Justice Committee

Management of Offenders (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from Venture Trust

Venture Trust welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the Justice Committee's scrutiny of the proposed Management of Offenders (Scotland) Bill.

Venture Trust delivers intensive personal development programmes supporting people to acquire the motivation, resourcefulness and life skills to change their patterns of behaviour for happier, healthier and more productive lives and ultimately a Scotland which is compassionate and just; where communities are safer and everyone can be part of society.

We have a long-standing track record in prevention and reducing re-offending agendas and a significant proportion (55%) of the people we support have a criminal record. As such, issues relating to disclosure of convictions and navigating how to disclose information as part of readiness for employment or training, are specific aspects of the work we do to support individuals to move forward positively.

Venture Trust is a member of the Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Forum (CJVSF) and we fully support the Forum’s evidence submission. As such, our submission is focused on specific and additional points drawing on Venture Trust experience of working with people seeking to move beyond their past.

1. Overall, do you support Part 1 of the Bill concerning the electronic monitoring of offenders?

We would highlight the use of terminology, specifically the term ‘offender’ and would encourage further alignment and coherence of the language used in the Community Justice (Scotland) Act 2016. We feel the Bill should seek to reduce stigma and the use of labels which can further hinder life chances.

2. The Scottish Government wishes electronic monitoring to play a greater role within the criminal justice system. Will the reforms in Part 1 of the Bill help enable this? If not, what further changes (legislative or non-legislative) are required?

We agree that there is a place for electronic monitoring and this should be part of a coherent, person centred approach which dovetails with a range of support for individuals to facilitate behaviour change and assist more individuals to reduce their risk of re-offending and to complete their sentence.

We support the CJVSF response regarding the use of electronic monitoring and in particular the importance of ensuring consistency of support from the public and third sectors across Scotland coupled with implementing approaches to provide greater confidence for Sheriffs, individuals subject to electronic monitoring, victims of crime and the public.
3. *Do you have any views on any specific aspects of Part 1?* – for instance, revisions to the list of circumstances in which electronic monitoring may be imposed or the creation of a power to enable future monitoring devices to contain GPS technology or technology that can measure alcohol or drug ingestion.

The Venture Trust personal development programme involves an outdoor-based residential phase of up to 10 days of learning and development in the Scottish highlands. As part of the preparatory phase Venture Trust staff are required to arrange with statutory partners for removal of any individual’s electronic monitoring device immediately prior to the journey and reapplying of the device upon return to community. Under the Bill proposals, we would advocate for individuals to continue to be able to access relevant support to assist in their rehabilitation journey alongside electronic monitoring. In addition, we would be concerned that electronic monitoring becomes a potential ‘barrier’ to other tailored support being identified and offered to an individual as part of their sentence to address underlying behaviours.

4. *Overall, do you support Part 2 of the Bill? The Scottish Government’s view is that it will provide a more appropriate balance between the public’s right to protection and a former offender’s right to “move on” with their life, by, overall, reducing the legal need for disclosure. Do you agree?*

We support the intention of the Bill regarding disclosure. We would echo the evidence given by CJVSF regarding the timing of disclosure in relation to employment that this should be at job offer stage rather than as part of an application process.

5. *Do you agree with the Scottish Government that other reforms in Part 2 will make the law on disclosure of convictions more intelligible, clear and coherent?*

We would encourage the development of further guidance particularly so that individuals with convictions understand their rights and responsibilities and for organisations where individuals are required to disclose convictions. Support for training of practitioners working with individuals to secure employment, volunteer or a college placement will be important to enhance the clarity of the Bill provisions and establish working arrangements which remove barriers to progression.

We welcome the proposed changes of terminology.

6. *Do you have any further views on law and policy around disclosure of convictions?*

We support the CJVSF position.

7. *Do you support Part 3 of the Bill, which makes provision for the Parole Board for Scotland, in terms of its membership and appointment system; its functions and requirements in relation to prisoners, its independence, and its administration?*
Venture Trust has no further comments.

8. Do you have any further views on the role, purpose and functions of the Parole Board?

Venture Trust has no further comments.

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CEO
19 April 2018