



The Truth About Transforming Rehabilitation

VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINE

1. Introduction

What is the truth about the Ministry of Justice Transforming Rehabilitation reform of the Probation Service in England and Wales?

Trade unions Napo and UNISON jointly represent 12,000 of the staff who since 1 June 2014 have been forced to work for the new probation bodies created by Chris Grayling the Justice Secretary. In July 2014, we surveyed our joint membership to find out directly from members how they were feeling about the probation reforms. On the eve of key decisions by government about the future of probation, we publish the following results of our survey. They make for harrowing reading and back up our joint union call for the privatisation of probation to be halted now in the public interest.

2. Background

The Conservative-led coalition government published its 'Transforming Rehabilitation' proposals in early 2013. The plans would enable for the first time the supervision of offenders leaving prison following short term sentences, but would abolish the 35 Probation Trusts in England and Wales and replace them with two new delivery bodies:

- **A National Probation Service (NPS):** to become an integral part of the Ministry of Justice and concentrate on court work, high risk supervision, approved premises and victims work
- **21 Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs):** to deliver medium to low risk offender management, programmes, unpaid work and a range of corporate services.

The 17,000 probation staff who previously worked for the Probation Trusts were forcibly transferred to either the NPS or one of the CRCs on 1 June this year. What has followed has been a catalogue of errors in terms of staff assignment, mismatch between workload, staffing levels and staff location, compromised risk management, reduced IT capability, increased bureaucracy and a huge rise in the use of temporary and sessional staff. High performing Probation Trusts have been replaced with poorly performing replacements; none of this the fault of the probation staff themselves.

To compound all of these woes, the CRCs are due to be sold off to the private sector later this year without proper regard being given to the public interest of such a controversial outsourcing so late in the life of this Parliament.

These survey results tell our members' story. This is what it is like to work in the government's probation experiment. We hope that the Justice Secretary, MPs and other decision-makers listen before it is too late. Napo and UNISON want the privatisation of the CRCs called off now and the Probation Service re-united as soon as possible.

3. Executive Summary

Here are some of the key findings from our member survey:

- 1,046 members responded to the survey (nearly 10% of our combined membership)
- 48% of respondents work for the National Probation Service
- 52% work for a Community Rehabilitation Company
- Nearly 40% of respondents are probation officers
- 23% are probation service officers
- 10% are admin and clerical staff
- 10% work in approved premises, community payback and as case administrators
- 9% are senior probation officers
- 2.5% work in corporate services
- 74% of respondents say that workload and pressure has increased since they transferred to the NPS or a CRC
- 86% indicate that stress levels have increased since the transfer
- 82% say that staff morale has decreased following the transfer
- 46% of members are extremely stressed
- 49% are moderately stressed
- Nearly 80% have considered leaving their job in the last 12 months
- 55% are actively looking for a new job now
- The top-line reasons that members are looking for a new job are:
 - Disagreement with Transforming Rehabilitation: 78%
 - Feeling undervalued in my job 70%
 - Having to compromise on standards 70%
- 84% would not recommend their own occupation as a career to others
- 83% feel less secure in their job now compared to last year

- 99% do not support the government's Transforming Rehabilitation proposals
 - 96% don't believe that they will improve probation services
 - 96% don't believe that they will enhance end-to-end offender management
 - 91% don't believe that service provision will improve for users
 - 93% don't believe that the delivery of statutory duties to the courts will improve
 - 90% say that statutory partnerships will not improve
 - 97% say that the management of risk will not improve
 - 93% don't believe that value for money will be provided to the tax payer

- Nearly 90% say that Transforming Rehabilitation has made their working life more difficult

- 86% do not feel valued by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS)

- 98% have no confidence in the Secretary of State for Justice Chris Grayling

4. Commentary

4.1 Respondents

The majority of respondents were either probation officers, probation service officers or senior probation officers, i.e. senior professionals within the probation workforce. The overwhelming representation of these members within the survey sample should come as a major wake-up call to government, MPs and bidders for the CRCs. The professionals who lead the work of the probation service are saying loud and clear that probation is now in crisis as a result of the botched probation reforms. Once the trust of such professionals is lost, it will not easily be regained. We urge opinion formers to take our members at their word – you have been warned.

4.2 Stress and Morale

All the indicators of organisational health which were tested in our survey show very strong negative trends. One might expect that workload and pressure would increase at a time of major service transformation, but 86% of members reporting an increase in stress levels, and 82% a fall in staff morale, tells us that something is very badly wrong with the internal environment in probation.

Nearly 50% of members report that they are extremely stressed which can only lead to negative outcomes in relation to employee health and well-being and ultimately staff attendance and organisational performance. This level of extreme stress in any organisation would normally be a warning sign of a collapse in the psychological contract between employee and employer.

4.3 Staff Loyalty

Perhaps not surprisingly given the stress indicators above, staff loyalty to the service is rapidly ebbing away.

