

HMPPS CFO Commissioning guidance

Peer mentor & peer involvement roles in prison study series (2024)

Dr Katherine Albertson



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Aims of HMPPS’s Creating Future Opportunities programme

Creating Future Opportunities (CFO) is part of His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and part funded by the European Social Fund. One of the activities CFO promote is the CFO wing model, designed to both complement and advance core HMPPS provision. The CFO wing model provides specialist professional staff, and meaningful activities with which residents may engage, alongside peer involvement role opportunities, aiming to provide a sense of collectiveness which will encourage those in custody to focus efforts towards realising crime free pro-social futures.

The external qualitative study

A Sheffield Hallam University-led research team was commissioned and conducted integrated data collection activities at CFO’s four wing model pilot sites between February and December 2023. The aim of this external study was first to evaluate the peer involvement role delivery element in each pilot site, and second to provide recommendations for future CFO wing model commissioning. Responding to Buck’s (2020¹) four principles of peer mentoring in the criminal justice system we designed and delivered a range of data collection activities across the four pilot sites, engaging a total of 681 residents and 70 staff. Four ‘Peer mentor & peer involvement roles in prison’ site specific reporting outputs were generated (Albertson, 2024a-d²).

Mapping four CFO wing pilot sites peer involvement delivery models

The comparative analysis of our findings was explicitly designed to inform CFO’s future strategic commissioning decisions concerning the peer involvement role element of their wing model initiative delivery commissioning processes (table 1).

Table 1: Peer involvement role delivery model selection per pilot site

CFO’s wing model pilot host site	Peer involvement role selection	Peer involvement role training provider	Training	Supervision/ oversight	Progression routes
HMP Risley’s Discovery wing.	Veteran Peer mentor	Prison’s Education provider, Novus.	NCFE Accredited Level 2 Award in Mentoring.	Weekly CFO Community drop-in.	Roles across wider prison.
HMP High Down’s Community Living Unit.	Male Lifer IAG Ambassador	Prison’s Education provider, A4e.	QS Accredited Level 2 Award in Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG).	Weekly CFO Community meeting.	Currently being considered.
HMP Drake Hall’s Hamlet.	Female Lifer Peer mentor	Prison’s Learning and skills provider, People Plus.	NCFE Accredited Level 2 Award in Mentoring,	Weekly CFO Community meeting.	Currently being considered.

¹ Buck, G. (2020). Peer mentoring in criminal justice. Routledge.

² Albertson, K. (2024a) CFO Discovery wings Peer mentor initiative at HMP Risley; Albertson, K. (2024b) CFO Community Living Units Ambassador initiative at HMP High Down; Albertson, K. (2024c) CFO Hamlets Peer mentor initiative at HMP Drake Hall; Albertson, K. (2024d) CFO Endeavour wings Peer mentor initiative at HMP Holme House; Albertson, K. (2024e) HMPPS CFO Commissioning guidance: Peer mentor & peer involvement roles in prison.

HMP Holme House's Endeavour wing.	Veteran Peer mentor	CFO's Peer Mentor Coordinator.	Ingeus, Non-accredited Peer Mentor program.	Monthly supervision with Regional CFO Peer Mentor Coordinator.	Currently being considered.
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Research questions

Traditional mentoring roles are theory 'steeped' (Mullen, 2017³; Holbeche, 1996⁴), and peer mentoring originates in more progressive mentoring theories exploring relational possibilities that disrupt the status quo (Bona et al., 1995⁵). While peer mentors have been identified as valuable resources supporting individual change trajectories across the criminal justice sector (Buck, 2020; Nixon, 2018⁶) they have proven difficult to evaluate. Our findings highlight that while all peer mentoring is peer support, not all peer support is peer mentoring. The research questions, set outside of the integrated CFO site-specific evaluation, are: What is a peer mentor in prison? How has it been explained? What are the benefits and disbenefits of the peer mentor role compared to other peer support role options?

How is the peer mentor role explained as operating?

The four principals underpinning the peer mentor in criminal justice role are: Identity; Pedagogy; Fraternity and: Politicisation (Buck, 2020).

1. First, Buck (2020) theorises peer mentoring as identity level work where mentors inspire mimetic desire (imitation) which initiates the process of behaviour change.
2. Second, peer mentoring is conceived as involving shared social learning where mentors navigate mentees through social systems.
3. Third, peer mentors build communal resilience by helping mentees to form solidaristic groups and networks.
4. Finally, peer mentors call attention to the political nature of criminal justice contexts.

The peer mentor role is currently the most recognisable, if not inconsistently categorised, peer support role in criminal justice. Largely considered an individual level of intervention the role is also defined as being conducted by (ex)offenders with lived experience (Buck, 2020). Remaining defined as divorced from the communal and democratic principles underpinning the role, the scope of the potential impact of this role is diminished. The Home Office (2023⁷) recently distinguished between "lived experience" and those having "living experience". We conceptualise the peer mentor role as a potential change-agent in prison operating across individual, communal, and democratic spheres (cf. McCulloch, 2021⁸; Mullen and Klimaitis, 2021⁹).

