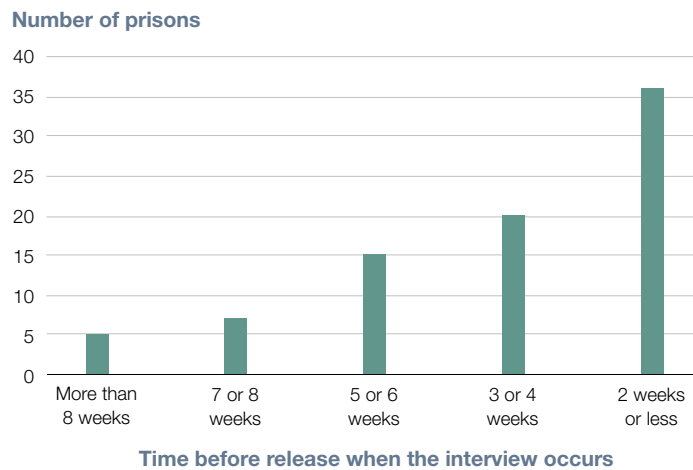
3.12 Information from initial assessments is only one of a number of criteria that determine who gets access to courses, with prisoners' individual levels of motivation also being a key factor. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons recommends that short-sentenced prisoners have formal custody plans, but this is not yet the case. Referral processes are usually manual and it is up to individual members of staff to choose whether and how to prioritise their caseloads. Even though levels of need exceed the supply of interventions, in all the prisons we visited some short-sentenced prisoners told us they were doing courses that did not address their own needs as a means of passing the time. Prison staff agreed that this was the case. At HMP Doncaster, when classes on a particular course were cancelled at short notice, prisoners were placed onto other courses, which they had not started and would not finish, and which may not have been relevant to their own educational needs. This was partly to ensure that targets for purposeful activity were met. Prisoners told us it adversely affected the learning environment.

3.13 There is a significant risk that the most prolific short-sentenced offenders are the ones most likely to be left unchallenged while in custody. Unmotivated prisoners are likely to spend more time in their cells, often watching television. Prisons do not attempt to motivate these offenders most of the time. While personal officer schemes can prove motivational, it takes time to build a relationship. In focus groups, prisoners who told us that they were avoiding activity tended to have been to prison many times before; staff also told us that prolific offenders were less likely to engage with prison activities.

3.14 Many prisons plan for resettlement assistance to be available towards the end of a sentence, often after a pre-release interview. **Figure 14** overleaf shows that 43 per cent of prisons hold such interviews two weeks or less before a prisoner's release. For prisoners spending more than a few weeks in custody, this is unlikely to maximise their chances of sorting out accommodation or employment problems. A recent internal review of housing services noted that this could be particularly counterproductive for homeless prisoners, who are more likely to get housing if they are put on local authority waiting lists at the earliest opportunity. Barriers to housing, such as rent arrears, also take time to overcome. At HMP Doncaster, an innovative scheme for prisoners with arrears to re-establish eligibility for housing by making regular repayments to their local authority takes 13 weeks to complete.

