

Summary

Reoffending – how can society’s combined resources be better used? (RiR 2015:4)



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Reoffending – how can society’s combined resources be better used?

The Swedish National Audit Office has audited central government measures to reduce reoffending. The Swedish NAO summarises the results of the audit below.

Audit background

Reasons: One of the most important objectives of the Swedish Prison and Probation Service is to reduce reoffending. The Government has instructed the Swedish Prison and Probation Service to cooperate with other public actors to achieve that objective. Others that may be involved include the Swedish Public Employment Service, the Swedish Enforcement Authority, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, the municipalities’ social services, healthcare services and actors in civil society. Cooperation is central, not least at the important time when prisoners are approaching release and are to go back out into the community.

The percentage of reoffenders has remained constant for a long time. On average almost 40 per cent of all those with criminal convictions reoffend within three years. For people who have been in prison the corresponding reoffending rate is about 70 per cent. Crime entails major costs to society, both human and financial. Research has shown, however, that several factors can reduce the risk of reoffending. These include the possibility of changing the correctional clients’ criminal attitudes, networks and personality patterns. It is also a matter of being able to make a living through work, being free of substance misuse, having a place of one’s own to live, having an education and gaining access to adequate psychiatric care. Measures in these areas have proved to have positive effects. But despite specific wishes expressed by the Government that work to prevent reoffending should be intensified the measures have not increased in recent years.

Best practice in prevention of reoffending is a relatively well researched area. A pre-study conducted by the Swedish NAO in spring 2014 proved, however, that many problems remain in the area. Among the reasons are deficient cooperation among actors involved and lack of clarity around the allocation of responsibility and resources.

Purpose: The purpose of the audit is to find out whether the work of preventing reoffending has good prospects of being conducted effectively and appropriately. Among the conditions analysed are legislation, planning, coordination and division of responsibility and resources.



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Implementation: The audit is based on several sources, such as legislation, policy documents, guidelines, other studies, available statistics and about 60 interviews. The Swedish NAO has also audited 200 randomly selected correctional clients' "enforcement plans". The enforcement plans summarise the Swedish Prison and Probation Service's information on each client's situation, needs and planned and implemented measures to prevent reoffending.

Audit findings

The Swedish NAO's audit shows that the percentage of people with convictions who reoffend has in principle been unchanged for a long period. The audit also shows that many measures to prevent reoffending are not taken at the time they are needed, but are delayed. This may partly be explained by the lack of a holistic and long-term perspective both in planning measures and the attitude to costs. Long-term costs and savings for society are not generally a factor in individual agencies' decision-making.

The actors responsible for measures to prevent reoffending do not cooperate sufficiently in planning. Far too often each one makes an individual plan for measures based on its own budget. Nor does the Government impose sufficient requirements regarding a holistic and long-term perspective in decisions on measures. There is also a lack of knowledge of the long-term effects of measures to prevent reoffending, since follow-up of today's system is short-term and spread among many different bodies in society. Systematic evaluations of the macroeconomic consequences of the work of preventing reoffending are seldom made.

All in all there is a risk of bad economy in the use of public resources and an inefficient system to prevent reoffending. The reasons for these conclusions are elaborated below.

Measures are too few and not adapted to the individuals

In its audit the Swedish NAO was able to establish that the measures to reduce reoffending are too few in relation to the need, too late and often uncoordinated. A relatively large proportion of the measures described in the enforcement plans concern unstructured conversations and references to other actors, rather than more concrete measures such as treatment programmes or studies. Waiting times both in healthcare and social services make timing and coordination more difficult. Not least during the critical period just after release or at the beginning of a non-custodial sentence a time delay can be devastating. If certain crucial measures are delayed or are not taken there is a risk that correctional clients will reoffend or return to substance misuse and previous measures will be wasted.

In addition the system is far from consistent – clients' opportunities of receiving support and care from actors in society varies depending on where in the country they are domiciled.



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Considerable deficiencies in agencies' planning and cooperation

The Swedish NAO considers that more measures to prevent reoffending could be taken, with better effect, if clients' problems and needs were identified earlier. Forward planning and coordination between the actors involved – not least those who are to pay for and approve measures - could be better. The large number of clients who need care for misuse or mental ill-health for example are often shuttled back and forth between different care providers and easily fall between stools.

There are often no cooperation agreements, for example between the Prison and Probation Service, municipality and county council, and there is seldom any one person responsible for coordinating all contacts for one client. The same client may have different plans with the social services in the home municipality, the county council's dependency clinic and the Prison and Probation Service.

