

A report on the withdrawal of alcohol related courses at HMP Gartree.

Alcohol related courses in Prison

Over the past several months the Board at Gartree Prison has been involved in investigating why the prison administration withdrew these courses.

For many years Gartree, which is a Lifer Male Prison, have undertaken Alcohol Related Courses within their STOP program alongside drug and drug and alcohol courses, and indeed have received a Butler Trust Award for their work. After an audit last year this all changed. The audit stated that alcohol only programs should not be offered under the STOP program, and indeed they failed the audit for that year as they had in fact undertaken these courses as indeed they had done in previous years.

Our Board became aware of this situation and was concerned about the ability of prisoners within the system to progress their sentence if their offense had been committed whilst under the influence of alcohol. We felt the Parole Hearing would not see any demonstration of a reduction risk without such a course being completed.

We discussed this with head of Psychology at the Prison and with the Governor, both of whom agreed. We took the matter up with the Area Manager and he also agreed. There is no course at the moment available anywhere within the prison system to enable these prisoners to undertake a course that is recognised as a demonstration of reducing their risk of re-offending due to alcohol fueled actions. We also took up the situation with Dr Lynne Lawrie head of the Intervention Group who also confirmed the situation and added it was not part of the funding allowed under the STOP course. Prisoners could undertake work if they had a drug and alcohol problem but not just alcohol. She went on to say that there are courses being trialed but to date are not available, they say that the prisoners can undertake a voluntary AA course if they wish. On checking this we found a leaflet which the prisoner reads through in his cell and perhaps they can organise some group courses if required. It was felt this would not demonstrate a sufficient level of reduction when being presented to a Parole Board

In effect this means prisoners are being held in the system and cannot progress, this is not only not in their interests but the whole system is which is already full to capacity cannot move these people through. It just did not make a lot of sense.

We wrote to Marie Eagle then Prison Minister and have just had a reply which confirmed the above. She did say that such courses in future should be funded within the prison locality and that the prison Governor had to investigate funding and courses within the local community. Before we replied to her we felt we needed further information and found that recently the prison have been asked to undertake assessment of those prisoners who committed offenses under the influence of alcohol and indicate which of two courses may be appropriate. There is a course offered by the Intervention Group for those with more acute problems and one called Corvaid offered through the NHS for those with a less intense problem. Financial bids will then be made to the Ministry of Justice to fund these courses next year.

So, perhaps we have "rattled a few bones" on the way, and things have progressed. We will continue to monitor the situation, and would suggest those Boards in other establishments effected by this situation do the same. and if things don't progress as we all hope, we should again try to rattle of few more!

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