Figure 14

Time before a prisoner's release when resettlement interviews are held



Source: National Audit Office prisons survey

Continuity of assistance after release

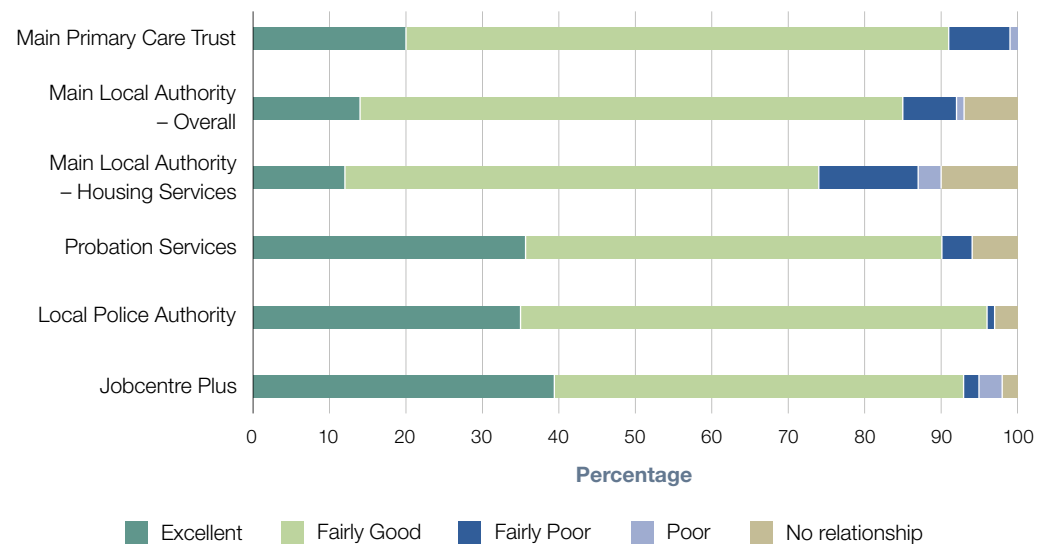
3.15 To be effective in helping short-sentenced prisoners, particularly with housing, employment, drugs and mental health, prisons need to work in partnership with external bodies: local authorities, Jobcentres, Primary Care Trusts and Drug Intervention Programme teams. Each prison routinely releases prisoners to numerous parts of the country, which makes joint working harder. With the exception of drug services, short-sentenced prisoners are frequently released without being put in contact with the community services they need. A plan published by the Government in November 2009, however, seeks to improve the way offenders access other health services, including mental health and alcohol services.¹⁹

3.16 Prison governors tend to be positive about their relationships with external organisations (**Figure 15**), but this does not translate into effective working practices in many establishments. Research by the Local Government Association in 2007 indicates that local authorities were more negative about their relations with prisons: 29 per cent said they were 'good' or 'very good', compared with 25 per cent who said they were 'poor' or 'very poor'. Both local authorities and prisons reported having better relationships with police and probation than with one another. When asked specifically about local authority housing services, a significant number of governors were less positive.

¹⁹ Department of Health, *Improving Health, Supporting Justice*, 2009.

Figure 15

Prison governors' assessment of the quality of relationships with external bodies



Source: National Audit Office prisons survey

3.17 We found that drugs services are the most 'joined-up' at present. Drug workers routinely made appointments for prisoners with Drug Intervention Programme teams for the day of release or shortly after. Cooperation with local authorities on housing, for which supply and demand vary greatly across the country, was much less consistent. An example of good practice was HMP Doncaster, where the prison actively encouraged local authorities to fulfil their responsibilities and where one local council, Sheffield, had a representative working full-time in the prison.

3.18 In the absence of statutory supervision, some prisons, working with charities, have put frameworks in place to support short-sentenced prisoners on release. Examples include Project Bont in Cardiff, the Prisoner Re-offending Project in Hull and Interchange at HMP Doncaster. They can deal with only a small number of prisoners at a time, often meeting them immediately after release and ensuring they get to important appointments. The Corston Report in 2007 recommended more of this kind of support for women offenders, including those released from short sentences. There is now an emerging network of such centres involving in-reach work in women's prisons like HMP New Hall.

The cost of work to reduce re-offending

3.19 NOMS does not yet know what it spends on reducing re-offending in prisons, principally because it does not record staff time by activity with sufficient detail. It has work in progress to improve its understanding of how much different prison activities cost, which should help it to take better decisions about which activities are cost-effective and which are not. On the basis of our observations at all the prisons we visited, only a small proportion of overall staff resources was being spent on addressing the long-term needs of short-sentenced prisoners.

3.20 To identify how much NOMS and its health and education partners spend on the Reducing Re-Offending Pathways for short-sentenced prisoners, we analysed the 2008-09 accounts of two prisons: HMP Lincoln, a men's local prison, and HMP New Hall, a women's prison. **Figure 16** shows our analysis, which uses estimates and assumptions where information was not available and does not count the cost of voluntary assistance.

3.21 In 2008-09, at HMP Lincoln, we estimate that approximately 21 per cent (£4 million) of the overall prison budget was spent on the Reducing Re-Offending Pathways, of which some £1.2 million (31 per cent) was spent on short-sentenced prisoners. On any given day, short-sentenced offenders comprise approximately 18 per cent of HMP Lincoln's population and, over the year, 39 per cent of all admissions. In 2008-09, at HMP New Hall, approximately 31 per cent (£5.8 million) of the overall prison budget was spent on work in the pathways, £1.9 million (32 per cent) of it on short-sentenced prisoners. Short-sentenced prisoners made up 19 per cent of the prison's population on a normal day and 48 per cent of all admissions over the year. There is no information at present to determine whether these figures are representative of prisons as a whole.

