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# Improving lives through linked data: Views from groups with complex needs

Reducing Reoffending Pilot

Audience summary report

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## Executive summary

The Better Outcomes through Linked Data (BOLD) project is a three-year, cross-Government pilot programme, created to demonstrate how individuals with complex needs can be better supported by the Government through linking and improving data in a safe, secure and ethical way. BOLD is sharing and linking a range of social policy datasets from across government to drive new evidence and insight, and better understand how services delivered in one part of government impact on outcomes in another.

To ensure that BOLD delivers for the individuals with complex needs that it aims to serve, four projects have been identified that could deliver the greatest impact with the highest probability of success. The four key vulnerability projects chosen are: Homelessness, Substance Misuse, Reducing Reoffending and Victim Pathways. In order to demonstrate what BOLD will involve in practice, each project has developed 'use cases' which outline key research questions and the data sets that will be used to investigate these.

As part of a commitment to put data ethics at the heart of its delivery, and to support transparency and public engagement, BOLD and the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation commissioned this piece research with the overarching aim of informing how to take the BOLD programme forward, by engaging and consulting with the relevant audiences.

The research has engaged 27 people with lived experience of offending, alongside 2 third sector support services, and the high-level findings are provided below.

This report focusses specifically on the research with the group of participants discussing reducing reoffending, including those with lived experience and the organisations that support them, henceforth shortened to reducing reoffending audience in this report.

## Key findings

- 1. Participants feel that better data linking would be beneficial for ex-offenders.** They feel that essential services, such as parole, housing and health, often let ex-offenders like them down. Their need to access these multiple services simultaneously means there are numerous areas where data linking could help.
- 2. BOLD is viewed positively by ex-offenders.** The target audience see themselves as a neglected group in society and respond positively to an initiative that seeks to help ex-offenders successfully rebuild their lives when they leave prison.
- 3. Participants feel they experience significant stigma as a result of being ex-offenders.** They are therefore wary of having their criminal record shared more than is necessary.
- 4. The use cases are seen as relevant, impactful and important to the majority of participants.** Most agree that accessing services when released from prison, improved access to courses and education while incarcerated, and further exploration into the impact of parental imprisonment on children are all especially key areas for focus that, if improved, could provide a clear benefit.
- 5. As a result of previous negative experiences with public services, participants are sceptical about the extent to which BOLD will deliver for ex-offenders.** Participants believe that the questions BOLD use cases are asking have "obvious" answers which do not require new research to understand. Additionally, there is a

widely held belief that broader systemic changes are required to improve outcomes and significant scepticism about the likelihood of those kinds of changes being made.

## **Considerations for communicating BOLD with the Reducing Reoffending audience**

- 1. Use cases should not only cover areas where ex-offenders currently experience detriment, but also highlight how the impact of BOLD could help to improve the lives of ex-offenders.** The use case that resonates most focuses on improving access to education and courses in prison, an area which is seen to potentially improve the lives of offenders once they are released.
- 2. Continue to clarify what BOLD will and won't do, especially when it comes to anonymisation.** Participants are concerned that BOLD could further add to the stigma they currently experience when accessing essential services and employment. BOLD's aim to improve outcomes on a macro level should be consistently reiterated in order to address these concerns.
- 3. Show how BOLD will both highlight issues and drive change and improvement.** As many in this audience feel that they already know some of the findings that BOLD may uncover, the Programme should be framed as a way of providing evidence to bring about positive change to the programmes or services accessed by ex-offenders.
- 4. The Reducing Reoffending audience consistently mention how barriers to employment are a big factor in preventing positive outcomes for people like themselves.** Developing use cases that look at how employment opportunities for those with criminal records can be improved is likely to have resonance among this target audience, as it is seen to be so universally important.

