

Evaluation of the UK-wide Building Futures Programme

From March 2021 to January 2025 **subject to a review after 24 months to confirm if the methods/ approach has been effective.**

The Prison Reform Trust

The Prison Reform Trust (PRT) 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;
- Promoting equality and human rights in the justice system.

Background: Building Futures

Sentencing for the most serious crimes has become dramatically more severe over the last two decades. People are spending much longer in prison as well as longer under supervision after release. There has been a huge rise in the use of long-term imprisonment, with at least 11% of the prison population now serving some form of indeterminate sentence. In September 2019 3,555 people were serving a life sentence with a tariff of between 10 and 20 years (with 1 in 5 being over tariff), 880 had a tariff of more than 25 years and 264 people had a tariff of more than 32 years¹. The UK has more life-sentenced prisoners per 100,000 of population than any other country in Europe, with life-sentenced prisoners accounting for more than the 10% of the total sentenced population². While the number of life-sentenced prisoners has sharply increased, so too, with longer tariff lengths being handed down, has the time that these individuals will spend in prison. In 2003, the average tariff for murder was 12.5 years, by 2013 this had increased to 21.1 years³.

This exponential growth of the long-term prison population puts an already overstretched prison system under immense pressure. These individuals face some of the most complex issues. Indeterminate sentenced prisoners, in particular, have been seen to experience a loss of hope and meaning, which results in a rise in suicides, self-harm, serious violence, poor mental health and chronic diseases associated with old age. Family relationships – both with the prisoner and more widely – are often heavily disrupted making families the hidden victims of the system. Communities are also disconnected from the rehabilitation process, with an 'out of sight, out of mind' mentality further undermining the rehabilitation and reintegration process.

The immediate and continuing impact of Covid-19 on this long-term population is yet to be fully understood. Early indications are that meaningful family contact, relations and support have severely diminished. Restricted regimes that have seen prisoners locked up under solitary confinement conditions for up to 23 hours a day is having an adverse impact on prisoners' physical and mental health as well as staff/ prisoner and relations. The cessation of both offender behaviour programmes and non-essential transfers between prisons will slow individuals progressing through the system, potentially resulting in them spending longer in prison at substantial economic and human cost⁴.

¹ Crewe, B., Hulley, S., & Wright, S. (2020). *Life Imprisonment from Young Adulthood*. Palgrave Macmillan UK

² van Zyl Smit, D. (2019). *Life imprisonment: A global human rights analysis*. Harvard University Press.

³ Suppression, denial, sublimation: Defending against the initial pains of very long life sentences. *Theoretical Criminology*, 21(2), 225–246.

⁴ See Prison Reform Trust's CAPPTIVE briefings <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/PressPolicy/News/vw/1/ItemID/932>

The Prison Reform Trust's Building Futures will focus on the impact of long sentences on prisoners, their families and wider communities. The programme will work with these partners to highlight penal conditions and the particular pains of long-term imprisonment. Working together to create solutions to shape a prison environment that is safe, humane, encourages accountability and fosters hope. This will include facilitating listening forums, promoting prisoner leadership and self-advocacy and setting up inter-prison support networks. The programme will make a difference to the way of life for long-serving prisoners and their ability to connect with and prepare for a future in the communities to which most will return. This will be achieved through:

- Understanding, through intensive listening and user engagement, the range of experiences of very long-term prisoners, including those with indeterminate sentences and those under imprisonment for public protection.
- Engaging with families and communities of long-term prisoners to understand the impact of the current prison system on their lives and communities, and work towards real-life improvements.
- Identifying and promoting best practice for meaningful community engagement with long-term prisoners.
- Raising public awareness of the human and material cost of long-term imprisonment and deconstructing (media/ political) representations of 'dangerous' offender narratives by shedding light on success stories of rehabilitation and community reintegration.
- Identifying significant differences related to race, gender, age and disability and creating evidence and guidance for prisons to better care for people's individual needs.
- Running in-prison workshops and conferences bringing together prisoners and expert participants (judiciary, academics and policymakers).

A vital pillar to this work is the recruitment and development of prisoner leaders who will drive the programme. The project will be formed and led in partnership with prisoner leaders who will draw on their lived experience and that of other prisoners and staff to identify issues and priorities, and co-produce sustainable solutions. This will include:

- Generating evidence on what works in relation to the treatment of long-term prisoners to shape policy and practice, ensuring that policy implications for subjects (ranging from family ties to education, training and employment in prison) are acted upon.
- Producing original research to supplement the relatively little research on this group of people.
- Producing evidence-based guidance on organising effective and sustainable prison communities (e.g. roles, structures and staff members) and recommendations for development of policy frameworks for improved collaboration with families.
- Development of evidence-based, best practice guidance to create policies that encourage high quality family contact for long term prisoners.
- Engagement with ministers, officials, inspectors and other relevant stakeholders to recognise and address potential barriers to the implementation of the recommendations.