3.22 Healthcare makes up over half of all the costs attributed to the Reducing Re-Offending Pathways at both prisons in Figure 16. This overstates its contribution, however, because not all health spending is intended to reduce the risk of re-offending. While much mental health treatment and methadone prescribing have clear links with offending, this is not so with treatment for routine injuries and chronic conditions. We have been unable to obtain a more detailed breakdown of health spending at either establishment.

The effectiveness of work to reduce re-offending

3.23 Prisons have a poor understanding of the quality and impact of the work they do with short-sentenced prisoners. This is partly because information about good and bad practice is not generated or shared, and partly because there is almost no feedback about what happens to prisoners after release. Within this context, it was clear from our visits that some of the assistance being delivered was both innovative and of good quality. In other cases, however, staff delivering locally-designed courses had received little or no training to fulfil their roles. In sessions that we observed, the effectiveness of presentation styles and staff's levels of expertise varied greatly. An internal review of prison housing services in July 2009 identified the same variation in quality.

Figure 16

Analysis of costs at HMP Lincoln and HMP New Hall, 2008-09

Cost Category	Total (£)	Lincoln		Average amount per short-sentenced prisoner (£)	New Hall	
		Sub-total for short-sentenced prisoners (£)	Average amount per short-sentenced prisoner (£)		Total (£)	Sub-total for short-sentenced prisoners (£)
Total prison budget ¹	18,000,000	N/A	N/A	N/A	19,000,000	N/A
Total spending identified within the Reducing Re-offending Pathways	4,000,000	1,200,000	1,300	1,300	5,800,000	1,900,000
Of which:						
Mental and Physical Health	2,300,000	660,000	690	690	3,100,000	1,000,000
Including NHS spending	2,300,000	650,000			3,100,000	1,000,000
Drugs and Alcohol	550,000	200,000	200	200	580,000	220,000
Education, Training and Employment	640,000	180,000	190	190	1,800,000	440,000
Including OLASS spending	520,000	150,000			1,000,000	320,000
Accommodation; Children and Families; Finance, Benefit and Debt	190,000	54,000	57	57	92,000	31,000
Including DWP spending	31,000	8,900			39,000	13,000
Attitudes, Thinking and Behaviour	2,600	1,300	1.3	1.3	28,000	12,000
Reception, Induction and Discharge	280,000	130,000	140	140	240,000	100,000
Including discharge grants	100,000	80,000			55,000	42,000

Source: National Audit Office analysis of NOMS data

NOTES

- 1 Includes NOMS, NHS, Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) and Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) funding.
- 2 NHS spending includes the prescription of methadone and other detoxification pharmaceuticals. This spending could not be disaggregated, but should more properly be attributed to the Drugs and Alcohol pathway.

3.24 In focus groups and interviews, prisoners who were receiving help had mixed opinions about how good it was. In general, drug services were praised and some prisoners who had done Offending Behaviour Programmes on previous sentences said it had helped them to reduce the severity or frequency of their offending. On education, prisoners tended to speak more positively about courses that led to certificates or qualifications. Prisoners at HMP Belmarsh found it useful to get their CSCS Site Safety Card, a requirement for work on building sites. Prisoners tended to prefer specific assistance that addressed their own circumstances to formulaic advice, but this is more costly and time-consuming to provide.

3.25 Data from Measuring the Quality of Prison Life shows that most short-sentenced prisoners do not believe that the prison regime they were experiencing was helping reduce their risk of re-offending:

- 29 per cent (389 of 1354 interviewed) felt they had been encouraged to address their offending behaviour while in prison; and
- 27 per cent (370 out of 1362 interviewed) felt they were being helped to lead a law-abiding life on release.

There is no information about what was making the difference for those short-sentenced prisoners who felt that their risk of re-offending had diminished.

3.26 Prisons have little understanding of the outcomes of the work they do in any of the seven Reducing Re-Offending Pathways. External bodies, including Drug Intervention Programme teams, rarely give feedback on whether appointments were kept or problems addressed. Chance encounters aside, prison staff usually only find out about a released offender when they arrive back in custody. As well as being demoralising for staff, this makes it impossible to evaluate the effectiveness of what is done. It should be possible for prisons to know whether practical assistance (for instance, on housing, drugs or employment) has had the desired effect.

