



Coordinated measures for clients on parole

An evaluation of the Swedish Prison and Probation Service's trial programme with reintegration groups

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English summary of Brå report 2020:15

Preface

In April 2018, the Swedish Prison and Probation Service was commissioned by the government to conduct a trial programme with so-called reintegration groups. The purpose of the trial programme was that the probation service and other actors would be able to make plans at an early stage and facilitate the reintegration of clients into society by means of coordinated measures.

In March 2019, Brå was commissioned by the government to evaluate the trial programme. The objective was to evaluate whether the trial programme has enabled the Prison and Probation Service to create the conditions to reduce recidivism among clients and conduct a nationwide reintegration programme, and to create the conditions for improved and long-term reintegration work.

The primary target audience for the report is the government and the Prison and Probation Service. The report may also be of interest to other organisations that have contact with the Prison and Probation Service and its clients. Brå hopes that the evaluation can also constitute a basis for continued discussions concerning how reintegration groups can be developed.

The report was written by Anna Öström, and Anna-Lena Beutgen also participated in the evaluation. The report has been reviewed by Professor Malin Åkerström at Lund University and by Per Germundsson, who is a senior lecturer at Malmö University. Valuable feedback has also been provided by a reference group connected to the project: Erika Sallander, Charlotta Lindell, Monika Hjeds Löfmark, Elisabeth Nordén, Petra Bergnor and Linnea Littman. Particular thanks are extended to all clients and employees at the Prison and Probation Service and other organisations who have shared their experiences of the trial programme.

Summary

With the aim of preventing recidivism, the Prison and Probation Service was commissioned by the government in April 2018 to conduct a trial programme in order to develop and reinforce the collaboration between the probation service and other relevant actors.

The government clearly expressed that the collaboration would involve the social services, healthcare providers, and public authorities such as the Public Employment Service, the Enforcement Authority, the Police Authority and the Social Insurance Agency, as well as civil organisations. The intention was that the collaborating actors would use reintegration groups to facilitate early and coordinated measures for the clients, which were in turn expected to contribute to their reintroduction to society.

Reintegration study as an important point of reference

As part of the assignment, the government referred the Prison and Probation Service to a reintegration study for the implementation of the trial programme. Among other things, this study identifies which preparations are necessary and which areas should be focused on in the reintegration programme, and states that the reintegration group and collaborating activities should be held together by a reintegration coordinator. Furthermore, the actors included in the reintegration group for each client shall jointly, carefully and at an early stage plan for the client's release, take responsibility for ensuring that measures implemented during the time at the custodial institution are completed and followed up, ensure that some form of employment (including training, etc.) is guaranteed and that the client receives debt-management advice where necessary, and ensure that the client is provided with a support contact from civil society.

Those clients whom the study suggested should be eligible for the reintegration programme were clients who would be conditionally released under supervision within the timeframe of the programme, who had been assessed as being at medium to high risk of recidivism, whose sentences had not been deemed to be too short, who required measures to be taken by several social actors, who had a motivation to end their criminal behaviour and who would not be expelled from the country in conjunction with their conditional release. The study was, however, clear that, in its preparations for the trial programme, the Prison and Probation Service would need to conduct in-depth analyses of the target group, as well as of the form and content of the trial programme.

Brå's evaluation assignment

In March 2019, Brå was commissioned by the government to evaluate the Prison and Probation Service's trial programme for reintegration groups. The purpose was to assess whether the programme has provided the Prison and Probation Service with better conditions to reduce recidivism, to implement the approach on a national basis, and to conduct long-term and improved reintegration work. According to the assignment, Brå's evaluation was to provide answers to the following questions:

- What differences in relation to the regular structure are deemed to represent key factors in this context?
- How and to what extent had the trial programme been conducted?
- Had the conditions for collaboration in the individual case changed? If so, in what way?
- How had the actors involved experienced the programme?

In order to answer these questions and to analyse the performance and collaboration as a process in change, Brå conducted a process evaluation. Data collection was performed by means of documentation review, questionnaires, interviews and observations.

Few clients participated in the trial programme

The trial programme was tested in three municipalities: Umeå, Norrköping and Gothenburg. In these municipalities, a total of 27 clients were included in the reintegration programme and, as part of a reintegration group, received coordinated measures during 2019 and up until 30 June 2020.

All clients who had at least one collaboration meeting with the reintegration groups during the period of the trial programme have been included in the report. Nine of the clients were in Umeå, three were in Norrköping and 15 were in Gothenburg. Six of the clients from the probation service in Norrköping and Umeå terminated their participation, moved to a different municipality or died during the period of the trial programme. Accordingly, only 21 of the clients remained in the reintegration programme at the end of the assignment.