³ Mullen, C.A. 2017. Critical issues on democracy and mentoring in education: a debate in the literature. In *The Sage Handbook of Mentoring*. D.A. Clutterbuck, F.K. Kochan, L.G. Lunsford, et al., Eds.: 34–51. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

⁴ Holbeche, L. (1996) "Peer mentoring: the challenges and opportunities", *Career Development International*, Vol. 1 No. 7, pp. 24–27.

⁵ Bona, M.J., J. Rinehart & R.M. Volbrecht. (1995) Show me how to do like you: Co-mentoring as feminist pedagogy. *Feminist Teacher* 9: 116–124.

⁶ Nixon, S. (2019). "I just want to give something back": Peer work in prison. *Prison Service Journal*, (245), 44–53.

⁷ Home Office (2023) Support Services and Lived Experience Guidance Part 4: Glossary and resources [online]: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/recovery-support-services-and-lived-experience-initiatives/part-4-glossary-and-resources> (Accessed 05/02/24).

⁸ McCulloch, T. (2021) 'Co-producing Desistance: The role of peer support', in E. Loeffler and T. Bovaird (eds) *Palgrave Handbook on Co-production of Public Services and Outcomes*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature, pp. 409–426.

⁹ Mullen, C. A., & Klimaitis, C. C. (2021). Defining mentoring: a literature review of issues, types, and applications. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1483(1), 19–35.

Study findings - Headlines

Our comparative analysis demonstrate the delivery of the CFO wing model including the peer involvement role element has enabled different, positive relational experiences, which have been brokered expansively at the individual level and, promisingly, at the wing community level. These outcomes were identified as being more pronounced where the peer mentor role option was selected. These positive outcomes are also identified as occurring most explicitly in sites where peer mentors had engaged in an externally accredited L2 mentoring qualification. Signs of brokerage from the wing community level into the wider prison sphere were however found to be minimal across all the pilot sites.

Distinguishing the peer mentor role in prison – A definition

Our analysis identifies peer mentoring in prison as distinct from the wide array of other peer involvement role opportunities. This has wider implications in other criminal justice jurisdictions. Our findings distinguish peer mentoring from the more traditional hierarchical mentoring relationships (typified in prison for example where a literate resident assists another to read). As a direct result of our study's findings, we provide a clear definition of the peer mentor role in prison across three key elements:

- a) First, the peer mentor in prison is an unpaid role undertaken by currently serving residents adapting externally accredited, independently delivered mentoring qualification skills and a distinct inter- and intra-personal skill set to promote growth, advancement, hope and empowerment amongst their peers.
- b) Second, peer mentors in prison take up opportunities to champion their community's aspirations by representing collective interests at wing practice and wider prison decision-making levels to promote positive changes in delivery of services.
- c) Third, peer mentors in prison represent the collective living-experience-voice of those currently remaining affected by criminal justice sanctions in national policy-making forums, contributing dynamism to policy transformation efforts (Albertson, forthcoming¹⁰).

CFO Commissioning Recommendations

Based on our comparative analysis of the four pilot models we make the following three recommendations to inform future peer involvement role element decisions. In order to support CFO peer involvement role initiative delivery best practice, we make recommendations across the CFO wing community, the host prison and national policy levels:

1. CFO should lead on the development of a co-produced across-jurisdictional HMPPS target operating model:

to facilitate a strategic vision and operating guidance incorporating the full range of peer involvement roles available in custody. This strategy needs to be aligned to Probations' National Target Operating Model for services in England and Wales. As an operating model this existing model includes guidance on peer involvement roles in the community (HMPPS, 2021¹¹, pp 62-68), and includes a commitment to an evidence-based approach and peer support recruitment plans for those on probation. An equivalent model designed for the prison service may be similar but must be adapted specifically for the custodial context distinctions highlighted in site-specific study findings, which differ from the issues faced by peer mentors involved in probation provision.

¹⁰ Albertson, K. (forthcoming) "What is and is not peer mentoring in prison?"

¹¹ HM Prison & Probation Service (2021). The Target Operating Model for probation services in England and Wales. London: HM Prison & Probation Service.

2. Embed five commissioning requirements in CFO wing model commissioning frameworks:

- a. The provision of a CFO Governor-level sponsor, preferably also responsible for Prison Council arrangements.
- b. CFO wing peer representation on the Prisoner Council, if possible, CFO peer involvement role-specific¹².
- c. That any non-specialist HMPPS wing Officer staff working on the CFO wing receive additional training to ensure ‘belonging & buy-in’ to the CFO wing ethos¹³
- d. Special regime flexibility arrangements for the CFO wing.
- e. Co-produced-focussed partnership interaction and liaison with prison’s Education, Libraries & Industries Departments¹⁴.