3.27 The link between assistance given and an offender's future criminal behaviour is more difficult to prove for methodological and cost reasons. Once complete, Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction and work to establish the re-offending rate at individual prisons should help NOMS to make informed decisions about which models of assistance are best.

The New Strategy

3.28 NOMS and the Department have been working during the last year on improving their approach to short-sentenced prisoners within their overall Offender Management framework. NOMS expects to be in a position to implement a more planned and targeted approach to this prisoner group in 2011-12, following the completion of prison pilots of Layered Offender Management, its evaluation of post-custody techniques called Integrated Offender Management, and ongoing work on standardising and costing prison services.

3.29 Layered Offender Management establishes a standardised assessment tool for short-sentenced prisoners. It will become electronic, initially in Yorkshire and Humberside in April 2010, which should cut down on duplicated assessment, especially when prisoners are transferred between establishments.

3.30 The pilots also introduce a case management approach for short-sentenced prisoners, whereby an offender supervisor takes responsibility for seeing that each prisoner's risk of re-offending is addressed coherently. Currently, different parts of the prison provide help to prisoners at varying speeds and without much reference to one another. According to NOMS' own assessment, this part of the pilots has worked less well in local prisons, where most short-sentenced prisoners are, because of logistical and resource difficulties.

3.31 NOMS and the Home Office are also overseeing and evaluating six pioneer areas that are delivering Integrated Offender Management: a multi-agency approach which targets prolific offenders, most of whom have had short sentences and would be ineligible for probation supervision. It combines close monitoring of offenders with concerted efforts to reduce their risk of re-offending and involves police and probation officers working alongside local authorities and, sometimes, charities.

3.32 The draft strategy acknowledges that most Offending Behaviour Programmes are too long to be suitable for short-sentenced prisoners and recommends:

- the introduction of a uniform assessment for short-sentenced prisoners;
- adequate provision to prevent their needs becoming worse across the seven pathways during their time in custody;
- continued treatment, including interventions, for users of illegal drugs; and
- a focus on a subset of highly-prolific offenders, including through approaches pioneered in Integrated Offender Management.

3.33 In its current form, the draft strategy makes clear that prisons will be expected to prioritise the assistance they give short-sentenced prisoners, meaning that some may get more than at present, and others may only receive the minimum to allow them to be held safely and decently. The Department acknowledges that there is more work to do, some of which must wait until other projects are completed. Its intention over the next year is to specify:

- what the dates and milestones for implementing the strategy will be;
- which pathways are most important for reducing re-offending and should, therefore, be addressed first;
- the detailed criteria according to which prisoners will be prioritised;
- how prisons should address offenders' pre-existing needs, for instance, homelessness and unemployment; and
- what measures of effectiveness, including cost-effectiveness, and targeted outcomes they will adopt.

Appendix One

Methodology

Fieldwork occurred between July and September 2009. Below is an overview of our study methods, with more detail available at <http://www.nao.org.uk/sentences2010>.

Method	Description
Analysis of published Departmental data	Using datasets that underlie sentencing and re-offending statistics, to profile the short-sentenced prisoner population.
Prisons survey	Ninety-eight prisons surveyed about their provision for short-sentenced prisoners; the 91 that responded hold 90 per cent of the short-sentenced population.
Visits	To seven prisons (HMPs Belmarsh, Cardiff, Doncaster, Hull, Lincoln and New Hall, and Lancaster Farms Young Offender Institution), talking to staff working across the Reducing Re-Offending pathways. We interviewed 20 prisoners in depth and held six focus groups.
Interviews with NOMS and Departmental staff	On reducing re-offending, finance, managing the prisoner population, Departmental research and pilot projects.
Costing	Cost data from NOMS centrally and from HMPs Lincoln and New Hall.
Prisoner activity analysis	Using prisoner management systems at three prisons to establish how prisoners spent their time.
Surveys analysis	The Department and NOMS analysed Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction and Measuring the Quality of Prisoner Life data on our behalf, identifying survey responses by short-sentenced prisoners.
Document review	Review of published and unpublished Departmental documents.
Stakeholder meetings	Meetings with relevant charities and Criminal Justice Inspectorates.



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