Few clients means limited experiences

As a result of the low number of participating clients, several of the actors included in the collaboration had either not had the opportunity to take part in the work with clients or had only been able to participate to a limited extent. The low level of client participation also made it difficult for the Prison and Probation Service to draw any significant conclusions concerning the work, as well as making it hard for Brå to evaluate the trial programme.

There are several reasons for the low level of client participation. The main reasons are that the Prison and Probation Service did not conduct any in-depth analysis of the target group and client base in the preparatory phase, that the criteria for the selection of clients who would be asked to participate were not managed in the same way in the different municipalities, and that there were shortcomings in the client follow-up both locally and nationally.

Probation offices had only a short time to prepare the work

It takes time to establish collaboration, and the probation offices were only given a relatively short period of time to prepare the work on a local basis. Both managers and employees in the probation service should have been involved in the planning work at an early stage. For example, the Prison and Probation Service's start-up meetings with the relevant probation offices were first held in October 2018 – six months after the Prison and Probation Service had received the assignment from the government and just a couple of months before the work with the clients was due to begin.

The support and steering documents that were drawn up lacked adequate descriptions for the implementation of the trial programme. Examples of things that were missing include a clear client focus, starting points for the work of case workers, and adaptations to local conditions. It is reasonable to assume that beginning the collaboration between the local and national levels at an earlier stage would have created better conditions for the work.

The national leadership should have taken greater responsibility

It was the Prison and Probation Service's ambition that the probation offices should test and develop the collaboration locally, but the leadership and management at a national level should have taken more responsibility for the creation of a clear framework and to clear obstacles along the way.

Examples include that the national level should have defined how many clients needed to take part in the programme in order to achieve the stated goals of the assignment, ensured that the institutions had full understanding of the trial programme, conducted discussions with other public authorities about any time-limited agreements, and produced forms of measurement for the following up of the results. The absence of forms of measurement for follow-up has contributed not only to shortcomings in the follow-up for the trial programme, but also to the lack of a common agreement of what is to be considered a good or bad result.

Brå realises that the pressures experienced by the Prison and Probation Service during recent years may have affected the implementation of the trial programme. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic also had a certain impact on the opportunities for collaboration during the spring of 2020.

Early and coordinated measures

The working approach in the trial programme can be seen as a reinforcement of an already existing approach. Despite the limited client base, it is possible to identify two aspects that are characteristic of the way in which the work developed as part of the trial programme: early and coordinated measures.

Coordinated measures felt to give better planning

Although clear and coordinated measures had initially been more time-consuming for the probation service and other collaborating actors, the working approach was perceived as being effective in the long term. It also meant that, on the whole, the clients participating in the programme received good planning prior to their conditional release – not only because the actors worked together to review the clients' needs, but also because it was possible for roles and responsibilities to be allocated at meetings together with the clients.

Ordinarily, the probation service's case workers make contact with the clients and their points of contact at the custodial institution around one month before their conditional release. As part of the reintegration programme, the average time for the first meeting with the client was fully three months before. There were, however, major variations. Two clients, for example, were able to have their first meeting with the collaborating actors fully eight months before their conditional release, whilst five clients first met the actors less than one month before their conditional release. With the exception of these five clients, the measures had generally been planned carefully and in plenty of time.

Most collaboration meetings in Gothenburg

One way to gain an overview of the work of the reintegration groups is to look at how many collaboration meetings were held in each municipality and for each client. A total of 95 collaboration meetings were held between clients, the probation service and the collaborating actors, of which two thirds were held in Gothenburg. Around half took place when the clients were at the custodial institution, and half when the clients had received their conditional release.

In the reintegration study, it was stated that it should be appropriate to hold at least four or five collaboration meetings between the beginning and the end of the client's effective period. It was only possible to follow a few clients throughout the entire period, but the evaluation shows that it was mainly the clients in Gothenburg who were able to have collaboration meetings in accordance with the intentions of the reintegration study.

Working approach did not represent any extensive changes

Initially, a majority of employees in the probation service felt that the work with reintegration groups would involve quite major changes. At the end of the trial programme, however, employees in Gothenburg stated that any changes only occurred to a minor extent.

The work in Gothenburg involved the largest number of clients, and a change in the way of working may initially have been perceived as being greater than it actually was. After a period of working according to new guidelines, however, the new situation may soon have been felt to be 'normal'. The changed perception may also have been because much of what had been proposed in the reintegration study had, to a certain extent, already been implemented in Gothenburg. At the beginning of the trial programme, for example, good collaboration had already been established between the social services and the Public Employment Service, which have been key actors in the municipality's trial programme.

