



Public Health
England



HM Prison &
Probation Service

Unlocking the potential of mutual aid in prisons

A guide to the benefits of mutual aid,
and the use of security and vetting
procedures to support its delivery in
prisons

About Public Health England

Public Health England exists to protect and improve the nation's health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities. We do this through world-leading science, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships and the delivery of specialist public health services. We are an executive agency of the Department of Health and Social Care, and a distinct delivery organisation with operational autonomy. We provide government, local government, the NHS, Parliament, industry and the public with evidence-based professional, scientific and delivery expertise and support.

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About Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service

Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice. The agency has responsibility for delivering the orders of the courts by providing for England and Wales public sector prison, probation and youth custody services; managing the provision of private sector prison, probation and youth justice services; providing information to victims and for ensuring the whole system is focused on reforming the men, women and young people it works with.

HMPPS works collaboratively with providers and partners to manage a system that maintains the highest levels of public protection, keeps prisons safe and secure, and reduces reoffending while ensuring best value for money from public resources.

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Introduction

The focus of this document is to ensure prison staff are aware of the benefits of mutual aid (MA) and are familiar with security requirements (vetting and access) as they affect MA organisations. Public Health England (PHE) has collaborated with Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) to develop advice for prison governors and directors, and other security staff, to support MA organisations in achieving the clearance their members need to run MA groups in prison, while maintaining the underlying safety and security of their establishment.

What is mutual aid?

Mutual aid (MA) refers to the social, emotional and informational support provided by, and to, members of a group at every stage of recovery. Mutual aid groups are an important source of structure and continuing support for people seeking recovery from alcohol or drug dependence. Groups often include people who are abstinent and want help to remain so – these people are actively changing their behaviour using a programme of mutual aid. They also include people who are thinking about stopping or are actively trying to stop their drug and alcohol use. Groups also exist to support families, carers, children and friends affected by substance misuse.

The most common mutual aid groups in England are 12-step fellowships and SMART Recovery. The fellowships (such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), Cocaine Anonymous (CA) and Al-Anon Family Groups) are based on a 12-step self-help philosophy developed in the 1930s. SMART Recovery applies cognitive behavioural techniques and therapeutic lifestyle change to its mutual aid groups to help people manage their recovery.

Evidence

The role played by mutual aid in promoting and sustaining recovery from drug and alcohol problems has been specifically examined by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), the Recovery Orientated Drug Treatment (RODT) Expert Group and the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD).

In NICE's Quality Statement 7: recovery and reintegration and clinical guidelines for both alcohol and drug treatment (NICE 2011, 2012, 2013), based on an evaluation of the best available evidence, recommend that people seeking help with alcohol and drug problems should be encouraged and offered support to attend mutual aid.

In 2012, 'Medications in recovery: re-orientating drug dependence treatment' (RODT 2012) highlighted the benefits of mutual aid in strengthening community integration and developing recovery capital, and made clear recommendations around promoting choice and facilitating access to mutual aid.

The ACMD Recovery Committee's second report (ACMD 2013) draws upon a wide range of international peer-reviewed evidence to demonstrate that:

- involvement with mutual aid can significantly improve recovery outcomes
- more active or frequent involvement with MA is associated with greater improvement in treatment outcomes
- substance misuse treatment providers can improve sustained recovery outcomes (including abstinence) by actively encouraging service users to engage with MA

The report also highlights emerging evidence that a close match between personal beliefs and choice of mutual aid group improves outcomes, and that non 12-step groups, such as SMART Recovery, are probably as effective as 12-step fellowships. The report concludes that further development of mutual aid in the UK should be encouraged.

This evidence base underpins the assertion in the 2017 government drug strategy that 'evidence for the efficacy of mutual aid is well-documented..' and '...can increase and sustain the gains achieved by formal treatment, in addition to challenging stigmatising views of people who use drugs', and supports the advice provided in the 2017 UK guidelines on the clinical management of drug misuse and dependence (DHSC 2017):

"Building resilience is a key task centred on a reconnection with, or development of, activities that provide valued meaning and purpose. Work, involvement with peer support and involvement with mutual aid are all good examples of such support structures."

