



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

Effective practice in Resettlement

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Foreword

HM Inspectorate of Probation is committed to reviewing, developing and promoting the evidence base for high-quality probation and youth offending services. *Academic Insights* are aimed at all those with an interest in the evidence base. We commission leading academics to present their views on specific topics, assisting with informed debate and aiding understanding of what helps and what hinders probation and youth offending services.

This report was kindly produced by Dr Matt Cracknell, reviewing the evidence base on how best to support people as they leave prison and transition back into the community. Six key principles for effective resettlement practice are set out, highlighting the importance of working co-productively as early as possible, maintaining relationships and providing continuity of support, recognising intersectionality, accessing a wide network of community resources, and balancing monitoring and risk management with genuine rehabilitative and reintegrative support. For the principles to be realised, practitioners need to be given the time and resources to adopt an individualised and collaborative approach, and any exclusions that individuals face as they leave custody need to be minimised to enable them to fully integrate into the community.



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The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the policy position of HM Inspectorate of Probation

1. Introduction

In 2021, 47,014 people were released from prison in England and Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2022), demonstrating the extent to which resettlement work is a core part of probation practice. However, the practitioners tasked to work with these individuals are often asked to fulfil a range of antagonistic and contradictory aims and approaches to resettlement (Canton, 2022) that can include:

- aftercare
- treatment
- the continuation of punishment
- risk management.

Indeed, there have been various policy and practice initiatives regarding how best to support people as they leave custody dating back to the birth of the modern prison in the early 19th century (Crow, 2006). These ambiguities reinforce concerns outlined by Maruna (2006) – that resettlement lacks an underlying theory or narrative for how it is supposed to work.

The uncertainty regarding how best to support people leaving custody is mirrored in ambiguities in the terminology used to describe this practice, with a set of interchangeable terms such as resettlement, re-entry, reintegration, and rehabilitation often used. However, there are a number of scholars who feel that the prefix 're' for these terms is inappropriate and does not sufficiently capture the reality that many people leaving prison are perennially disadvantaged and had not previously been integrated or settled in society (Carlen and Tombs, 2006). In England and Wales, resettlement is the common terminology in official policy language, replacing the previous terms of 'aftercare' or 'throughcare', and is used to describe the process of leaving prison and returning to society. However, linked to its originations in official policy language, resettlement is also commonly used to refer to any prison and/or probation intervention used to address practical issues and criminogenic factors in order to reduce reoffending (Rubio Arnal, 2021).

Despite the longstanding 'intractable problem' (Crow, 2006: 3) in providing effective resettlement, there is a substantial evidence base which demonstrates how best to support people as they leave prison and transition back into the community. This *Academic Insights* paper will draw upon this literature in order to outline what best practice in this area might look like, outlining six key principles of effective resettlement support. The paper will then turn to outlining some potential barriers that need to be addressed in order to realise this approach, setting out the implications for resettlement policy.

2. Six key principles of effective resettlement practice



2.1 Early identification of needs and through-the-gate support

The first key principle of effective resettlement practice is to ensure early identification of the needs of an individual. Resettlement needs should be identified through a sentence planning process that is initiated from the start of the sentence, when a person first enters custody. This approach should ensure issues are worked on pre-release and a realistic plan is set-up for release into the community (Hedderman, 2007; Kemshall, 2007; Malloch et al., 2013).

All individuals should have an assigned community probation practitioner in place before release, who can ensure the support plan is put in place, ready for when the person re-enters the community. This process of support is commonly referred to as a through-the-gate model, which is seen as the optimum approach for resettlement practice, as it should negate the deficiencies of models that operate purely in a prison or community setting, which either risk the individual relapsing upon release with a lack of support or do not allow for necessary preparations to take place for release (Clancy et al., 2006; Crow, 2006; Hucklesby and Wincup, 2007). A through-the-gate model should provide the individual with continuity and an opportunity to form a working relationship with a named probation practitioner who can work with the individual to: (i) form a plan before release; (ii) begin targeted work in prison; and (iii) help put the resettlement plan into practice when the individual is released.

2.2 Plans produced co-productively and not solely risk-focused

The second key principle involves ensuring any resettlement plans are collaboratively produced and not solely focused on risk management. Enforcement, monitoring and management of risk have increasingly become a central element of modern probation practice and will inevitably play a role in resettlement planning – particularly for any individuals assessed as high risk of serious harm (Trebilcock and Worrall, 2018). However, Raynor (2007) reminds us that practices which concentrate on compliance, enforcement and monitoring should be entitled risk management rather than resettlement, and equal attention should be paid to fostering a genuinely collaborative approach between the individual and practitioner.