The perception may also have been influenced by a change at national level in the approach to how the work with reintegration groups was to be performed, where initially it was not to be conducted within regular structures, but the position was later changed so that it would be conducted within regular structures.

Collaboration in individual cases

During the period of the trial programme, the probation service adopted the role of reintegration coordinator in the municipalities. The reintegration study stated that each reintegration group should focus on the client's problems with addiction, mental ill-health, employment/education, debt and/or accommodation, and the client should be provided with a support contact from civil society.

Confidentiality obligation overridden by consent from the clients

In order to share information about the clients between the various organisations, the probation service inspectors obtained the consent of those clients who had agreed to participate in the programme. This provision of consent was of crucial importance to the work with reintegration groups.

Two probation offices obtained written consent, and one office obtained consent in oral form. Regardless of the form of consent, it is important for the legal certainty of the clients that the consent was documented. A review of the documentation at the end of 2019, however, revealed that the consent provided by around half of the clients had not been documented. This was rectified for several of the clients during spring 2020, but documented consent was still missing for some clients when the trial programme came to an end. At the end of the trial programme, a written document was drawn up that regulates how consent is to be documented.

Probation service in Umeå had most collaborating actors

With regard to collaborating actors, the probation service in Umeå succeeded in securing the inclusion of all actors that had been stated as being of importance in the reintegration study and in the Prison and Probation Service's assignment description. In Norrköping and Gothenburg, significantly fewer actors were included in the trial programme. The low number of clients that participated in the programme in Umeå, however, meant that several of the social actors included did not have any involvement in the work with the clients.

The social services represent the actor that, in all municipalities, participated in the largest number of client cases, followed by the Public Employment Service. These actors were also those with which the probation service already enjoyed relatively good collaboration before the start of the trial programme. Other public authorities and civil organisations only participated in a few cases – for example, only the probation service in Umeå succeeded in securing the involvement of the Enforcement Authority in collaboration meetings with the clients.

Majority of men convicted of narcotics offences

Of the 27 clients who were subject to measures as part of the trial programme, the majority were men: just four women participated. Around half of the clients were granted conditional release during 2019, and the other half during the first six months of 2020. Fully one third of the clients had been convicted of offences related to narcotics. The next most common crimes were robbery, assault, aggravated theft and rape. A few clients had been convicted of murder, serious weapons offences, serious abuse of women or serious drunken driving. To a large extent, they experienced both addiction problems and mental ill-health, and also required measures relating to accommodation, employment, family and relationships, as well as measures aimed at changing patterns of criminal behaviour.

Measures generally matched the clients' needs

As a result of collaboration, the matching of the clients' needs, measures implemented at the custodial institution and measures related to the conditional release was generally good. There were, however, cases where (for example) a coordinated individual plan should perhaps have been implemented in an additional instance, or where coordinating measures should have included the Police Authority or a dedicated support organisation for those attempting to break free from links with organised crime, and there were a few cases where the Enforcement Authority could have helped by providing guidance with regard to the clients' problems with debt. In addition, voluntary organisations from civil society were only included in the collaboration for a small number of clients.

Of the 21 clients who completed the reintegration programme, five clients were granted conditional release at the end of the trial programme. It has not been at all possible for Brå to follow these clients following their conditional release. Of the remaining 16 clients, half had received some form of employment (e.g. education, work training or an employed position).

Because the problem with addiction was so widespread within the group, it was important for certain clients to first undergo a programme of treatment before they could be considered for any measures to reintroduce them to the labour market. A total of seven clients were offered a chance to undergo treatment for addiction.

The issue of accommodation proved difficult for the collaborating actors to resolve – not least because of the limited availability of housing in the municipalities. Several clients were, however, able to be admitted to treatment centres in conjunction with their conditional release, which provided a temporary solution to the problem of accommodation. Five clients received an offer for assisted accommodation either in conjunction with their conditional release or shortly afterwards.

With regard to support contacts in civil society, most clients in Umeå and Norrköping were allocated an assistant supervisor to help them in their daily lives. In Gothenburg, the social action group was involved in the work with clients, which meant that the use of assistant supervisors was not adjudged to be necessary in all cases.

Experiences of the trial programme

In a questionnaire sent on three occasions by Brå to the participants in the trial programme, many of the questions concerned a selection of key mechanisms for good collaboration that were defined in the research. These relate to resources, consensus and regulations, as well as the collaborating actors' availability, commitment and knowledge of each other's organisations. Because a number of actors were absent from the trial programme, the questionnaire was primarily answered by people from the probation service, the social services, the Public Employment Service and, to a certain extent, providers of addiction and substance abuse treatment services (including psychiatric services).