There is also evidence that simply providing information and leaving individuals to decide whether they make contact with a mutual aid group often results in their non-attendance or quickly dropping out (Humphreys 1999). A more proactive approach is recommended, where attendance at MA groups is actively promoted and individuals are explicitly encouraged and supported to attend and engage with the group. Evidence shows that this kind of approach is usually more effective (Timko, DeBenedetti and Billow 2006).

Prison-based mutual aid

Substance misuse is a major barrier to rehabilitating people in custody and their reintegration back into the community. Quick access to the right kinds of services in

custody and post-release is essential for helping people reduce their substance misuse and offending, and sustain their recovery. The evidence shows that MA can improve treatment outcomes and also contribute to reducing offending behaviour.

The Patel report (DHSC 2010) reviewed drug treatment and interventions for people in prison, people moving between prisons and the continuity of care for people on release from prison. The review group found that intensive courses and programmes, including 12-step programmes, were highly valued:

“Treatment alone can only go so far and we need to be more ambitious in helping drug users to make lasting changes, to maintain their recovery and ensure that there is help and support from outside the treatment system – family and friends, peer support/mutual aid networks, access to housing, and education and employment opportunities.”

The beneficial impact of MA includes developing social capital and positive self-identity, which is supported by evidence from:

1. The Ministry of Justice’s analytical series on transforming rehabilitation (MOJ 2014), which found that well developed social networks, such as MA groups, help to stop people from committing crime.
2. The University of Glasgow’s evidence briefing on desistance from crime (McNeill and others 2012), which sets out a range of principles for criminal justice practice, including the importance of developing strong positive social networks, and of recognising and celebrating progress.
3. The National Offender Management Service’s guidance on better outcomes for women offenders (NOMS 2015), which advises that activities exposing people, particularly young adults, to socially positive peers can support the development of an identity that is seen as benefiting other people, or society as a whole (that is being “helpful” or “good”).

MA provides a framework for people with experience of substance misuse and prison to use their knowledge and life skills to support people in prison to develop social capital. Having the opportunity to make a difference and give something back through helping others also becomes part of MA members’ recovery journey and builds their recovery capital.

While most groups cannot be directly commissioned, there are a number of ways to encourage and promote the development of a range of MA groups within the prison setting.

Advice for prison governors and directors

Prisons provide a significant opportunity for effective engagement with mutual aid. Many recovered substance misusers report that they attended mutual aid initially as a distraction from the routine of prison life, but grew to appreciate the support and hope such groups can provide.

There is evidence that MA can enhance treatment outcomes and can make an important contribution to reducing offending, so it makes sense to fully exploit this opportunity for encouraging change, especially when mutual aid represents such good value for money. MA groups can be established and run within the prison for no additional cost or (in the case of a SMART Recovery group) for a very small outlay.

There is a long-standing history of good relations between prisons and MA organisations. However, there is some anecdotal evidence that the availability of MA groups in prison may have dropped recently. Reduced staffing levels and the introduction of the core day may be partly responsible for reducing the availability of staff to facilitate access to MA groups at suitable times. Prison officers are more likely to be able to facilitate meeting attendance during the day, but the volunteers who run the meetings often have full-time employment and are only available to run meetings during the evenings and at weekends. Where meetings are arranged to take place during the day, there is often a need for mutual aid groups to have several volunteers cleared at establishments to ensure someone is always available to take meetings.

While the evidence suggests that it is important to support the delivery of MA in prisons, the underlying safety and security of the prison must be paramount at all times. This means ensuring that the programmes are appropriate for a prison setting, the individuals delivering them are suitable, and that risk is properly assessed in each case. Details of the security vetting procedures in place to assess these risks are included in appendix A.

Some prisons allow certain MA groups in but not others. The [Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs Recovery Committee](#) report found that people are more likely to engage with MA if they are able to attend the group of their choice. While the final decision rests with the governor or director, there is a need to promote MA choice in prisons.

Clinks, a charity that works with offenders, developed [guidance to help volunteers requiring security clearance to undertake rehabilitative work in prisons](#) to better understand and navigate the vetting process. This guidance is being adapted specifically for members of mutual aid groups and will be published separately. It will include information on how to apply and how to increase the chances of success for

gaining security clearance, as well as tables and figures to enhance understanding of the most important issues.