Purpose of Evaluation

To undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the UK-wide Building Futures Programme. To examine, analyse, measure and document the programmes' outcomes.

Approach/ Design

Building Futures' core priorities will be set by those the programme represents, people spending 10 or more years in prison. As the programme's main outcomes are yet to agreed and defined, an evaluation strategy is required that can accommodate Building Futures generative/evolutionary design and offer an external perspective and space for challenge and reflection on the project's development. We are seeking an adaptive interactionalist/ qualitative approach that will make a real-time contribution through identifying

substantive outcomes as well as identifying learning/ lessons for the future. As part of this responsive approach we will be looking for consideration of the potential impact of Covid-19 on the evaluation process and creative adjustment(s) in response. We are particularly interested in hearing from applicants with a strong track record of evaluating projects aimed at facilitating agency for disempowered groups under a complex matrix of power relations. Proven experience in evaluating advocacy programmes through approaches such as 'outcome harvesting' or other evaluation methodologies, which:

- Are suited for programmes where outcomes, activities and outputs are not all overtly defined or measurable at the point of planning and delivery.
- Moves away from rigid evaluation designs that only measures progress towards predetermined objectives or outcomes, employing instead an adaptive approach that identifies and collects evidence of what has changed and then, working backwards, determines whether and how an intervention contributed to these changes.
- Enables participatory design that empowers beneficiaries, front-line staff, communities and partners to 'monitor' what matters to them.

We are seeking an evaluation of Building Futures that offers an open, accessible and dynamic account of the difference the programme makes. We encourage applicants to think creatively about how the learning from the programme can be shared in real-time with The Prison Reform Trust and a wider audience at key milestones during the life of the programme. Key programme deliverables should include:

- Regular progress updates
- Multiple reports/ briefings (capturing various workstreams)
- Final report
- Lessons for policymakers

We welcome an open and engaged dialogue with applicants about the best way to deliver this ambitious programme evaluation.

What the Prison Reform Trust will provide:

The Prison Reform Trust (PRT) will provide the evaluators with access to all available information on the Building Futures programme and past initiatives, existing data and contribute suggestions for possible focus areas.

PRT will assist the evaluators in making contacts with beneficiaries (groups), partner organisations and other key stakeholders.

Management

The evaluation will be managed by the Building Futures Programme Director. Day-to-day contact will be with the Building Futures Research Officer.

Skills and Experience Required

Essential

- A proven trackrecord of evaluating high profile programmes, particularly those with a strong focus on advocacy and research.
- Experience of developing beneficiaries to lead on evaluation process.
- Proven record of beneficiary engagement in the evaluation process.
- A strong understanding of the process of changing policy and practice. An ability to conceptualise, measure and explain policy change in a local and national setting.

- Capacity and experience of working in a UK-wide context.
- Strong qualitative and quantitative research skills including desk research, interviews, stakeholder surveys and data analysis.
- Strong project management skills.
- Strong communication skills and ability to disseminate key findings in an accessible fashion.

Desirable

- Knowledge of the criminal justice landscape in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Budget

Subject to review after 24 months, this evaluation will run for the life of the Building Futures (February/ January 2021 – January 2025). The indicative budget for this work is **£35,000 PA (inclusive of VAT)**

Indicative timeline

Key Actions	Dates (subject to change)
Issue the invitation to tender	December 4 th 2021
Deadline for tender submissions	January 14 2021
Selection of Preferred Evaluator (If a number of bids are of high quality The Prison Reform Trust may invite shortlisted applicants to present their proposals)	Mid February 2021
Contract Award	TBC
Evaluation commencement date	March 2021
Inception Meeting:	TBC

Application

Potential bidders for this contract should submit a detailed research proposal of 1500 words setting out how you would approach this brief and why you are suited to it. You should also include a detailed breakdown of project costs, and CVs for all relevant staff outlining relevant research skills, experience and why they would be well-placed to deliver the high-quality output required for an evaluation of this nature.

Bids will be assessed on a) understanding of the brief; b) recognising current and projected impact of Covid-19 on both the project and its evaluation and appropriate/ creative methodology in response; c) skills, knowledge and experience of contractor; d) value for money.

Interested parties can contact David Maguire at (david.maguire@prisonreformtrust.org.uk), or on 07572 527904 should you require further detail prior to submitting an application.

Bids should be sent to Building Futures Team at buildingfutures@prisonreformtrust.org.uk by **14th January 2021**