The results show that there had not been a shortage of economic funds in the organisations for the implementation of the programme. Neither do the responses indicate that any of the areas involved in the trial felt that they had more time than any other. The results do however show that the managers – to a somewhat

greater extent than the case workers – felt that there was sufficient time for the employees to work on the assignment.

It also suggests that, above all else, there was a consensus between the probation service, the social services and the Public Employment Service with regard to working approaches and the needs of the clients. It was also between these organisations that the regulations were deemed to have been most in harmony, that there was particularly good availability, that there was greatest commitment, and that the collaboration was felt to have been most strengthened during the period of the trial programme.

Another question in the questionnaire concerned the employees' awareness of how the other organisations worked in order to be able to collaborate with them. The results show that knowledge of the other organisations does not seem to have increased notably during the period of the assignment. In certain organisations, this knowledge was actually lower at the end of the assignment than at the beginning. The participants also assessed their own knowledge of other organisations as being relatively high from the start, which may be because they had already worked with the collaboration processes for six months before Brå sent out the first questionnaire.

Most clients felt that they received good support

According to interviews with seven clients who took part in the reintegration programme, it was clear that most understood the content of the programme, that all were motivated to put an end to their criminal behaviour, and that they felt that they were actively participating and their voice was being heard. Those interviewed were mainly clients in Gothenburg, and they felt that the programme had provided them with good support and help. Several also stated that the collaborating actors had displayed patience, even when they themselves had not been so cooperative. It had not, however, been made clear to all the clients exactly what was entailed by the revocation of the obligation for confidentiality when the client consented to participate in the reintegration programme.

Brå's evaluation

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this evaluation was to assess whether the working approach provided the Prison and Probation Service with better conditions to reduce recidivism, to implement the approach on a national basis, and to conduct long-term and improved reintegration work. The definition of these conditions relates to those areas stated in the reintegration study as being of importance in the work with clients, but also concerns a selection of key mechanisms for good collaboration that were defined in the research.

Because so few clients participated in the reintegration programme, and because several of the collaborating actors were not included, it is difficult to draw any far-reaching conclusions from the evaluation. However, Brå is able to make certain recommendations for the continuation of the work.

Not possible to identify any reduction in recidivism

Because so few clients participated in the reintegration programme, it has not been possible for Brå to evaluate the extent to which the working approach provides the conditions for a reduction in recidivism. In addition, Brå has only had the opportunity to follow a small number of clients throughout the entirety of their conditional release, because most didn't leave the custodial institution until autumn 2019 or spring 2020. The case workers are, however, convinced that this has been the case, and this is an important collective experience to listen to. Several of the clients have had stable and patient reintegration groups around them, and this is most clear in Gothenburg, which had worked with the most clients.

In order to assess whether there is any reduction in recidivism as a result of this kind of trial programme, it would also be necessary for the work to be conducted over a longer period of time. As a general rule, the implementation of a new working approach usually takes between two and four years.

Working approach should not be implemented nationally just yet

Brå does not feel that the Prison and Probation Service is ready to implement the reintegration work on a national basis. This is partly because it has not been tested to a sufficient extent, and partly because several elements of the working approach still need to be clarified. In the continuation of the work, the leadership at the national level must take greater responsibility to establish clear objectives for the work, to remove the obstacles to collaboration that have emerged, and to review the need for any contracts and agreements between the organisations involved.

As the work continues, the national leadership will need to consider whether there is a need for training and/or method-supporting measures in order to develop the work effectively and to make it easier to follow up.

The Prison and Probation Service's final report proposes that the experiences gained from the trial programme be recognised and propagated by means of mentorship, whereby the probation offices in the trial programme would become mentors for at least three new probation offices. This is a reasonable way of further developing the work with reintegration groups. However, it is Brå's opinion that only the probation service in Gothenburg is ready for such a mentorship, on the condition that certain elements of the working approach are clarified. Although the probation service in Gothenburg has the most experience of the work performed with the clients, there are also lessons that can be learned regarding the need to expand the working approach to include one additional urban district during the period of the trial programme. The two other probation offices need more practical experience before they will be able to act as mentors for other municipalities.

The working approach indicates improvements and long-termism

Before the question of whether the trial programme has contributed to an improved, long-term process of reintegration can be answered, there is a need for more experience of coordinated measures for the Prison and Probation Service's clients. Interviews with the probation office inspectors, however, show that the working approach involves more time with the clients, and that clear and coordinated measures create an element of efficiency in the work. In the longer term, this should result in long-term and improved reintegration work.



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