Communication and training

Shared understanding and support between MA members and prison staff can be greatly enhanced by inviting MA representatives to attend prison drug and alcohol strategy (or equivalent) meetings. This can help to bring about a better appreciation of what MA has to offer, promoting greater engagement at a practical level. It also provides an opportunity for the benefits of their 'lived experience' to more directly inform strategic decision-making.

It would also enable MA representatives to more fully comprehend what it's like to plan effective drug and alcohol treatment services in a prison setting.

Inviting MA members to address prison substance misuse meetings can also help to promote the effectiveness of MA with prison and drug treatment staff. The relevance of MA involvement in such meetings will need to be determined locally by each establishment.

The prison officer entry level training course does not currently contain any information about mutual aid. However, prisons can consider whether to include information about MA in local staff induction programmes and it may be helpful to provide signposting to further information about mutual aid.

Central HMPPS contacts for further enquiries

For further information, please contact:

Approvals and Compliance Team (Recruitment-decisions@hmps.gsi.gov.uk or 01633 631297)

Appendices

Appendix A: security vetting and clearance procedures

There is real value in people who have lived experience of serving a prison sentence or other involvement in the criminal justice system, providing role modelling and support to prison-based mutual aid groups. They can play an essential role in promoting recovery, providing support to people in custody in the early stages of recovery and helping them to maintain strong recovery networks after release.

MA organisations have raised concerns about difficulties they have experienced obtaining security clearances for their members who have previous convictions, to work as volunteers in prisons to establish new groups or chair existing groups. Their offending history can result in some people being unsuccessful through the normal centralised vetting approach.

Enhanced vetting

Public sector prisons have recently seen some fundamental changes to the vetting process with the introduction of online vetting forms, which have simplified the vetting process and experience for applicants and vetting contact points (VCPs).

For non-directly employed workers

1. The VCP at the establishment meets the applicant, verifies the applicant's identity and right to work and takes copies of the relevant documentation.
2. The VCP will complete a clearance request form (CRF) and submit it to Shared Services Connected Limited (SSCL).
3. SSCL will send the applicant an email with a link to the online portal through which they access the vetting questionnaire.
4. The applicant needs to complete the vetting questionnaire and upload their right to work and ID documents.
5. The establishment no longer has much involvement in the process – the communication throughout the process is between the applicant and SSCL.
6. The applicant will be notified of the vetting result by SSCL. Where the result is a fail, the applicant can appeal this decision by writing to the approvals and compliance team (ACT) although there must be grounds for appeal.
7. The case will be reviewed and the applicant and establishment will be notified of the outcome.

There have been no changes to the vetting process for private sector prisons which continue to send paper documents to SSCL.

If an applicant fails vetting and the prison governor or director believes there is mitigating evidence to overturn that decision, they can submit a business case requesting that the approvals and compliance team reconsider the central vetting decision, and the case will be reviewed accordingly. Details on this can be found in [PSI 05/2015](#).

If it is known at the outset that an applicant is likely to fail enhanced vetting due to previous offending behaviour, the VCP can request that Standard Plus (see below) be considered concurrently to the enhanced vetting. This can reduce processing time and help inform any decision on suitability quickly and efficiently.

Standard Plus

The main objective of Standard Plus is to improve and provide opportunities for workers and volunteers with previous criminal convictions to work within prison and community environments without increasing risks and compromising safety and security.

Standard Plus is for ex-offenders who would not usually be successful through the usual security vetting procedures because of their previous convictions. Standard Plus clearance can be used for any applicant applying for a non-directly employed role who is likely to fail enhanced vetting due to their offending history and who is applying for a role delivering rehabilitative activities (activities relating to reducing re-offending). Applicants must fully declare all previous spent and unspent convictions and cautions (including the outcomes).

There are currently two types of Standard Plus clearance and associated Prison Service Instructions (PSIs) that provide an explanation of the policy and procedures that must be followed. These are:

1. [Additional risk criteria for ex-offenders working in prison and community settings \(PSI 27/2014\)](#)

This criteria applies to individuals whose community or suspended sentence order, licence or post sentence supervision has been successfully completed and there is no longer a right to recall.