Indeed, the [Academic Insights paper 2021/07](#) notes the importance of blending desistance-focused practice with risk management (Kemshall, 2021). Kemshall (2007) has also previously posited that if risk management is undertaken effectively it can contribute towards resettlement. This approach should include ensuring that individuals are fully aware of release conditions before their release and are involved in the planning of their release. Effective risk management plans also involve promoting internal controls (recognition of 'triggers' to reoffending) and utilising external controls (licence conditions) where needed. However, an over-emphasis of external controls can undermine internal controls, so Kemshall (2007) promotes a balance between them. Finally, failure to meet basic welfare needs as part of a release plan can undermine the entire process.

Hughes (2012) also reminds us of the important role that the assessment process can play in engagement, and that assessments should not solely be about managing harm, but a way to identify how best to work with an individual. Therefore, resettlement plans should be co-produced, and enhance protective factors. Where appropriate, resettlement plans should also actively involve the families and loved ones of the individual, who can play a crucial role in the resettlement process (Farmer, 2017).

2.3 Emphasis on continuity of support and the relational aspects of supervision

The third key principle identifies continuity of engagement as a crucial factor in developing the relational aspect between the individual and their probation officer (Maguire and Raynor, 1997; 2006a; 2006b; Clancy et al., 2006; Crow, 2006; Hedderman, 2007). Research on resettlement practice identifies that when the process between an individual and their probation practitioner becomes fragmented, the individual can experience confusion and frustration when re-starting the process with new officers (Maguire and Raynor, 2006b; Cracknell, 2020). Providing consistent support from a single named probation practitioner who works with the individual throughout their sentence is thus very important.

A central means of promoting support that is relational is to revisit McNeill's (2006) '*desistance paradigm*'. This framework promotes several elements of good practice, including:

- early individualised preparation for release
- continuity of personal contact
- support in the face of setbacks
- a positive collaborative approach from the practitioner that is flexible and realistic.

Malloch et al. (2013) also outline areas of good practice that include:

- involving individuals in support plans
- consistency from workers which allows a trusting relationship to develop through dedicated liaison
- flexibility from workers to respond to issues as they occur.

The [Academic Insights paper 2019/05](#) outlines the importance of effective engagement in probation practice (Raynor, 2019). Essentially, individuals released from custody need to work with someone who displays genuine care and can form a trusting professional relationship.

Practitioners exhibiting a flexible approach towards recalls and licence conditions is also an important part of a relational approach to resettlement. An overtly punitive and inflexible response from practitioners can undermine legitimacy and procedural fairness – having a long-term impact on attitudes towards resettlement (Weaver and Barry, 2014). Indeed, a perceived lack of procedural fairness can create anger and resentment towards probation supervision (Digard, 2010). In particular, lapses and relapses can be a common element in an individual's often complex pathway of behavioural change, with the desistance journey often resembling a zigzag rather than a straight path (McNeill and Weaver, 2010). As such a practitioner should ascertain where the individual is on that journey and maintain a consistent approach that allows a trusting relationship to develop, alongside a flexible approach to respond to issues as they occur (Malloch et al. 2013). Failure to do so may result in the individual becoming trapped in a cycle between prison and the community (Cracknell, 2021a; 2022).

2.4 Bonding and bridging to sources of social capital

The fourth key principle involves supporting people to access appropriate welfare, treatment and community resources. The [Academic Insights paper 2019/03](#) advocates for the practitioner to become a 'community connector' (Best, 2019:7), linking individuals to community support networks. Such an approach places the practitioner in a central role of connector and advocate with an individual's families and the local community, helping to navigate the person through their resettlement journey. Social capital has also been outlined in the [Academic Insights paper 2021/06](#) as an important element of supporting desistance (Albertson, 2021).

Further recent research develops the notion of 'resettlement capital' (Hall et al., 2018: 521). This involves the individual drawing on a set of resources, including personal capabilities, families and partner networks and community resources, in order to successfully resettle in the community. For some, this involves the practitioner bonding links to existing networks, while, for others, it means the practitioner bridging the individual to new contacts. This approach foregrounds the social context in which resettlement takes place, including family and social networks as well as the wider community (Moore, 2011), and requires the practitioner to foster close links with external organisations in the community (Hucklesby and Wincup, 2007; Malloch et al., 2013).

However, the promotion of social capital and practical support should be combined alongside therapeutic and motivational work, particularly as providing practical support alone is often not sufficient in reintegrating individuals back into society, with practical help needing to be reinforced by addressing thinking and behaviour (Maguire and Raynor, 1997; 2006a; 2017; Crow, 2006; Raynor, 2020). Practical support should also be geared to helping individuals navigate the often complex bureaucratic systems, including the universal credit benefit system and housing – particularly for individuals with deficits in digital literacy (Halushka, 2020; Cracknell, 2021a).