***Note: the findings in this report reflect the views expressed by participants who took part in this research.***

## Background and methodology

### Background and objectives

The BOLD project is a three-year cross government pilot programme, created to demonstrate how individuals with complex needs can be better supported by removing barriers across government and linking and improving data in a safe, secure and ethical way. To ensure that BOLD delivers for the individuals with complex needs it aims to serve, four pilots have been identified that could deliver the greatest impact with the highest probability of success. The four key pilots are:

- Homelessness
- Substance Misuse
- Reducing Reoffending
- Victim Pathways

BOLD and the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation commissioned this piece of research with the overarching aim of engaging and consulting with the relevant audiences for the BOLD project to help inform how the programme will be taken forward. Each pilot had its own specific audience group relevant to its individual focus, so that all research participants had lived experience of the issues covered by the use cases.

The specific aims of the research were to:

- Gain **feedback** to improve and refine **how BOLD delivers** the four pilot projects, in particular in relation to determining acceptable uses and forms of analysis of shared data
- Inform **how BOLD communicates** about the aims and outcomes of the programme to the relevant audiences, in order to be as **clear and transparent** as possible about what BOLD is doing
- Understand how the ways in which BOLD manages data **impacts on how much trust there is** in the programme

### Methodology

Our overall approach consisted of the following stages:



#### *Intermediary organisation workshops*

We conducted workshops with expert intermediary organisations, such as charities, who have a deep understanding of each of the audiences' attitudes and needs.

The purpose of these sessions was to:

- **Explain the purpose of the project to the intermediary organisations, covering:**
  - The proposed approach for the project
  - The specific methodologies to be used for their audience, including specific groups within this audience
  - A run through of the initial draft materials
  - The role we would be asking them to play in the recruitment of participants for fieldwork
- **Gain their feedback on the approach and materials**
  - We built in time for this to ensure that the organisations had an opportunity to have their perspective on this heard, particularly in relation to the BOLD use cases
  - We wanted to ensure that our research approach was ethically informed and considerate of practical considerations relevant for each audience (e.g., the settings for fieldwork activities that were likely to ensure most engagement)

The following organisations participated in the intermediary workshop for the Reducing Reoffending audience:

- Nacro – a charity that provides support to those with criminal records and campaigns for the reforms to the criminal justice system.
- Unlock – a charity that provides support to those with criminal records and campaigns for the equality of reformed offenders.

### **Fieldwork**

We engaged with a total of **27 participants**<sup>1</sup> across the Reducing Reoffending audience over the course of the fieldwork period, using a combination of methods to ensure full participation from a range of individuals with differing levels of need.

The fieldwork activities conducted for the Reducing Reoffending audience are outlined below:

	<b>Reducing Reoffending</b>
<b>Stage 1</b>	<p><b>2-hour online pilot workshop with 5 participants</b>, all of whom had previously offended and had experience of serving time in prison. Participants were all engaged with support services through an intermediary organisation.</p> <p>This initial phase enabled us to gain feedback in a group setting and to ascertain whether our research materials would be suitable for lower confidence participants in each audience. We then had the opportunity to refine our materials before the second stage of fieldwork.</p>

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<sup>1</sup> N.B. an additional 8 participant partially completed the online community

<b>Stage 2</b>	<p><b>Online community with 22 participants</b>, using the same content as the pilot workshops.</p> <p>This enabled us to gain feedback through set tasks and response activities.</p>
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**Note on our approach:** based on feedback gained in the pilot workshops, we were not required to adapt our materials for the second stage of research, as all information and activities were clear and useful in the sessions.

### Sampling

Given the specialist nature of these audiences, and based on our experience of conducting research with these audiences, it was agreed that we would work with the intermediary organisations to recruit participants for the research. We developed a recruitment screener, which was shared with intermediary organisations, enabling them to reach out to their networks as a trusted voice to find potential participants.

### Achieved sample

Below is an overview of the achieved sample across the reducing reoffending audience:

	Reducing Reoffending
<b>Stage 1</b>	<p><b>5 x participants</b> who are all prison leavers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● All men</li> <li>● Range of ages</li> <li>● Mix of ethnicities</li> <li>● All attended sessions in St Albans and were based in the surrounding area</li> </ul>
<b>Stage 2</b>	<p><b>22 x participants</b> who have previously offended</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 12 x men, 9 x women, 1 x non-binary</li> <li>● Range of ages (from 21-75+)</li> <li>● Mix of ethnicities (incl. White British, White European, Asian and Black)</li> <li>● Mix of locations in the UK</li> </ul>

**Note on intersecting needs:** based on our sessions with the intermediary organisations, we anticipated that it would be very likely that our participants would have experience of more than one of the issues covered by the four pilots. This did become apparent during the research as participants, though recruited with a focus on one specific pilot, spontaneously shared experiences across multiple areas covered by other pilots, for example homelessness and substance misuse.



