

Unlocking Banking

Impact Report (2014)

Developing effective, efficient & secure access to banking for people in prison before release

Introduction

This report has been written at the end of a landmark 9-year project for Unlock. It is designed to summarise and reflect on the progress that has been made to date, as well as outline some of the key priority areas moving forward. The main focus of the report is on the latter part of the project, which was the national campaign which ran from 2010 to 2014.

Summary of recent progress

In the final year of the project (2013-14);

1. **5936 basic bank accounts** were opened for people in prison ready for them to use once they were released¹
2. RBS began a 6 month pilot in 9 prisons, expanding into a further 6 prisons
3. HSBC expanded from a pilot to cover 15 prisons in total
4. Santander completed a review of their pilot, and continued to operate in the original 5 pilot prisons

Overall summary

During the course of the 9-year project;

1. Unlock has helped to set up **74 prison/banking programmes**
2. **114 prisons** now have links with a high-street bank
3. The 'big 5' current account providers (Barclays, Halifax (part of Lloyds Banking Group), HSBC, Santander and RBS) are all actively involved, as well as a significant contribution from Co-operative.
4. **By the end of 2013, all prisons that wanted and needed a basic bank account opening programme had one**

¹ Please note – the majority of the data involves 'accounts opened', but some refer to 'applications'. See later in this report.

Summary of recommendations

This section provides a summary of the recommendations that are made in this report. They are discussed in more detail at the end of the report, alongside an explanation of the reasons behind the recommendations.

1. Single point of contact for prisons and banks

1. NOMS should ensure that there is a single point of contact for prisons to contact if they're looking for advice or support in their prison.
2. NOMS should ensure that there is a single point of contact for banks to contact if they're looking for advice or support about their work in prison.
3. To perform these roles appropriately, we recommend that NOMS dedicates 0.5 FTE staff to overseeing this work at a national level. This is considerably less than the amount of resources Unlock has dedicated to this over the years, and reflects the stage at which this work is now at. A concern we have is that it is unclear at this point whether this level of resource will be achieved.

2. 'Zero-account' prisons / 'Low-volume' prisons / Meeting needs

1. Work needs to be done by NOMS to understand why those prisons have not opened any accounts (particularly those that are soon-to-be 'resettlement prisons') and what works need to be done to improve this, as it would suggest that people are being released from those prisons with the need.
2. NOMS should establish a standard framework which allows prisons to assess 'need' amongst people in prison, and put in place a system that allows for this to be collected centrally so that 'need' can be matched with the number of accounts actually opened

3. Regular reviews

NOMS should ensure that regular reviews be carried out assessing levels of account opening across the prison estate and across the banks. This review process should capture which banks are covering which prisons, the processes in place, the contacts at each bank, the contacts at each prison, the number of accounts opened, and any issues that are outstanding.

4. Resources in prisons

NOMS should ensure that prisons are sufficiently resourced, and appropriately targeted, to ensure that they're able to help anybody who wants and needs a basic bank account before they are released by supporting them to apply for a bank account with the nominated bank in their prison. Priority should be placed on those prisons designated as 'resettlement prisons', although recognising that any prison that releases individuals directly into the community will need to have access to a system like this.

5. Share of prisons by the banks

NOMS and the BBA should work with those banks having a disproportionately large number of prisons than is sustainable for them (e.g. Co-operative), and work with them and the other major current account providers to re-allocate those prisons to banks that, given their size, should take on further prisons (e.g. Santander, RBS; and those yet to be formally involved – i.e. Yorkshire Bank and Nationwide Building Society). This should be done in an open and transparent way, acknowledging that this is not a ‘competitive’ area, but rather an issue that the banking industry has collectively committed to support.

6. Local arrangements breaking down

Where a local arrangement breaks-down, NOMS should provide support to the prison to make contact with that specific bank nationally, to include the prison within their national framework.

7. Bank processes – Simplification and standardisation

NOMS and the BBA should consider convening the banks to look at what levels of simplification and standardisation could be achieved across the banks.

8. High return-rates

Prisons should ensure that they are ‘checking’ applications before they are submitted to the bank, to ensure that they are completed properly and that the appropriate paperwork is enclosed.

9. Pre-release banking in addition to savings provision

All prisons that release people directly into the community should have a system in place which enables people to open a basic bank account before they are released. Alongside this, prisons that have people with a long time left until release should have a system in place which enables people to set up a suitable savings product.

10. Broader ‘managing money in prison’ issues

NOMS should continue to improve the policies and procedures that are in place that govern the way that people in prison can manage an external bank account, to ensure that there is greater flexibility and ultimately the ability for individuals to prepare effectively for their release.

Future contact

Moving forward, support to both prisons and banks will be provided by NOMS. The provisional lead at NOMS is Rachael Reynolds. Email rachael.reynolds@noms.gsi.gov.uk.

Questions regarding this report can be directed to Christopher Stacey, Director (Services) at Unlock. Email christopher.stacey@unlock.org.uk.

Full report

This is a short summary. The full report can be downloaded from www.unlock.org.uk.