- Nearly 80% of respondents have considered leaving their job in the last 12 months.
- 55% are actively looking for a new job now.
- Disagreement with Transforming Rehabilitation is the main reason for wanting to leave, followed by feeling undervalued and having to compromise on standards
- Nearly 84% of probation members would not now recommend their own occupation as a career for others
- 85% do not feel valued by the National Offender Management Service which manages the NPS and the CRCs prior to sell-off.

The bidders who want to run the 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies would do well to note this deep well of discontent and disillusionment. These are the views of staff who do not want to be sold off to one of the big multi-national outsourcing companies who are vying with each other for a slice of the probation cake.

4.4 No Support for Transforming Rehabilitation

99% of respondents do not support the government's Transforming Rehabilitation reforms. This staggering figure tells you all you need to know about the confidence of probation professionals in the proposals to break up and privatise the probation service. Over 90% of respondents do not believe that the reforms will either improve probation services, or enhance offender management, or improve services to clients, or give better services to the courts, or assist with statutory partnerships or provide value for money to the tax payer.

4.5 Making the Job Harder

Nearly 90% of members say that Transforming Rehabilitation has made their working lives more difficult. This is the achievement of Chris Grayling. Here is just a small selection of the personal testimony from members who described in the survey how they were feeling about Transforming Rehabilitation:

"Perhaps I was naive before, but I now realise how dangerous our political system is when it gives so much power to people who have no real understanding of the services they have control over. My profession is being destroyed and the public's safety is at risk."

"No part of the transition to date has been straight-forward or even effective.... I am losing track of my cases and losing sleep worrying about it!"

"I am dismayed that I am being forced to work in such an unsafe way, both in terms of my own personal safety and the safety of the public. I am a dedicated, professional

probation officer, I have been forced to move offices, work with a brand new caseload of 55+ with no time to assimilate their history or evaluate their risk issues and criminogenic needs."

"It saddens and angers me - it feels like improvements and positive partnerships developed over years are being thrown away for an ideology without evidence or purpose. The bureaucracy is already becoming unmanageable and every task is ten times harder."

"By moving to CRC, I have lost use of my skills as probation officer, i.e. report writing and high-risk assessment and management of offenders. I have no idea what job I will actually perform in the future, for whom and for what salary. TR is also creating duplication of information between CRC and NPS, inefficiency, extra costs and increase risk to the public."

"My job role has changed from helping people change their lives to churning out reports on people I will never work with. My enthusiasm has gone."

"On the basis of my frontline experience in recent weeks, I really fear I will make a critical error. I am overwhelmed with high risk work and standards have dropped dramatically."

"What is most shocking is that there appears to be a complete denial /unwillingness to acknowledge the scale of the existent problems and the evidence of field workers. The public are being exposed to greater risk and clients are being failed."

"Probation is in meltdown and I fear a serious incident, every day."

"I feel demoralised, worthless and scared for the future. Chris Grayling has ruined the Criminal Justice System."

"It's putting the public at risk and creating unmanageable workloads leading to high levels of staff stress and staff leaving. Experienced and valuable staff are having their expertise diminished and they are leaving as a result."

"I used to look forward to coming to work and really enjoyed my role, but now since TR I feel sick coming into work and wishing the week away. I feel relieved when Friday comes that I have 'survived' another week. I'm exhausted all the time and most weeks on the verge of tears."

"It is ethically and morally wrong. That aside, it has created so much more paperwork and barriers to good communication which are clearly a hindrance to managing risk. Many staff are being deskilled and demoralised whilst service users are not being considered at all."

"I am very frustrated by TR and the way the Government has handled it. They do not appear to have listened to any of our concerns at any stage of the process, which makes me feel as though my views are not valued."

"It's very sad that all professionals disagree with it for valid reasons, but Grayling is steamrolling ahead irrespective."

"It has taken something that worked perfectly well and broken it. Probation officers in the CRC feel undervalued, de-skilled and second-rate, having trained for years to work with high risk offenders to be told they can no longer do this. Everything takes twice as long and it is just RUBBISH!"

“On June 1st 2014 my workload doubled. No one in management is sure of the proper procedures to follow. Experienced staff are leaving and not being replaced leaving more work for everyone else.”

“The people in government who have implemented this strategy obviously have no understanding of the role of the Probation Service and the management of risk. They have destroyed a small and effective service, fragmented service provision and destroyed morale.”

“I feel we are heading for a train crash and have a high risk to the public. We are having our work made more difficult, which is leaving staff morale at an all time low. It is worrying that a serious incident is going to happen because the government /NOMS will not listen to the staff doing the job.”

“The most disastrous dismantling of the previously high performing National Probation Service that has ever taken place. The illogical, naive and ill thought out split has caused both sections to be chronically understaffed, undervalued and de-professionalised.”