## Context

*Engagement with participants throughout the research surfaced contextual themes which, while not derived from direct lines of questioning, were influencing participants' responses to data linking and the BOLD programme. This section highlights the most relevant of these contextual themes for the prison leavers audience.*

**The Reducing Reoffending audience report using multiple public services, including housing, probation, healthcare and benefits. Participants from this audience often have to access multiple services at any one time in their lives, with the period when they have just come out of prison mentioned as an especially important time for getting immediate access to these public services.**

- Participants in the Reducing Reoffending audience share similar experiences with the other audiences, especially the Substance Abuse and Homelessness audiences. For example, many have experienced being placed in hostels or probation houses and receiving treatment for addiction at the same time as accessing their probation services.

**Participants from this audience describe a generally negative experience of accessing public services. They criticise the current probation and welfare systems in place, claiming that these often work against people like them.**

- Those in the Reducing Reoffending audience feel frustrated and demoralised by their experiences of accessing different services. They claim that many individuals they encounter within the public service system dismiss them because of their criminal record, especially probation officers. Many do not believe that these service providers care about them or their outcomes. Indeed, participants in the in-person workshop claim that they are rarely told about the different support services or benefits for which they are eligible, and instead have to find this information out for themselves.

*“It’s all about ticking boxes. I don’t feel like probation officers give a crap.”  
(Participant from the Reducing Reoffending audience)*

- Participants mention positive experiences too, especially those in the online community, even if they are the exception and not the rule. Many say that it is the auxiliary organisations in the voluntary sector that care about them most, but others also say that occasionally there are individuals within state structures who will go out of their way to help them. In addition, some online community participants mention that digitalisation, especially with the introduction of Universal Credit, has helped improve some of the public services they access.

*“Universal Credit has gone some way to help this in the benefits system.”  
(Participant from the Reducing Reoffending audience)*

*“The staff usually want to do a good job, which involves helping people. They generally know what they’re doing, and what they need to do.”  
(Participant from the Reducing Reoffending audience)*

**Participants argue that better linking between different public services would improve their experience as service users.**

- Participants report frustration at the lack of data sharing between government agencies, including mental health, prison, probation or housing services. Most participants are able to give specific examples of times when their personal situation has been made more difficult by the fact that one agency did not have access to data from another.

*“Organisations do not link together. This is the thing that makes me frustrated. It demoralises you as a person, you don’t know where you stand.”*

- Participants describe how they are forced to continuously share data from one service to another, answering the same questions and spending a lot of their own time doing jobs that they feel should be the responsibility of the state – for example, sharing their mental health records and prescriptions with their GP.

*“The benefits system isn’t very co-ordinated. When they put someone on a programme, they seem to share as little information as possible, leaving the service user to explain their circumstances every time. Some service users seem to struggle with that.”*

**Audience example: Reducing Reoffending**

Participants describe the difficulty of having to provide their own data across services, especially when they have just left prison and have to access multiple services for the first time.

For example, one participant talked about how those who are on prescription drugs in prison, often for treating addiction or mental health issues, do not have their records linked with health services on the outside. This means that in many cases, it is impossible to continue taking a prescription immediately after leaving prison. This, as the participant described, can have serious consequences and can even put lives at risk. He talked about someone he knew being put in a high risk and traumatising situation upon his release as he was not able to continue taking the Valium he had been described in prison to treat anxiety.