2. [Using offenders as mentors in the community and in custody \(PSI 39/2014\)](#)

This policy applies to men and women post-release who may still be serving a period on licence. Individuals on licence may only be considered for Standard Plus if they have served at least half of the licence element of their sentence (for those who

have received custodial sentences)or at least half of their community or suspended sentence order (for those in the community).

Standard Plus clearance is only valid for twelve months. Upon expiry of valid clearance, a prison, community rehabilitation company (CRC) or the National Probation Service (NPS) has to request a renewal of clearance should the individual be continuing in the role for which they were originally cleared. Where the individual will be prison based, the clearance is not transferable which means that a separate request is required for each prison that the MA organisation may wish the individual to enter. This is because each establishment is different and will have varying risks and the governor or director is accepting the risk based on their establishment and no-one else's.

Overview of procedure

Where the applicant fails enhanced vetting but the governor or director wishes to consider an applicant for Standard Plus clearance, they must send a completed request for additional information form (Annex B of PSI 27/2014) to the approvals and compliance team (ACT) unless applications for enhanced vetting and Standard Plus are already running concurrently.

The ACT will provide the governor or director with all relevant information they have available to them which will assist in the decision-making process of whether they are content to accept the risk(s) posed. This will include PSI 27/2014, the applicant's Police National Computer (PNC) record and any other relevant information. They would also be advised whether the applicant is in scope or not. If the applicant is not in scope the governor or director will be advised that the ACT do not approve the request, but ultimately the governor or director can still accept the risk and overrule the decision.

Where an applicant will need access to multiple establishments, instead of completing a vetting questionnaire for each one, the governor or director of any establishment can send a request for further information (Annex B of PSI 27/2014) to the ACT who will use existing information to process the application. As with the primary establishment, the ACT then provides each establishment with the relevant information.

The governor or director will delegate authority to a head of function within the establishment to carry out a local risk assessment which includes information on the role the applicant will be fulfilling, offending history, whether they can be unsupervised and any restrictions to be put in place (Annex A of PSI 27/2014 provides a template for this).

Where the governor or director is content to accept the risk, a confirmation form (Annex C of PSI 27/2014) will be completed by the establishment and sent to the ACT for approval. The individual's vetting record will be updated and confirmation will be issued

to the prison that Standard Plus has been approved and when it expires. Should Standard Plus clearance still be required after this date the prison should make a request for renewal to the ACT (in the format set out in Annex D to PSI 27/2014) and every twelve months thereafter for as long as the individual will be continuing in the role.

Individuals who have served sentences for a particular specified offence, where the underlying risk posed to safety and security in a prison is judged significant, will be considered appropriate for Standard Plus clearance only in exceptional circumstances. Any such application will need to be supported with a business case and documentary evidence stating the benefits of using the individual in that role.

The decision of the governor or director is final in all cases and there is no right of appeal.

Increasing the use of Standard Plus

Standard Plus has been available since 2012 but it appears that it is still not being used to its full potential. In 2015, only 57% of all establishments in England and Wales were using Standard Plus as a clearance method for people applying to work in an establishment who have failed enhanced vetting because of their previous offences.

Where appropriate, governors or directors are strongly advised to consider using Standard Plus to facilitate security clearance for men and women with previous convictions who wish to run mutual aid groups within the prison.

There is the potential for vetting difficulties to cause volunteers (in particular) to walk away from a role to which they have been recruited. Where possible, prisons should ensure that when applications come in from volunteers, VCPs are aware of the need to be as flexible and facilitative as possible.

Some prison areas have trialled having fully vetted people who regularly run MA meetings, and allowing other MA members to run meetings occasionally on a photo card identification. This helps to optimise the availability and consistency of meetings.

