English summary

From prison to a life at liberty – on the outside

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The objective of this study is to examine how the prison service works to prepare prisoners for release on parole and to facilitate readjustment to life outside prison. The study follows a group of prison service clients from a point one month prior to their release from prison on parole until approximately six months after their release. One report has already been published from the study ("From prison to a life at liberty – prior to release," 2000). The current report presents the follow-up work conducted by the probation service in relation to the clients conditionally released from prison, and illuminates the following issues: *The way the probation service has worked with the clients regarding the planning of treatment, lay supervision, maintaining contact with the clients and how noncompliance has been dealt with; the extent to which clients have re-offended following their release on parole; the way the clients' social situation looked six months after release as compared to how it looked one month prior to discharge from prison; in what ways and to what extent the probation service has worked to help and support the clients; whether different groups of clients have been given help to the same extent; and the level of co-operation between the probation service and other agencies and authorities.*

The report is principally based on information obtained from the clients' probation officers six months after their release from prison. The material includes information obtained from the probation officers one month after release, information obtained from the inmates themselves prior to release and register data from the Criminal Records and Arrests registers as well as from

the C--entral Register of the Prison and Probation service. A number of clients were interviewed six months after their release from prison as a means of providing a more qualitative complement to the information provided by the probation officers. A sample of 95 clients was drawn from a group of 557 persons sentenced to at least six months in prison who were due for release in November and December of 1999 and who were to be placed under supervision following their release. The clients were divided into groups on the basis of length of sentence (between six and 23 months, and 24 months and over, respectively) and prior criminal record (at most one prison sentence, and two or more prison sentences, respectively). After six months at liberty under supervision, 73 clients remained in the sample. The remainder had dropped out for various reasons.

The probation service's work with clients released on parole

Prior to the clients' release from prison, contact had been established between the probation service and the majority of the clients, usually by means of telephone conversations. According to regulations, the probation service should visit inmates where possible. Approximately half the clients had been visited by their probation officers.

In only one fifth of the cases had there been cooperation between the prisons and the probation service with regard to the planning of treatment for the client, among other things as a result of the fact that in certain instances, there were no treatment plans in place at the prisons and the probation service had been served with a request for supervision at a rather late stage. The treatment plan that is required with respect to parole supervision had been drawn up within the prescribed time frame – i.e. at the latest, one month after release – in only half of the cases studied. This was usually a result of the fact that the clients had avoided contact with the probation service. In most cases, however, the clients had been included in the planning process. In relation to the treatment plans, follow-up and revision should take place at least every third month, but only a fifth of the plans had been revised at some stage during the follow-up period covered by the study. Almost two-thirds of the clients were supervised by lay supervisors, the majority of whom had been appointed while the client was still in prison. This is in line with the relevant directives. The frequency of contact between supervisors and clients was good, often exceeding the recommended minimum level. The content of the contacts between clients and supervisors and/or probation officers most commonly took the form of conversations. Engaging in some form of leisure pursuit together with the client was unusual, even where the contacts in question were with a lay supervisor.

Crime and other infractions of probation

Half of the clients were convicted and/or suspected by the police of committing new offences during the follow-up period. Those who re-offended came almost

exclusively from among those with the most extensive prior criminal records, particularly those who had been sentenced to a relatively short prison term. The majority had committed at least one infraction of their parole, most often by not maintaining contact in the manner agreed with the probation service. There were also cases, however, where infractions took the form of drug abuse or crime. Despite the fact that drug abuse is a criminal offence and is to be regarded as an infraction of parole according to the general recommendations of the prison and probation service, there appears to be no unitary view of drug abuse within the probation service. The majority of clients who committed infractions were given a reprimand by their probation officer. One-fifth of the cases where the client committed an infraction against the conditions of parole led to sanctions from the probation board by means of reminders, cautions, temporary custody and, in a very few cases, forfeiture of their conditional release from prison. In no case did the probation board choose to issue a written directive to a client committing an infraction.

The situation of clients and the help provided by the probation service

The social situation of the probation service clients did not improve for the most part during the follow up period. The only exception was in the area of the clients' housing status, which had been unsettled for just over half of the cases prior to release as compared to only fifteen per cent after six months of supervision outside prison. Those clients with the most extensive prior criminal records, particularly those serving short prison sentences, remained in the worst position. The probation service had not helped to any great extent when one takes into consideration the situation of the clients and the level of help they were adjudged to need. The most common reasons that help had not been provided were that the clients were unmotivated, did not want help, had not been particularly conscientious in their contacts with the probation service, had managed to sort the situation out for themselves or had received help from another source. The clients were adjudged to need most help in relation to their finances and their employment situation. As regards the clients' social networks, the probation officers were ignorant of their clients' situation to a large extent, as indeed the prison officers had been at the prisons housing the clients prior to release. The probation service nonetheless focused its efforts in such a way that the clients adjudged to be in the greatest need of help were in fact those who received the most help.

The probation service view of its own work and of its cooperation with others

The probation officers usually felt that contacts with clients were good and that clients were satisfied with their work as probation officers or supervisors. Of

the clients who were interviewed over the telephone following their release, the majority were also of the opinion that contacts with the probation service had worked well. The probation officers felt that they did not have sufficient opportunity to deal with their client-related tasks in a satisfactory manner, primarily due to a shortage of time. In addition, clients released on probation are allotted little time in relation to other probation service client groups. Among other things, this may be due to the fact that they have already served their prison term and are assumed to have been given most of the help they need whilst in prison, unlike other clients of the probation service. There is no way, however, that the help provided to the persons included in the study whilst they were in prison could be deemed sufficient. The group as a whole could be described as being quite clearly in need of help. A large part of the task of the probation service is to fulfil an intermediary role, for which reason it is very important that cooperation with other authorities and agencies functions well. Cooperation between the probation service and the social services was deemed to function in this way, whilst the psychiatric services and labour market authorities were not deemed to work together with the probation service to any great extent. The level of resources available to these agencies was felt to be low, and they did not treat probation service clients as a priority.