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# Evaluation of Services Provided by Nacro Cymru to the Welsh Government

Research Summary

Social research

Number: 29/2013

In early 2012 the Welsh Government commissioned ARCS (UK) LTD, with assistance from Aberystwyth University, to provide:

- a detailed description of work provided by Nacro Cymru (NC) for the Welsh Government (focusing in particular on work delivered over the last few years);
- an assessment of the quality, value for money, and impact of the above work; and
- an assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of key options for future provision.

The research involved collection and analysis of a wide range of available documentation and data, and extensive consultations with key stakeholders in youth justice and related fields in Wales.

## Findings:

The evaluation generated a rich and wide-ranging data-set, which underpins the key findings summarised in the following sections.

## Work delivered by Nacro Cymru

Nacro Cymru (and in particular, the Youth Offending Unit) has been receiving funding from the Welsh Government for over 10 years, to undertake a range of youth justice work. During most of that period, the organisation has delivered an annual work programme which has been funded by a rolling grant from the Welsh Government, with the content and timing of this work programme being agreed and monitored by representatives of the Welsh Government (WG).

This work has included:

- research projects, literature reviews;
- support work for Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), with this involving both “on tap” support, and focused programmes to support individual YOTs;
- strategic work - e.g. to support implementation of the All Wales Youth Offending Strategy (AWYOS);
- networking/dissemination work;

- work with YOT Managers Cymru (an umbrella forum created in 2000, to allow Welsh YOTs as a group to consider developments in youth justice and the impact of these on YOT practice, and to discuss and agree joint positions on key topics), and
- training, covering a wide range of areas such as:
  - participation, and engagement of young people;
  - assessing dangerousness;
  - pre-sentence report (PSR) and other report writing;
  - specific dispositions or orders, such as Youth Rehabilitation Orders;
  - bail support, bail and remand, and an introduction to the new remand provisions in the Legal Aid Punishment and Sentencing of Officers Act 2012;
  - intervention planning and design;

- mental health and young people, and
- risk management.

Nacro Cymru's work programmes have been multi-faceted, but the evaluation also highlighted a clear degree of "fit" across these different work strands. The programmes have been fairly cohesive, and anchored both in a reasonably clear framework on the funder's side, and a clarity of purpose and organisational commitment on the part of NC.

### **Quality**

All respondents were asked for their views about the quality of work delivered by Nacro Cymru, and the evaluation team also undertook separate assessments of the quality of some of the specific NC products – e.g. research reports, and reviews of the literature or evidence.

There was considerable unanimity on the part of respondents about the high quality of NC's work, and about its relevance to the needs of the "consumers" of this work.

There was occasional negative feedback (e.g. in relation to training provided), although this was

mitigated to some extent by the fact that NC appeared to respond favourably and quickly to such criticism where it was made known to them.

### **Impact**

Although the research was not designed as an impact evaluation, questions concerning the impact of Nacro Cymru's work provided a key focus during the data-collection.

The team was interested in assessing impacts relating to:

- youth justice practice (and YOT practice in particular);
- trends in youth justice (both in terms of offending and/or resettlement outcomes, and youth justice “processing”), and
- strategic coordination (and related changes in levels of awareness among key stakeholders about key issues etc).

The majority of respondents seemed to think that NC's work had had a positive impact on practice over the years, with some going further to suggest that various measured improvements (as in improved inspection reports for example) would not have come

about without NC's involvement. The evaluation team was unable to confirm this kind of impact (or impacts on actual trends in youth justice in Wales) through statistical analysis of available data.

The evidence for impact on practice was therefore largely qualitative, but had considerable persuasive power nonetheless (since much of it was gathered from key representatives across Wales, who had wide-ranging youth justice and related experience).

NC's involvement in strategic work has clearly been both important and sustained. We did not uncover any negative feedback concerning NC's strategic work, and all respondent groups appeared to think that it would be important for this kind of work to continue (in one form or another).

In general, NC's work programmes appear to have worked well in terms of key efforts to improve the quality and “cohesiveness” of youth justice practice in Wales, although the evidence suggests that the balance between flexibility and clarity of their work specifications has not always been struck

successfully – with it sometimes being unclear whether particular work strands have formed part of the “official” work programme or not, for example.

### **Value for money**

Generally positive findings concerning the quality and impact of NC’s work are obviously relevant to issues about value for money, but the evaluation team also examined a number of issues concerning cost more directly as part of the research.

Although not all of the work referred to above could be costed in a straightforward manner, the evaluation team estimated the costs that some of NC’s individual project work might have incurred if they had been procured on the open research market – using comparisons with other projects whose costs are known.

That analysis made it clear that NC’s work programme compared fairly well in terms of cost with what might have been purchased via other routes, although it is obviously for the funder to decide whether this also means (in the light of evidence concerning quality

and impact discussed in sections earlier) that this provision provided value for money.

The respondent feedback contained numerous references to the “added value” of having an organization such as NC deliver the kind of work that they have been delivering as part of their annual work programmes, because of the broad knowledge and skills that the organization brings to the work, and because of the “joined up” way in which it is perceived to have been delivered.

### **Future provision**

Part of the evaluation team’s brief was to consider various options for future provision of work of this kind, and we therefore examined a number of options including:

- discontinuation of the service;
- in-house provision;
- open tendering;
- mixed provision, and
- continuation of current arrangements.

The advantages and disadvantages of each alternative were discussed, and the cost implications also assessed.

Complete ***discontinuation of the service*** would obviously result in cost savings, although some of the momentum that has been generated in relation to strategic youth justice work would clearly be lost, as would responsive intelligence-gathering to underpin decision-making and policy work.

***In-house provision*** can be easier to manage, if the new provider is also the funder, and such provision can also alleviate risk of dependence on one provider.

Delivery of some work strands requires a diverse skills base however, and such skills can only be drawn upon in-house if they are specifically recruited. “Lag time” can be increased while new staff establish relationships, and access could be complicated initially.

***Open tendering*** can reduce the scope for “complacency” on the part of preferred providers, and can also drive prices down (although tendering also has costs of its own). The design of specifications by the funder can also raise awareness internally (of organisational need, and strategic priorities).

Contracts secured through an open tendering process can lack flexibility during the delivery period – i.e. contractors are likely to deliver only what is specifically within a brief; a degree of flexibility can be built in, but is often difficult to specify.

A switch to open tendering from longstanding provision by one provider can lead to delays in provision and access in the short term, and can also widen the scope for an erosion of overall cohesion across multiple work strands, if they are broken up in separate tenders.

Decisions about which strands of work are best suited to which kinds of future provision (or to discontinuation altogether) can be anchored in a “stock-take” which is itself of value to the funder in clarifying strategic focus.

***Continuation of the current arrangements*** would allow existing positive relationships between NC and key youth justice stakeholders to be maintained, along with speed of response, and well-established arrangements for local access. Continuation would also allow for multi-faceted future work

programmes to be delivered in a more “holistic” way than if these work strands were separated into a package of mixed provision.

There would continue to be no market testing however, which means that the scope for achieving the same services at lower costs would remain unknown. Issues concerning a lack of clarity in some of the previous annual work programmes would also still need to be addressed.

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