Appendix B: flow charts for security vetting and clearance procedures

Diagram 1: steps in the enhanced vetting prison process

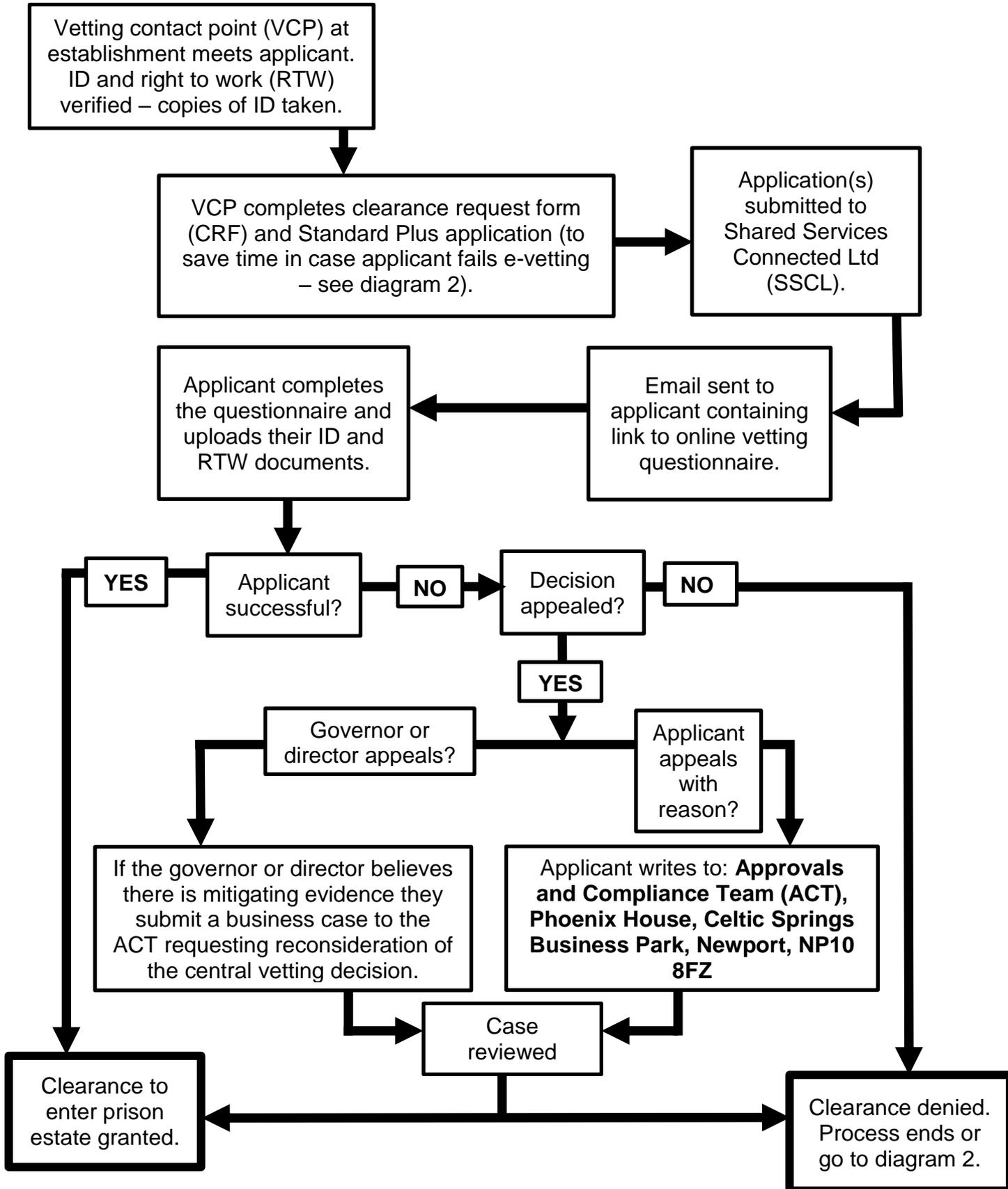
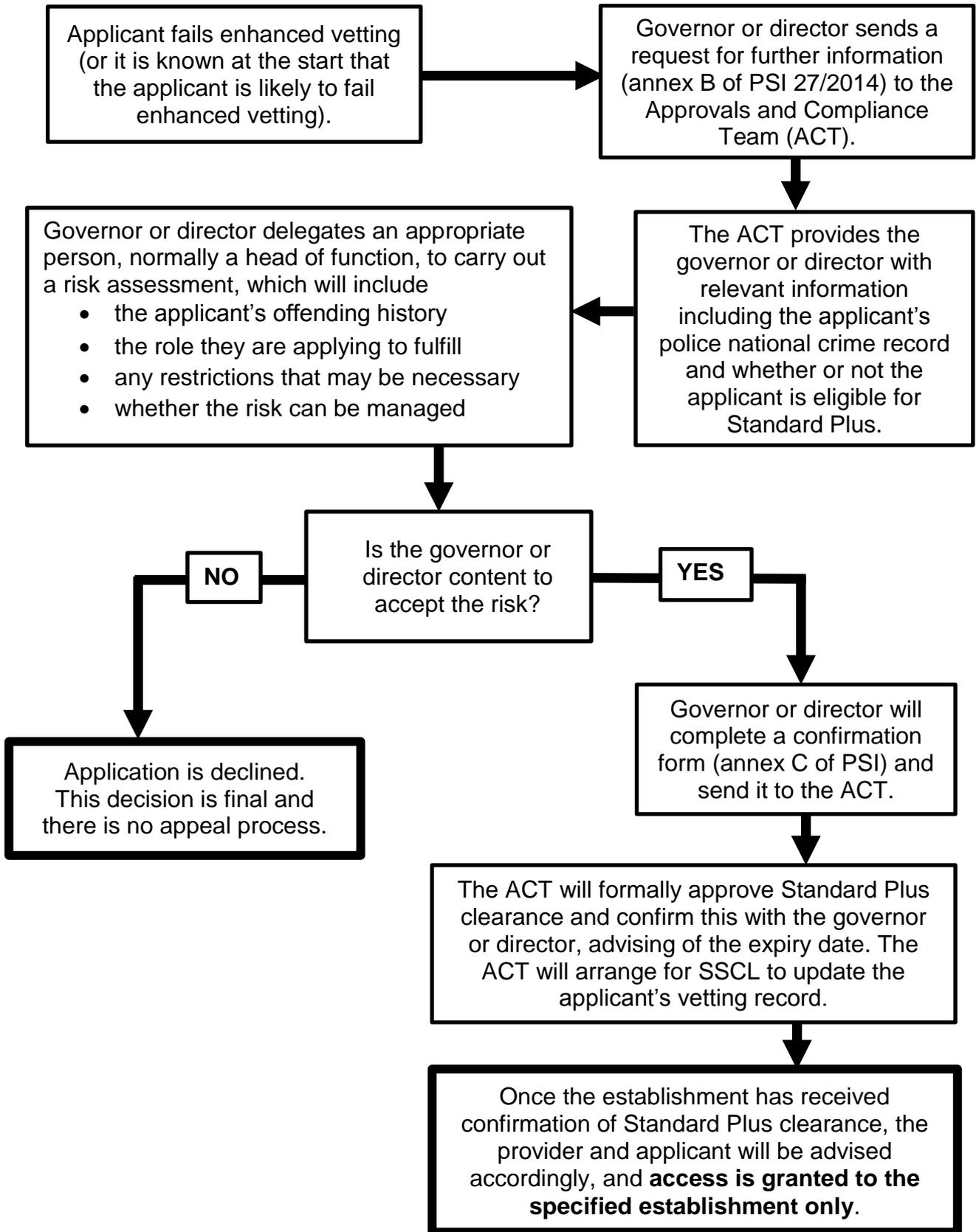