2.5 Responsive to needs of different groups

The fifth key principle involves the practitioner being cognizant of intersectionality and its impacts upon the resettlement process. In particular, it is important to recognise that specific groups and communities in society face additional barriers in their reintegration. Bunn (2019) outlines how the particular challenges of re-entry are often exacerbated by a

range of structural barriers including gender, race, class and age, and urges us to look at resettlement through an intersectional lens. For example, empirical evidence involving the resettlement experiences of black and ethnic minority groups suggests that these individuals find that their ethnicity affects their resettlement experience, principally that their needs and experiences are amplified by racism and discrimination (Jacobson et al. 2010). An HM Inspectorate of Prisons report (2020) on this issue highlighted that prison staff had an insufficient understanding of ethnic minorities' distinct experiences of imprisonment and that these individuals felt that this had a negative impact on their resettlement and rehabilitation. Greater awareness of these issues is particularly important due to black and ethnic minority groups being over-represented in the criminal justice system (Lammy Review, 2017).

Equal recognition also needs to be given to the distinct resettlement needs of women (Gelsthorpe and Sharp, 2007). Gelsthorpe and Sharp's empirical research tells us that woman within the criminal justice system have multiple needs that are often different to men, located within areas such as victimisation, paternalistic power relations, and distress. However, in a prison system dominated by males, these are often under-explored. Corston (2007) has long called for a more gender-responsive criminal justice system that fully recognises the specific needs of women, which would entail better community support, coordinated multi-agency provisions, and greater awareness that many women have childcare responsibilities. It is critical that a practitioner is able to recognise differences and be culturally and gender responsive in their approach.

2.6 Strengths-based and restorative approaches

The sixth and final key principle of effective resettlement practice involves utilising a strengths-based approach. In practice, this approach means not solely focusing on helping or monitoring an individual, but treating the person as an individual with talents and abilities who can make a positive contribution to society (Maruna and LeBel, 2015). This principle recognises the central role the community plays in reintegration. Maruna (2006) forcefully reminds us that reintegration has to be community led, and that practitioners cannot 'do' the reintegration, but they can support, enhance and work with the community to help individuals earn redemption.

As such, a strengths-based and restorative approach to resettlement could involve the practitioner fostering opportunities for the individual to not just physically re-enter the community but to 'earn' a place back into the 'moral community' (Burnett and Maruna, 2006). This can be achieved by providing opportunities for the individual to 'make good' and 'give something back', perhaps through mentoring, civic community engagement or participating in mutual aid groups. Involvement in these activities can also help to 'de-label' the individual and find a new identity beyond the 'offender' label (Burnett and Maruna, 2006).

An additional restorative practice for resettlement would involve use of 'reintegration rituals' (Maruna, 2006) to symbolically recognise a clear end of the period of punishment and to celebrate reintegration. This could involve the individual receiving a certificate in rehabilitation – complete with a list of their achievements during the sentence – presented at the end of the licence period (Maruna, 2011).

3. Conclusion

The six principles of effective resettlement practice outlined in this paper highlight a common theme; individuals released from custody need practitioners who:

- can demonstrate commitment and genuine care
- have knowledge of and access to a 'thick' network of community resources (Dominey, 2019)
- have the skills and confidence to balance monitoring and risk management with genuine rehabilitative and reintegrative support.

For the principles to be actualised into practice, practitioners need to be given the time and resources to work effectively with the individuals on their caseloads. Cracknell (2021b) has outlined how a series of resettlement policies introduced by various governments have been undermined by a 'common thread' of failures to properly resource resettlement services and give practitioners sufficient time to provide individualised and continuous support. A recent joint inspectorate review of the latest resettlement policy – *Offender Management in Custody – pre-release* – sadly seems to highlight many of the same concerns, with understaffing in particular highlighted as an issue hampering rehabilitative efforts (HM Inspectorate of Probation and HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2022).

A further potential barrier for effective resettlement policy involves the post-sentence exclusion that many individuals face as they leave custody (Cracknell and Flintermann, 2022). Principally, the stigma of a criminal record can lead to exclusion and restriction in accessing services in areas vital to resettlement, including: employment, banking and financial services, access to housing, access to education, restrictions on travel, and restrictions from civic participation. These exclusionary policies mean that individuals become 'carceral citizens' (Miller and Stuart, 2017) and are denied the opportunity to become full autonomous members of society. Wider government policies thus need to pay attention to providing individuals with the all-important opportunities to reintegrate into the community.

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