The Government's management is insufficient

According to the Government, activities in the legal sphere should be characterised by a systemic and holistic view, by cooperation and a long-term perspective. However, there is a lack of clarity concerning the division of responsibility and resources as regards matters that no agency sees as its main task, or that require the involvement of several actors to be adequately performed. One example is pharmacological treatment for misuse, which the Swedish Prison and Probation Service can start for a client in an institution, but only if the client's home county council undertakes to take over responsibility on release of the client. Another is that the Swedish Prison and Probation Service is not one of the agencies that can enter into agreements with municipalities and county councils under the Social Services Act.

The Government is clear that activities to prevent reoffending must be knowledge-based and that measures must be followed up. Nevertheless the Government has not initiated any long-term follow-up of the effects of measures to prevent reoffending.

There are good examples, but limited in extent

There are local examples of how different actors have organised cooperation aimed at finding good solutions for correctional clients. Coordinating resources and competence, for example from misuse care, psychiatry, prison and probation services and social services, perhaps even under the same roof, would facilitate for partners and clients and more easily solve problems of confidentiality and coordination difficulties. Such special solutions may be a way of overarching the distance between various bodies in society and at the same time relieving the pressure on a number of ordinary care and support functions.

Special solutions may need to be considered

The "normalisation principle" means that society's ordinary support functions should be responsible for correctional clients. Since they constitute a group that is at risk of falling between



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stools and ending up last in the queue for care and support, there may nevertheless be reason to consider special solutions. These already exist, as mentioned above, but to a limited extent.

Special solutions may be both more effective and cost effective for the public economy according to evaluations. The Swedish NAO notes that so far the Government has not raised the matter or pointed to the need for special solutions in this area.

Macroeconomic analyses can determine whether measures are nationally cost effective in the long term

Evaluations and experience have shown that measures to prevent substance misuse, criminality and exclusion are highly cost effective for society – not only in terms of human suffering but even financially. Despite this a long-term view of costs is very difficult to achieve in practice.

Municipalities and county councils with a limited budget must make priorities between the different needs of their inhabitants. The current system also lacks incentives for individual services to take the full picture into account. It is true that an investment in an individual can mean major future savings – but then often in someone else's budget.

Long-term macroeconomic analyses could form the basis of a changed view, better effects of the work to prevent reoffending and better economy in the use of public resources.

Lack of evaluations

The measures to prevent reoffending that have been evaluated have mainly been carried out within the programme activities of the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, and these evaluations are often performed internally. To examine the effects and results of an activity some researchers believe that external evaluation is a necessary condition.

As regards the work of preventing reoffending as a whole there is also a lack of important knowledge of measures, results and long-term effects. Much data needed for long-term follow-up are non-existent or too spread out in the current system. All in all this affects the conditions for effective management of prevention of reoffending.

The Swedish National Audit Office's recommendations

In order to achieve effective measures to prevent reoffending and reduce reoffending the Swedish NAO recommends the following to *the Government*:

- Make clearer requirements for cooperation between agencies that are responsible for measures to prevent reoffending and take the initiative for cooperation between municipalities and county councils and the Swedish Prison and Probation Service. For example the county councils should be obliged to enter into agreements with the Swedish Prison and Probation Service on care and treatment of clients who misuse or are addicts



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in the Swedish Prison and Probation Service in the county council area. This should be regulated in law.

- Ensure that the terms of reference for agencies that are responsible for measures to prevent reoffending are consistent as regards requirements for cooperation in instructions and appropriation directions.
- Investigate how costs of various measures to prevent reoffending should be allocated to strengthen cooperation between the actors concerned.
- Initiate macroeconomic analyses that include long-term costs and savings when considering measures.
- Draw up a national action plan together with the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) to develop prevention of reoffending. The plan should clarify a common basic view of the area, division of responsibility and costs between actors responsible as well as the scope of the measures. The plan should also include creating a research and knowledge based system to follow up national measures to prevent reoffending, including in the long-term.
- Ensure that it is compulsory for the Swedish Prison and Probation Service to offer supplementary education for the clients who do not have a complete upper secondary qualification.

The Swedish NAO recommends that the *Swedish Prison and Probation Service* does the following:

- Takes appropriate measures to ensure that cooperation with other agencies responsible in enforcement planning will start as early as possible – in good time before release and preferably already during the period of detention.
- Ensure that a “cross-professional team” is created around each client and that these teams are able to follow the client. Follow up the individual plan as long as measures are in force.
- Be more proactive in cooperation by appointing a coordinator responsible for contacts with all actors concerned with the respective client.
- Work to bring about an individual plan common to all actors for each client and that planned and started measures are completed.
- Promote the involvement of voluntary organisations to a greater extent than at present.
- Ensure that cooperation agreements are created locally, regionally and nationally.
- Ensure, in connection with the introduction of the new monitoring system within the agency, that the measures to prevent reoffending are followed up and evaluated.