“It makes no sense. My staff feel de-skilled and de-valued. Workload pressures have increased. The IT systems do not help. It takes twice as long to do anything. I believe in the work of probation, but the changes are ill thought-out and rushed. There is a real risk that something serious will go wrong and that will impact on everyone. It is allegedly a money saving change but will cost potentially with lives in the end.”

“A shambles! Zero communication! No guidance or direction from senior management. No updates as to what's happening Staff shortages, stress for those left behind trying to hold everything together.”

“Lack of sufficient resources to implement change in timescales. No consideration given on work involved in merging 3 trusts into 1 CRC. Whole thing is badly thought out, rushed through and dangerous.”

“Disappointed that the Government did not think Probation were doing a good enough job & needed to change us. Angry that our good work is not recognised. Scared that the split is unsafe & risk has increased.”

“It goes against all the evidence of good Offender Management, is untested and unproven. Has increased the workload and administrative tasks which means there is less time to work with offenders directly.”

“It is a travesty and is a massive risk to public safety - the probation service is on its knees and new cases are not being managed properly - all my team have sent workload letters to the senior manager - there are a high number of people off work with stress, related to the TR agenda.”

“I have become an SPO form-filler; there appears to be no end to long processes within shared services /NOMS. I recall the inspection report following Hanson and White which expressed worry concerning SPOs not being able to support/manage POs due to endless paperwork and red tape. TR appears to have put us back into this danger area. Also the split has created Silos between CRC/NPS this is equally a major risk area.”

“Costly, unnecessary and extremely stress inducing. My health is suffering and everything has been made more difficult. Admin tasks are a nightmare; communication

difficult, workload becoming impossible and standards bound to fall. Minister's stubborn ignorance is unbelievable! Criminal justice should not be for profit - too many risks."

"A disgrace...Attempting to do Justice 'on the cheap' will clearly not provide the outcomes we all came into this job for (i.e. helping and supporting those in need), only line the pockets of private companies and shareholders"

"It is ridiculous rhetoric and pushed through without thought or planning - a workforce that was full of dedicated vocational public servants stressed as they struggle to manage senseless and chaotic change, and still do a decent job. It is dangerous, and will lead to increased risk to the public."

"Ridiculous and unmanageable workload; 51 MAPPA qualifying cases and 16 PSR's in one month whilst also covering Court duty. Stressed and worried what support will be offered should I have a case with an SFO. Directed to move to another office so all cases are new to me. Horrendous!"

"I believe that this is purely money-driven and a way for the government to have someone to blame when it all goes wrong i.e. whoever the contract is awarded to becomes the government's scapegoat. The officers in the CRC have far too high a caseload to do the job properly and the management pressure due to payment by results will be unbearable."

"Absolutely don't agree with TR. Justice is not justice when profit is involved. I have never felt as unhappy, deskilled and not valued in 28 years of working for Probation. I will leave as soon as am able to find another job!"

"It's hard to see where the savings are when extra staff are being taken on due to high workloads and information overload and where are the benefits to the public? NPS has no direction, no leadership, no vision."

"A complete disgrace. Fuelled by an incompetent justice minister who didn't even bother to study the evidence or at the very least pilot his insane ideas."

"What a chaotic shambles. Caseloads are up 40% in 3 weeks. Management appear clueless, IT systems don't work properly. Morale is at rock bottom, I hate seeing good officers going under."

"Unnecessary increases in bureaucracy between NPS and CRC. Massive increase in needless form filling and changes to procedures. Increased divides between former colleagues due to bad feeling. Offenders upset with so much change, almost different OM each time they attend. Disastrous and time consuming new IT."

"TR split is making staff work more competitively/aggressively rather than collaboratively. Frontline staff feel devalued, inferior to NPS due to central messaging from Director level, de-professionalised and worried about the intentions of the successful bidder. "This is a horrifying mess. What was a well run service by motivated, conscientious professionals is now ripped at the seams. I am deeply unhappy from a professional and moral perspective but also as a tax payer."

With all of the above heartfelt testimony in mind, it hardly comes as a surprise to find out that 98% of probation members do not have confidence in the Justice Secretary Chris Grayling.

5. Conclusion

With Government is so far adrift from the reality of life for probation workers, the public and their parliamentary representatives need to know the truth about Transforming Rehabilitation. Napo and UNISON have been campaigning to stop these disastrous reforms since they were announced in 2013. Our joint member survey is a wake-up call to all those who care about the safety of their local community. There really is only one way back from this plummeting approval rating for the Secretary of State:

- the CRC sell-off must be called off now
- the two parts of the probation service must be reintegrated at the earliest opportunity.

Napo and UNISON are campaigning for these outcomes and we ask others to join with us in our endeavour. Our members' testimony is the most powerful argument for this. We ask that the results of this survey are taken seriously at the very heart of government in parliament and in the media. Otherwise it will be too late.