



Prison Reform Trust submission to the Home Office Alcohol Strategy consultation

The Prison Reform Trust is an independent UK charity working to create a just, humane and effective penal system. We do this by inquiring into the workings of the system; informing prisoners, staff and the wider public; and by influencing Parliament, government and officials towards reform.

The Prison Reform Trust's main objectives are:

- reducing unnecessary imprisonment and promoting community solutions to crime
- improving treatment and conditions for prisoners and their families

Alcohol strategy and consultation

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the alcohol strategy consultation. Whilst the strategy focuses on a number of specific policy proposals regarding the sale of alcohol and licensing of premises, we wish to take this opportunity to highlight the high level of alcohol misuse and dependence amongst the prison population, the effects of alcohol as a driver to custody, and the need for appropriate identification and treatment. It is unfortunate that despite making a number of proposals for tackling alcohol dependency amongst offenders in the original strategy, the subsequent consultation document fails to make any reference to them.

The alcohol strategy makes the following recommendations:

- Develop an alcohol interventions pathway and outcome framework in four prisons, to inform the commissioning of a range of effective interventions in all types of prison.
- Increase the flexibility of the Alcohol Treatment Requirement imposed by the court as part of a community sentence.
- Produce a cost-benefit analysis to make the case for local investment in alcohol interventions and treatment services for offenders
- Work with pilot areas to develop approaches to paying for outcomes for recovery from drug or alcohol dependency.

Alcohol and crime

It would be simplistic and misleading to say that alcohol causes crime. Alcohol consumption does not inevitably result in crime and disorder. People can have a problem with alcohol misuse and drink excessively without it leading to their committing an offence. In contrast to illicit drugs, which are mostly associated with acquisitive crime, alcohol is legal, widely available and relatively cheap, so few people who are dependent steal to fuel a habit.

However, we can be confident that a significant amount of crime is alcohol-related. People do things under the influence of alcohol that they would not normally do when sober. In particular, alcohol is associated with the following types of crime:

Anti-social behaviour: Nearly one in four people in the latest British Crime Survey say drunk and rowdy behaviour is a problem in their area.¹

Offending by young people: Research tells us that young people who binge drink are more likely to become involved in crime. Nearly half (44%) of 18-24 year olds are binge drinkers and 27% of binge drinkers admitted committing an offence in 2005 – compared with 13% of drinkers who did not binge.² Children who have begun binge drinking by the age of 16 are 90% more likely to have criminal convictions by the age of 30.³

Violent crime: The 2010/11 British Crime Survey found that in nearly half (44%) of all violent incidents the victim believed the offender(s) to be under the influence of alcohol.⁴ There were 928,000 violent incidents in 2010/11 where the victim believed the offender(s) to be under the influence of alcohol. This is more than double the 419,000 drug-related incidents.⁵ Just over a quarter of all violent incidents between strangers and almost one fifth of incidents between acquaintances were said by the victim to involve alcohol.⁶ A fifth of all violent incidents and 27% of incidents involving wounding took place outside a pub or club.⁷

Careless and dangerous driving: The Department for Transport estimates that in 2010 driving over the legal alcohol limit accounted for 9,700 reported casualties or 5% of all road casualties.⁸ The provisional number of people estimated to have been killed in drink drive accidents was 250 (14% of all road fatalities). While the number of fatal and serious casualties has declined over the past decade, the proportion of young people over the legal alcohol limit who were killed or seriously injured has increased.

Alcohol misuse in the prison population

Alcohol misuse and dependence is significantly higher within the prison population than the general population. Latest figures show that nearly two-thirds of sentenced men (63%) and two-fifths of sentenced women (39%) admit to hazardous drinking prior to imprisonment. Of these, about half have a severe alcohol dependency.⁹

These figures almost certainly underestimate the scale of the problem, as many of those with alcohol problems will fail to recognise or acknowledge them.¹⁰ 22% of prisoners interviewed for the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction study said they had drunk alcohol every day in the four weeks prior to custody. However, less than one in 10 respondents (9%) said they would need a lot of help for an alcohol problem, and a further 6% said they needed a little help.

¹ Home Office (2012), Crime in England and Wales: quarterly update to September 2011, London: Home Office

² Home Office (2005), Alcohol-related crime and disorder, London: Home Office

³ Viner, R. M., and Taylor, B., (2007) Adult outcomes of binge drinking in adolescence: findings from a UK national birth cohort, J Epidemiol Community Health 2007; 61

⁴ Table 7.10, Home Office (2011) Nature of Violent Crime, London: Home Office

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Table 7.2, Home Office (2011) Nature of Violent Crime, London: Home Office

⁸ Department for Transport (2010), Reported road casualties in Great Britain: 2010 annual report, London: DoT

⁹ Prison Reform Trust (2004) Alcohol and reoffending: who cares? London: Prison Reform Trust

¹⁰ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales (2011) Annual Report 2010-11, London: HMIP and HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales (2010) Alcohol services in prisons: an unmet need, London: The Stationery Office

Alcohol treatment in prisons

We welcome the government's proposal to develop an alcohol interventions pathway and outcome framework in four prisons, to inform the commissioning of a range of effective interventions in all types of prison. In recent years a great deal of time and money has been spent developing drugs policies and treatment within prisons. In comparison, despite the similarly high rates of need, alcohol has not been given sufficient attention or resources.

