

UK unions welcome end to probation privatisation disaster



Public service unions in the UK welcomed the decision by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) on 16 May to return 80% of privatised probation services in England and Wales to public sector ownership and control.

Probation services to around 150,000 medium- and low-risk offenders were privatised in 2014 even though an internal MoJ warned against the move. Regional contracts were awarded to 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies run by eight companies or consortia. These were a mixture of non-profit organisations and private companies including the French-based multinational Sodexo, MTC - a company running private prisons in the US - and Interserve, a major UK outsourcing company which recently went into administration.

Since privatisation there has been a series of reports about problems with the service. Most recently the Chief Inspector of Prisons, Dame Glenys Stacey, found that 40% of offenders were being managed by phone calls rather than face-to-face interviews. Stacey welcomed the decision to bring the service back under public

control, saying: "Probation is a complex social service, and it has proved well-nigh impossible to reduce it to a set of contractual requirements."

Last October, the [Guardian](#) newspaper revealed that the number of offenders charged with serious crimes including murder, manslaughter and rape while they were being monitored in the community jumped by more than a fifth in a year.

The three main unions that organise in the service - [NAPO](#), [GMB](#) and [UNISON](#) - were all celebrating the decision to end privatisation. However, UNISON expressed concern about the fact that some rehabilitation and resettlement services would be repackaged and open to private providers.

The decision was also welcomed by the [We Own It](#) campaigning organisation. Cat Hobbs, director of We Own It, will be taking part in a panel debate on privatisation at EPSU's Congress in Dublin on 4 June.

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