

Probation crisis

Congress notes that in 2014-15 the probation service was subject to an untested and deeply unpopular privatisation process. The aftershocks continue and the operating environment remains unstable. This presents dangers for staff, service users and the public, as evidenced in numerous reports from the probation inspectorate and the NAO, highlighting:

- i. operational and performance failures across the privatised community rehabilitation contracts (CRCs)
- ii. total failure of the 'Through the Gate' initiative, meaning that prisoners leave custody with inadequate support
- iii. recruitment and workload problems undermining performance in the state run National Probation Service (NPS).

Congress recognises the danger of catastrophic service failures and a major probation crisis – e.g. if a CRC contract fails, with the NPS unable to pick-up a failing contract because of its own operational difficulties; or the NPS not being able to recruit enough staff, especially to work in prisons.

Congress believes that the MoJ must acknowledge its mistakes and take urgent steps to start putting things right. Accordingly Congress calls for:

- a. A full parliamentary inquiry into the failed probation change programme, including evidence from the NAO, HMI probation and probation unions
- b. any failing CRC contracts to be brought back under public ownership and control
- c. Adequate investment to stabilise the current operational environment, including adequately funding probation pay awards across the CRCs and the NPS
- d. The MoJ to work in partnership with probation unions to design and pilot more sustainable operational models that minimise risk by maximising public ownership, multi-agency partnerships and local accountability – including commissioning services through other public agencies
- e. the MoJ to halt the ill-advised and dangerous privatisation of night-waking cover in NPS approved premises

Napo