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To the Commission on Justice in Wales

Re: Respond to Call for Evidence

Please find below my submission to the Commission on Justice in Wales.

I noted that the Commission on Justice in Wales is also considered exploring the links to reducing crime and reducing reoffending. I am concerned primarily with issues and interventions at the exit point, particularly, with individuals who have either a custodial or non-custodial sentence and the impact on them as an individual and their attempts to build their own life, away from crime or a criminal past and as a member of the community. There is of course an impact on society by this journey as they are contributing to society, rather than reoffending or involved in other anti-social behaviour. Therefore for me it is imperative that consideration is given by the Commission to supporting interventions of what can be done to support individuals exiting the criminal justice system into education, employment or self-employment.

It is important the Commission looks at academic literature, particularly Desistance Theory and the role of purposeful activity. I have also conducted my own research which reinforces the position of education contributing to increased desistance, especially socially inclusive and purposeful activity (such as education or employment) which are linked to reducing reoffending in prisoners. The ties that exist to family, employment or educational programmes explain changes in reoffending behaviour across a person's life. Put simply they offer a reason to 'go straight'. Where they are absent, then people who offend have less to lose from continuing to offend. Engagement in purposeful programmes result in people

investing in their future, emerging in front of them. It helps to change people's behaviours away from reoffending beyond the obvious improved skills and qualifications. More than anything, this programme helps individuals to find, understand and pursue their purpose to write their own future.

The 2018 Ministry of Justice Education and Employment Strategy aims to put people on what the Justice Secretary recently described as a 'Pathway to Employment'. The main aims of the Strategy most of interest are: To put prisoners on a path to employment; Improving employment opportunities starting with education; Offenders leaving prison with the basic skills needed by employers which are relevant and required for finding work; Employment in prison as valuable work experience; Forging better relationships between employers and prisons by expanding the use of ROTL, for individuals to prove themselves; Increasing the employability of ex-offenders, thereby persuading employers to offer an opportunity for employment; Prisons offering hope and aspirations through educational and employment programmes; Breaking down the barriers and prejudices often faced by ex-offenders trying to find employment. I believe there is a great deal that could be driven forward in Wales and I hope the Commission will consider this.

Some practical aspects of the 2018 MoJ Strategy most relevant here include forging better links with employers to close the gap between skilled potential employees (who may have a conviction) and employers. I would urge you to visit the Wallich and particularly the BOSS project to see what good work is going on here. Myself and others can train people up on completing good applications, perform better interviews, etc. but if no work is done on the other side, we are always only going to be chasing the tail of potential employers as they will simply move further away from potentially employing this cohort. Currently I'm sure an employer facing the dilemma of two employees with identical skills and experience but one has a conviction and one does not, will always err on the side of caution as a default and employ the latter candidate 99 times out of a hundred. Some work does go on in this area, but inevitably it is very London focused. A Welsh presence here would be extremely beneficial - for example an AM who is an Ex-offender Employee Champion? Support for projects like Ban the Box or ensuring DBS checks are only conducted at job offer stage are simple practical things that I would urge the Commission to get behind.

Some individuals may wish to go self-employed when released. This could be for a variety of reasons such as: they may be more entrepreneurial, have a good business idea, may feel that they are 'unemployable' because of the nature of their offence - or they may have more than one conviction, and much more. All attempts by myself and other colleagues to access support from the primary organisation for Business in Wales for this cohort has fallen on deaf ears. They used to offer support but no longer. No reason for this has been given - just silence. They offer

support to 'regular' individuals like myself who went self-employed 12 months ago, so why not this cohort?

The use of ROTL is also very important as ROTL (Release on Temporary License) allows individuals who have been risk assessed as suitable the opportunity to gain real work experience and work in the community on a formal job, to get work-based practical experience. It is also an excellent transition for people moving from closed prison conditions into open conditions where they have to be less focused on their own needs and consider the needs of others.

One use of ROTL that I have first-hand experience of is in supporting Category D prisoners into university on license for the last 18 months or two years of their sentence. Many HEIs in Wales are seeing reducing student numbers as the issue £9k student fees start to bite. The license conditions that permit an individual to work on license are no different to those need to do education. However universities are not as forthcoming here as I believe they could. This cohort could easily become a Widening Participation target group for universities showing how they are widening access to higher level learning for those non-traditional adult learners. Not only could this help plug the gap in reducing student numbers, but there have been recent changes to the UCAS admissions process and an applicant going through the UCAS application process may not see a criminal convictions form unless it is a course exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (such as medicine for example). But if a DBS check is required then this comes at a later stage in the process - at the offer stage - whereas previously it was one of the first questions an applicant may see. Prisoners' Education Trust and Unlock have been instrumental in this work with UCAS.

The issue of Job Support in prisons for Welsh female prisoners needs to be considered. There are no prisons for Welsh women in Wales therefore they are usually sentence in HMP Eastwood Park or HMP Styal. English prisoners there receive employment support, but Welsh women do not. This is a clear anomaly that I hope the Commission will help urge to be rectified.

I hope the above information is useful to the Commission. I would be happy to speak to the Commission further if required. I know there is a larger review going on, such as the work with David Hanson AM so I hope this all contribute to playing a part.

Yours Faithfully

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