Diagram 2: steps in the Standard Plus prison process



Appendix C: case studies

Case study 1: D's story on Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous in HMP Belmarsh

I picked up using alcohol and drugs at an early age as my dad, uncle and cousins drank and used drugs. From the age of 11 to 24 years old I was doing drugs and alcohol.

In my teens I started robbing (including from my family which I promised I would never do) to feed my habit and that lasted for about 9 years. Towards the end of this time I was caught and sent to prison. I spent some time in Belmarsh prison where I found Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA). I started to attend the AA meetings initially because it was great to get out of the cells but I was still using at first then managed to stay clean.

I did manage to stay clean for a while when I came out of Belmarsh prison but I started using again, probably because I was not using the tools. In total I was out for four months before I was sent back to prison for 7 months. This time I was sent to High Down prison where I was introduced to a 12-step programme.

I went straight on to an intensive six-week, four and a half days a week, abstinence-based programme because I had managed to stay clean for 21 days.

I finished the programme and started attending the 12-step AA and NA meetings, they came into High Down on a regular basis. It was good to see others attending the prison who were clean and had left and were living a full life. I also managed to find myself an AA sponsor.

I started running my own meetings during and after the programme. If the prison officers could not find us a room I would run the meeting on the wing in my cell. Sometimes only two people would attend but if it meant we both stayed clean it had served its purpose.

I have left prison and have been clean for 22 months. I'm living in a dry house (independent living) where I can stay for two years. I hope to do some voluntary work and I will be applying to my local college to do a counselling course. I have also reconnected with my family.

I still attend AA and NA meetings for drink and drugs – between two and seven meetings per week – mainly for alcohol as that was my main problem. I also have a sponsor, who I met in Belmarsh prison and he is helping me to work through the steps.

Case study 2: A's story on Narcotics Anonymous in HMP Bronzefield

My name is 'A' and I'm an addict in recovery. I found recovery in 2010 in HMP Bronzefield, when I was 44 years old.

On my induction into the prison I saw a substance misuse worker, who offered me groups run by the prison, but also asked me if I had ever been to a Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meeting. I had never heard of anyone who had stopped using drugs and I thought once I had become an addict I would die an addict, but I wanted bail, and I thought if I did all the groups, I would look good in front of the judge and stand a better chance of getting bail. I didn't get bail, and was on remand for seven months.

I attended all the groups offered, and started going to the NA meetings, which were held for an hour every Saturday morning. At first I was suspicious of the NA Hospitals and Institutions service (H&I) members, but realised after listening to their experiences that they had had similar experiences in life as I had. For the first time in years I found that I had some hope in my life, and realised that I too could stay clean and live a productive life, if I attended meetings, and follow suggestions of the NA programme.

My dad died whilst I was in prison, and I was allowed to visit him before his death, and go to his funeral, of which I am grateful, as he saw me clean, I found comfort in the NA meetings, as I was able to share what was going on for me and felt real empathy and compassion from the other group members.

I loved the NA meetings in prison, and looked forward to them every Saturday morning, I was upset and disappointed when they had to be cancelled, the H&I members encouraged me to find meetings when I was released from prison, which I had made a decision that I would do. I have attended meetings ever since.

Being in recovery has changed my life, I'm no longer living a life of crime, I am a productive member of society, I went back to college, and re-educated myself, and have been in employment for the last two years, in a job that I love. And I now have the privilege of helping facilitate NA meetings in prisons, helping carry the NA message, as it was carried to me.

Looking back I am so grateful for NA H&I members giving up their personal time to come and share their experience strength and hope to prisoners. If I had not gone to prison I may have never found recovery as no one I knew ever stopped taking drugs.

Case study 3: K's story on Narcotics Anonymous in HMP Wormwood Scrubs

In 1984 I was introduced to mutual aid meetings (Narcotics Anonymous) whilst serving a sentence in Wormwood Scrubs.

Prior to that I had been using Class A drugs and alcohol for over 19 years. I had spent around 5 years in prison and had over 30 convictions, mainly for drug related offences. I was seen as a bit of a hopeless case, indeed I had made many tries at rehabs as well, but never managed to stay clean on completion. It wasn't that I didn't want to stop using it was just I found it incredibly difficult to do so on my own.

When I went to prison in 1984 I was relieved as I was in terrible physical shape, I think I spent the first 3 weeks in the prison hospital. While there another inmate told me that there was a weekly Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meeting in the prison. I had heard of AA but never NA and went along, not because I thought it might work but more out of curiosity and boredom.

I sat in the meeting, cynical, a guy came in from outside the prison to take the meeting, he said he was a recovering addict and had been clean (drug and alcohol free) for 18 months. He told his story and I knew he had been as crazy as I was, the thing was though he was staying clean, working and seemed to be happy. I had never met anyone before that had stopped using what I thought of as 'hard drugs' and was happy... let alone working. The few people I had come across who had stopped were heavy drinkers or cannabis users, and none of them seemed happy or had changed much other than what they were using to get high. In retrospect, I realise that what happened in that first meeting was I got some hope, if he could do it maybe I could.

