



BREAKING THE CYCLE

Mark Johnson (pictured above), who founded User Voice, a charity that employs ex-offenders, discusses reforms proposed in the Green Paper on rehabilitation and sentencing.

Q What do you think of the Ministry's plans to increase work in prisons?

MARK: It's questionable whether work in workshops equips people to be responsible citizens. For the system to integrate work and skills we need to incentivise both – currently workshops are incentivised over education, with prisoners paid a higher wage in workshops.

MICHAEL: The Government's Green Paper proposals are about making sure that prisons are places of hard work and prisoners are purposeful and active through their sentences. I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to try to improve the

amount of work and activity in prisons. You're right that there needs to be a balance, but it's a legitimate and positive objective to try to increase the amount of meaningful work which prisoners do. However, this should not mean that we don't also provide opportunities such as education or interventions to address drug addiction or offending behaviour. The two don't need to be mutually exclusive – they can be complementary.

MARK: What evidence is there that work in custody actually works?

MICHAEL: The best evidence is that people who leave prison and go directly into employment have less risk of reoffending. Activity in prison helps to create social skills, necessary if they are going to be good employees, and employers are looking at people who have a work ethic.

MARK: How does the four-and-a-half day working week and locking up prisoners for three hours in the middle of the day fit with this increase in prison work?

MICHAEL: We're not constrained by that. Recently, we removed a requirement to maintain that core day to provide flexibility to prison Governors locally to deliver the best regime they can within the resources they've got. The reality is that there isn't enough resource and activity for all prisoners to be fully occupied for all of the day. Our challenge is how we increase opportunities for work and how we look innovatively at working with other potential providers in the private and third sector to improve the availability of work in prisons.

MARK: For that decision to be localised makes it easier for Governors to increase access to outside employment. That is very positive.

Q What is 'payment by results'?

MICHAEL: The concept of Social Impact Bonds and 'payment by results' is that providers will work with offenders and receive a payment only if they are able to reduce reoffending. In terms of the pilot at Peterborough Prison in Cambridgeshire, providers are working with a thousand prisoners. If after two years reoffending has reduced, the providers at Peterborough will receive a payment. That's one pilot for 'payment by results'. We will look at several others, working with local authorities in London and Manchester, a public sector prison and with other private sector providers and Probation Trusts to look at how we can incentivise providers to reduce reoffending by paying them for what they achieve.

MARK: For the third sector, their biggest concern is the time constraints for the results. You've got all the small charities doing really effective work, meeting people one-on-one, but they don't have the financial capacity to go the distance.

MICHAEL: That is an absolutely legitimate concern – how smaller organisations, in particular, are able to continue to fund work where the payment is only received after the outcome is achieved. We are, therefore, looking at different models and ways of operating. The Social Impact Bond is one such idea – finance is raised on the back of a bond, with investors receiving payment on their investment in the future, after success has been achieved. And I recognise that this is a big step and difficult. It's a new idea, and the first Social Impact Bond, linked to Peterborough, is underwritten to some degree by charitable trusts. But the aim would be, eventually,

to go to the market to say 'this is something worth investing in', so that funding can be provided up front on the basis of a return later.

MARK: One point on everybody's mind at the moment is what we define as a 'result'.

MICHAEL: It is about whether the rate of offending reduces. There are different ways of measuring that. There is a straightforward way: for any offender who comes out of prison, are they reconvicted within 12 months? If they're not, you get a payment. If they are, you don't. You could also look at the frequency of offending for a group of offenders where you would expect a particular rate of reoffending to occur, based on history or statistics – are we able to reduce that rate of offending?

Q How effective is Community Payback?

MARK: We've done some research – what comes back to me after speaking to offenders is that, in their eyes, Community Payback is 'pointless'. It is a restriction on their time and movement, but has very low worth to them in terms of skills or being helped to not reoffend.

MICHAEL: Community Payback is primarily a punishment and most people don't like punishment. That is the point – it is about being required to do something you don't like doing. Most members of the public would say that this is entirely appropriate. But we want more than that – we want it to be a form of reparation and to allow the offender to pay something back to the community. Probation Trusts have worked very hard to get more local projects and to engage the community in the work they do.



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**NOMS Chief Executive
Michael Spurr**