

Executive Summary

The RJ-APPG is in the second phase of its inquiry into the current state of restorative justice (RJ) and restorative practices (RP) in the UK. This paper summarises the work of workstream 4, led by Dr Jonathan Hobson alongside Ben Fisk, Kate Hook, and Lucy Jaffé. The workstream examines potential mechanisms or processes for the commissioning, collection, and dissemination of evidence-based research in Restorative Justice and Restorative Practice & the benefits of implementing a national reporting framework.

The workstream received a wide range of responses in its call for evidence, including: data from the original 67 written and oral responses to the first report; further survey responses from 36 adult RJ commissioners, 3 private sector prisons, 2 delivery organizations, and 25 youth offending teams/services; feedback from 8 online and one in-person consultation events; and 10 detailed interviews and a further 16 survey responses from academics engaged in international research and dissemination on restorative work.

The analysis found that there was a wide variety of excellent practice across the field, but that there was a need to capture that evidence in a variety of different and consistent formats. There was also a need to support the dissemination of the extensive research and evidence-based practices that often underpin this work, and in doing so bring together practitioners, those responsible for service design and delivery, academics, and researchers. These findings are presented as three key recommendations::

- 1. To expand and support the use of regional, multi-stakeholder/multi-agency groups that can facilitate the sharing and dissemination of research and evidence-based practice.**
- 2. To design, develop, and embed a National Reporting Framework(s) for restorative services.**
- 3. To embed evidencing of success across processes of commissioning and reporting.**

Key recommendations for the APPG are:

- 1. To expand and support the use of regional, multi-stakeholder/multi-agency groups, that can facilitate the sharing and dissemination of research and evidence-based practice.**

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ), Restorative Justice Council (RJC), and other key stakeholders could work to support or establish regional multi-stakeholder and multi-agency groups. Where used effectively, these groups bring together practitioners, service providers and commissioners, and academics to share knowledge. Such groups have been demonstrated as highly effective in supporting communication, providing opportunities to disseminate research, and building new evidence-collecting and disseminating partnerships.

- 2. To design, develop, and embed a national reporting framework(s) for restorative services.**

In consultation, the MoJ and RJC could work with stakeholders to design and develop a series of clear measures for recording and reporting practice that would form the basis of a National Reporting

Framework. Such measures, would reflect sector differences and differences between youth and adult services, allowing for an overall assessment of impact and success as well as for sector-specific benchmarking. Such an approach would be greatly enhanced with the implementation of a digital system for the reporting, management, and analysis of data.

- 3. To embed evidencing of success across commissioning and reporting for services**

As part of developing greater visibility and sharing of evidence-based work, and of developing a National Reporting Framework, there is a significant opportunity to establish a series of success-markers for restorative work. This will allow for the greater evidencing of success across both interpersonal and system-wide indicators. A centralised national repository for case studies, service evaluations, and peer-reviewed research will enable the sector to promote evidence of success in restorative practices.



EVIDENCE AND CONTEXT

1. Expand / support regional, multi-stakeholder groups

Across the range of consultation responses, there was significant comment on the benefit of multi-stakeholder groups. Such groups were identified as successful in Belgium, the Czech Republic, and the Netherlands. In the UK, multi-stakeholder models are used impactfully, although not consistently, at a national level (e.g., in Scotland and Northern Ireland), at a regional level (e.g., the multi-county group in the South East), and at a County level (e.g., in Gloucestershire).

Respondents described how these groups provide: a location for the sharing of evidence-based practice and dissemination of research; access to further data for evaluation; opportunities to build networks in support of both service development and awareness; and help to 'connect' research to practice, service design, and service delivery. Expanding and supporting such groups, and encouraging connections between these groups, would provide a valuable structure for supporting restorative work.

Respondents identified that there is already much excellent research in the field, with more regularly undertaken. There is, however, a lack of financial support for this work, and limited opportunities for dissemination. Research is frequently undertaken by academics on a good will, low cost, or personal interest basis for the benefit of the restorative sector.

Respondents noted that bids and tenders for running services do not include funding for rigorous academic evaluation, which is important for ensuring quality, efficacy, efficiency, and the meeting of needs. As a result, large amounts of practice are not evaluated.

2. National Reporting Framework(s) (NRF)

Respondents reported that an extensive range and volume of data is currently collected, but that this varies significantly in format and type. Police and Crime Commissioner requests for data vary nationally in template format, terminology and definitions and services often do not have capacity to analyse their own data. The current MoJ data request focuses on wider victim services data and does not do enough to collect RJ specific information.

Respondents were generally in favour of an NRF, particularly if it were developed in consultation with the sector, considered academic input, reflected differences between areas (including youth justice), and not too labour intensive. Such a measure could: facilitate the collection of data across consistent measures; enable effective service and sector comparison; provide high quality and reliable and valid evidence of success; encourage evaluation by ensuring the use of similar baselines and measurement techniques; and support an effective separation of data from service, reducing potential bias.

Where suitable, respondents felt data gathered could be made publicly available for academic analysis, which would promote transparency in the sector and enable further research to be undertaken.

3. Embedding the evidencing of success

Respondents identified challenges to understanding the impact of service provision, including: a lack of a shared language and definitions; varied data collection points; and rigidity around measures and outcome types. Consequently, it was considered difficult to compare services and sectors on a type-by-type basis and at the national level.

Respondents highlighted the complexity of capturing 'success' in restorative work, noting that quantitative count data was reported in varying degrees by services, and that there was limited detailed qualitative contextual data, such as case studies and lived-experience voices.

Respondents felt embedding agreed success markers as part of an NRF would help to support the sector to identify and collect evidence across a number of impactful and comparable metrics. Such markers would be developed in an evidence-rich environment, and should involve input from academics, services commissioners and providers, and stakeholders.

Respondents suggested the creation of a National Repository of Restorative Work that includes case studies, service evaluations, and peer-reviewed research. This would promote evidence collection, demonstrate the variety of approaches, and could be used by policy makers, services commissioners and providers to inform service decisions.