Funding for, and access to, substance misuse services in prisons has continued to be primarily ring-fenced for those with a problem with illegal drugs, with alcohol often only addressed as part of a poly-substance misuse issue. The lack of central support means that services tend to be dependent on local initiatives and locally sourced funding. As a result the quality of provision can be extremely varied and limited and many of the strategies implemented by local establishments have been ineffective.¹¹

Just under half of prisons inspected by the HM Inspectorate of Prisons in 2010-11 had no alcohol-related services or programmes available.¹² Whilst there have been some pockets of progress the Inspectorate stated in its most recent annual report that "many other prisons continued to provide relatively little support, including Wandsworth, where only the Alcoholics Anonymous programme was available."¹³

This is despite significantly higher reconviction rates for prisoners who drank daily before entering custody, with 62% reconvicted within a year after release compared with those who drank less (49%).

Despite the significant level of need the Prison Service does not have a properly funded alcohol harm reduction strategy. The Prison Service's alcohol strategy published in 2004, in response to the findings and recommendations of the Prison Reform Trust's briefing paper *Alcohol and Reoffending: Who Cares?*,¹⁴ was not supported by any dedicated resources to improve the number and range of interventions available to prisoners. Funding for, and access to, substance misuse services in prisons has continued to be primarily ring-fenced for those with a problem with illegal drugs, with alcohol often only addressed as part of a poly-substance misuse issue.

According to Alcohol Concern, "one major difficulty is that where prison alcohol interventions exist, they have been grafted onto the existing CARAT treatment framework intended to support the prison drugs strategy. CARAT teams can provide services to poly drug users including those that drink but are not obliged to support prisoners that only misuse alcohol. Without additional resources this second group have to compete with drug users for attention."¹⁵

The most recent HM Inspectorate of Prisons thematic report on alcohol found that the most widely available treatments for those with alcohol-only problems was the Alcoholics

¹¹ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales (2010) *Alcohol services in prisons: an unmet need*, London: The Stationery Office

¹² HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales (2011) *Annual Report 2010-11*, London: The Stationery Office

¹³ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales (2012) *Annual Report 2011-12*, London: The Stationery Office

¹⁴ Prison Reform Trust (2004), *Alcohol and Reoffending: Who Cares?* London: Prison Reform Trust. Available at

<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Alcohol%20briefing.pdf>

¹⁵ Alcohol Concern (2007), *Tackling alcohol misuse in prison: a window of opportunity or a lost opportunity?*, London: Alcohol Concern

Anonymous service, with peer support schemes and accredited programmes least likely to be provided. Interventions need to be evidence-based if they are to work and there is little evidence that group-based alcohol awareness courses do make a difference. UK studies of abstinence-based interventions for alcohol misuse suggest that they do not result in a reduction in reoffending rates. The Inspectorate states: "AA may not always be the most suitable form of help, and the provision of abstinence-based self-help groups is not adequate for supporting everyone with an alcohol problem."¹⁶

The Prisons Inspectorate found that in every area of resettlement, and in all prison types, prisoners reporting alcohol problems were more likely to feel that they would have problems on release from prison. They were over twice as likely as other prisoners to say that they thought they would leave prison with a drug problem, and 60% said that they would leave with an ongoing alcohol problem. It is critically important that there is throughcare on release back into the community if alcohol interventions provided in prison are to make a difference.

Community solutions

Those who have committed non-violent crimes and have severe alcohol dependency problems related to their offending would be better suited attending treatment programmes in the community as part of a non-custodial punishment, rather than being given a short spell in prison during which they receive little or no help with their alcohol problems. It is therefore encouraging to see that the government plans to increase flexibility within the Alcohol Treatment Requirement to support those with serious alcohol-related offending problems. Currently only 3% of all community orders involve this requirement. This is despite a far higher percentage of offenders having an alcohol misuse problem.

We are pleased that the government appears to recognise the importance on early identification and treatment for people entering the criminal justice system with alcohol problems. However, it is unfortunate that the only commitment to supporting this is to "produce a cost-benefit analysis to make the case for local investment in alcohol interventions and treatment services for offenders." This is unlikely to lead to any meaningful change, particularly at a time of increasingly stretched local budgets. In general services are chronically underfunded, depending largely on the voluntary sector and there are long waiting lists for treatment. Designing a payment by results scheme for something as complex as drug and alcohol recovery needs extra care, attention and time to manage the risk and deliver the benefits.

Early intervention and treatment is always preferable to waiting until a crime has been committed and then making a punitive response. The Prison Reform Trust is confident that an effective alcohol strategy, and preventing and dealing with hazardous drinking, would reduce crime and improve public health.

¹⁶ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales (2010) Alcohol services in prisons: an unmet need, London: The Stationery Office