I kept going to the meetings in the prison, and managed to stay away from drugs throughout my sentence. There were about 5 of us who went to the meeting regularly and we used to support each other, it was a case of together we could do what we had never been able to do alone, it was mutual aid in action though we didn't know it then. I looked forward to the meeting as it gave me the strength and willingness to stay clean. On occasion, due to prison staff shortages, the person who came in to take the meeting was unable to get across to the wing. When this happened we went ahead and had our own meeting and I began to realise that it wasn't the person coming in that made the meeting it was the people in the meeting with a desire to stay clean. There was a real bond in our common cause, not only did I have hope I also felt I belonged.

Eventually I had to leave because my sentence was up, I had a real fear of going because I knew I could stay clean in prison but every time I had left prison before I had started using again. Someone from NA met me the morning I was released, we went to a NA meeting that lunchtime, the people in the meetings were really supportive knowing I had just got out of prison, I found it hard to ask for help, but having been there

themselves they kind of instinctively knew what I needed. Someone put me up for 6 weeks till I could buy a bed.

There have been untold instances that I could write about of one addict helping another addict throughout my journey. The past 30 odd years has been an incredible journey, I went from being hopeless, homeless, unemployed and unemployable to loving my work, having a beautiful family, friends and a beautiful home. It hasn't all been roses, but everyone has their ups and downs not just addicts, the great thing about NA and mutual aid is I have never had to deal with things alone. Mutual aid works for life not just getting clean.

Case study 4: MW's story on facilitating SMART Recovery courses

I completed the SMART Recovery course a couple of years ago and a big part of that course was the mutual aid from the other group members. Hearing other people talk about their experiences made me understand my own issues a bit more. It also made me realise that the things I had struggled with in the past weren't unique to me, which was a very big eye opener.

I now help to facilitate SMART Recovery courses and I can see the group members bounce off each other. Each one has a say and you can actually see the other members nodding along in agreement with what's being said. The support each individual offers the group is refreshing to see. This in itself helps to break down barriers and helps bring more out of everyone during the sessions. This type of group setting makes you feel at ease which is the best way I think to get the most out of people.

Case study 5: the benefits of mutual aid at HMP Liverpool by a treatment service provider

Mutual aid has been running at HMP Liverpool for many years. The drug and alcohol service arrange and facilitate Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA) and SMART Recovery courses, whilst recovery workers ensure it is offered to all service users who want to participate. Mutual aid and fellowship groups are delivered in line with the same messages as in the community, albeit there has to be some logistical differences due to the prison environment. Service users are given all information on release of how to continue with this support.

SMART is well received at HMP Liverpool and appears to be a good support for the service users, the positives are that they are gaining new tools to help them remain drug free in custody, and following release. We run this group once a week, and SMART allows men to get used to accessing support from SMART giving them a good understanding of how mutual aid sessions are run in the community, thus encouraging a drug free lifestyle and reduction in criminal thinking. Several of the men have said they will access SMART upon release.

Attendance is generally good but occasionally there has been a low turnout which has been linked to a combination of reasons, such as prisoners not being unlocked, choosing not to attend, conflicting appointments or wing lock downs which can't be helped. When the men attend they participate really well and they find the meeting very useful and supportive. For example, this week one of the service users is preparing a flip chart for a smart tool to be discussed at the next meeting.

The AA meeting is held on Thursdays and is facilitated by a volunteer who comes into HMP Liverpool and is in recovery himself. The meeting is generally well attended with a core of about five men who attend on a weekly basis. The meetings are well received and focus on the same principles as AA in the community. Men benefit from it as they are able to support each other when topics arise during shares. It is also an opportunity for men to be listened to when they are sharing. General feeling in the room during these meetings is one of mutual respect.

We do come across barriers within the establishment, with NA workers in particular. However, for many years we overcame this by linking with the NA fellowship in the community, and with guidance a service user along with a member of staff facilitated the sessions. I am now pleased to say, that after working with security and the prison governor we now have managed to enable access for NA workers, and the group runs once a fortnight. This was achieved by perseverance and ensuring the appropriate vetting took place as per prison service instruction for Standard Plus vetting. With normal vetting, due to previous convictions it would be almost impossible to get NA fellows in, but with Standard Plus this was achieved.

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