3. Provide clear guidance to CFO operational teams to embed CFO peer involvement role delivery into core activity programme:

- a. To set up expectations of external accredited training for peer mentors in prison, independently delivered by prison’s Education department if possible ¹⁵, and progression aligned to core phased CFO programme delivery cycles.
- b. Formal, independent, and structured supervision arrangements provided by Prime provider for peer involvement role holders, including a CFO peer involvement role ‘forum’ to encourage collective discussion and emergence of ‘a voice’ for wing representation.
- c. Setting practical core delivery activity expectations of peer involvement role holders as embedded in the CFO programme delivery, progression to be defined by increased responsibility and involvement in decision-making.
- d. Assist operational staff teams to construct site-specific peer involvement role journey mapping across the peer involvement role continuum, from a whole wing perspective with opportunities linked to service user engagement frameworks on a gradual continuum (see example in site-specific reports).
- e. This will ensure both staff and residents are aware of the options to progress at particular points in their sentence – when they are ready to take on increasingly responsible peer involvement roles (see Appendix 1).

¹² In cases where PC membership unavailable utilise the peer involvement role continuum to recruit CFO-Allies from peer support and peer involvement role holders (e.g., wing’s PID/ CIO, Shannon Trust Mentors, Education Class support assistants, Reps etc), thereby also increasing recruitment potential across the prison population.

¹³ Link to HMP Grendon’s staff training (pp We do things differently on a CFO wing).

¹⁴ For example, to negotiate consistencies in contractual accredited peer involvement role training provision.

¹⁵ Key to retaining independence from prison’s institutional logic, to mitigate potential mission creep and ensure wider prison-specific resourcing and increasing potential for impact across the institution.

Appendix 1: Mapping Peer involvement roles in prison

The analysis of the four Prisoner Council peer roles in prison mapping workshops revealed distinctions in the peer roles available in custody which contribute to our wider understanding of the peer mentor role in prison. Our analysis highlighted that peer involvement roles in prison are distinguished by three key criteria: Payment; Levels of confidentiality and responsibility (LC&R); and Role scope. The levels of responsibility per role criteria applied here (high, medium or low) were inductively generated. These distinctions are synthesised to inform future CFO commissioning strategy.

Appendix 2 table: Peer involvement roles in custody - A continuum of engagement and participation

Peer involvement role title	LC&R	Paid or Un-paid	Role scope			
			Induction	Single issue	Bridging role	Collective/Civic representation & Change
<i>Similar role profiles are often differently entitled</i>	<i>EG. Can involve sensitive personal data.</i>	<i>As per PSO 4460¹⁶ payment guidance</i>	<i>EG. Formal induction, orientation, navigation, signposting or crisis</i>	<i>EG. Specific health condition, skill or crisis</i>	<i>EG. Formal recruitment, or sustaining & motivating participation</i>	<i>EG. Wing Decision-making Forum (WDF) or Prisoner Council (PC)</i>
Induction/First night orderly	Low	Paid	Yes	Specified in role profile	Signposting	No
Wings' PID/ CIO and/or House Rep	Medium	Paid	Yes	Specified in role profile	No	PC as part of role in two sites
Listener	High	Unpaid	Yes	Suicide prevention	No	No
Social Care peer support¹⁷	Medium	Paid	No	Health condition /mobility	Day-to-day living essentials	No
Cleaners, Food servers, Laundry etc.	Low	Paid	No	Specified set tasks	No	No
Red or Purple Band¹⁸	High	Unpaid	No	No	Yes	No
Shannon Trust Mentor	Low	Unpaid	Yes	Literacy	Yes	No

¹⁶ HM Prison Service (2020) Prison Service Order 4460: Prisoners pay: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/paying-prisoners-for-work-and-other-activities-psy-4460>

¹⁷ This role is outlined in various PSIs: 16/2015 Safeguarding Adults; PSI 17/2015 Prisoners Assisting other Prisoners; PSI 03/2016 Adult social care; and PSI 06/2016 Guidance for prisons and probation services on the delivery of social care and support services for adult offenders.

¹⁸ In the male prison estate, a Red Band and in the female a Purple Band, describes a resident who has earned special trusted status, and is permitted to work unsupervised and move around selected parts of the prison unescorted.

Education Classroom Assistant	Low	Paid	No	Literacy	Yes	No
Healthcare Assistant or Orderly	Low-High	Paid	No	Health or Literacy-specific	No	No
Ambassador	Low	Unpaid	Yes	IAG ¹⁹	Yes	No
Industries or Workshop Mentors	Low	Paid	No	Industry specific	Yes	No
Reps- multiple²⁰	Medium	Paid	No	Rep specific	Yes	Various models identified
Prisoner Council/ Committee	Medium	Paid	No	No	Yes	
Peer Mentor	High	Unpaid	No	Individual and communal change	Matching strengths with opportunity	
User-led²¹ mutual aid/self-help groups	High	Unpaid	No	Single issue	Yes	No

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¹⁹ Information, Advice and Guidance.

²⁰ The Equalities Act (2010) defines the following 9 characteristics as protected: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation, [on-line]:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/part/2/chapter/1> (Accessed 12/02/2024). In custody Rep role examples are: Equalities; Safer Custody/ Violence Reduction; Domestic Violence; Lifer, Over 50s; 9 protected characteristic-linked; Houseblock Reps in female estate & Wing Reps in Male; etc.

²¹ One example of a user-led substance misuse recovery orientated self-help group supported by staff at one CFO wing pilot site was identified.