## Attitudes towards data linking

*During the research, participants were shown information about what data linking involves, to help build their understanding of this topic and explore their initial response to the concept of their data being used in this way. This section highlights key themes relating to their overall attitudes towards data linking. Full stimulus material shown to participants can be found in the Appendix.*

**Participants immediately see the advantages of data linking for individuals before they are introduced to the BOLD project.**

- They believe that if data in the system was linked more effectively, they would no longer have to provide their own records so frequently, as mentioned above.
- Participants bring up the lack of linking between services unprompted, before data linking is discussed. Participants who attended the in-person workshop are especially engaged in the data linking discussion, again reflecting that this topic immediately resonates.

*“It [data linking] saves us doing the leg work. I ring up my GP, but he doesn’t know what mental health is doing and vice versa. You personally have to share records with the GP, it’s not done automatically.”*

**While most assume data linking applies to individual cases, some participants talk about how it can provide benefits at a broader level.**

- These participants (the majority of whom took part in the online community) comment on data’s potential to uncover insights and improve outcomes for people like them. They describe how this analysis can be used to make changes at a system-wide level, for example in how councils allocate their budgets.

*“As mentioned in the last set of questions, data linking can allow us to find relationships between variables that we couldn’t previously compare. This would allow the government/councils [to] better allocate resources.”*

### **Audience example: Education in prison**

Several participants mention access to records from educational courses carried out in prison as a clear area that would benefit from linking of data records.

One participant talked about how frustrating it was to come out of prison and not have proof nor record of the GCSE qualifications he completed while serving his sentence. He said that because of this he eventually had to repeat his GCSEs, which was time consuming and made doing them while in prison seem a waste of time, rather than a reformative activity. To him, data linking would have allowed him to provide evidence of his qualifications and make a quicker start to life after prison, a clear and obvious benefit that he felt should be happening automatically.

*“I did my GCSEs in prison – but then I had to do them again when I got out. What’s the point of doing them if you can’t access them?”*

**As with the other audiences, the Reducing Reoffending audience group also have significant concerns about data linking, especially because they feel that sharing their**

**criminal record with other essential public services, such as healthcare or local government, may lead to even great stigmatisation than they already experience.**

- Many feel that if all data is centralised, they will be even more disadvantaged than they already are, owing to their past and the reaction it may cause. For example, participants say that applying for jobs is already difficult because of the need to disclose their criminal record, and they do not want this to be replicated across all other services. Some mention that in many instances their previous offences may not be relevant to the service they are accessing, such as seeing their GP.

*“I don’t want my GP to be able to see my criminal record.”*

- In addition, participants raise that data entry errors are relatively common in their experience, and that linking data together means that erroneous data could have an even more damaging effect than if it had been left in isolation.
- There are also wider concerns about data linking, especially in terms of government tracking and the development of a ‘big brother’ state. This reflects a broader distrust of the state from many within this audience.

*“It opens up the prospect of a Big Brother society, where parents are afraid to take their children to the doctor because they’re concerned information will be passed on to the school.”*

- Participants also mention data security and the possibility of leaks that would further put their personal data at risk. Some say they would want to be reassured that data is stored securely.

*“A lot of talk of “secure, encrypted, personal identifiers” all of which is just saying we take important data from you, and we promise to look after it. Anyone can encrypt something; it doesn’t stop someone misusing it.”*

#### **Audience example: Data entry errors**

Participants claim that data linking could increase the impact of any data entry errors. They report that it is not uncommon for individuals to have some of their data entered into the system incorrectly, and by linking this across all services, this error will have an increased negative impact compared to when it is isolated to one area of public service.

In one instance, a participant claimed that his exclusion zone (the area he had to avoid as part of his parole conditions) was entered incorrectly, meaning that when he was in an area that he should have been allowed to visit freely, he was re-arrested and came close to being recalled to prison. While this particular case was an unpleasant and scary experience for this individual, examples like this also damage trust in data systems on the whole, with stories such as these being passed between ex-offenders, further adding to a feeling of general distrust towards state-run services.

*“So many people have had data entered incorrectly, like wrong courses or misquotations. You can have data about you that is wrong. I don’t feel like the data being held about me is necessarily correct”.*



## Responses to the BOLD project

*During the research, participants were shown information about the BOLD project, to explain its purpose and objectives. They were also shown information about what BOLD aims to do in the context of the Reducing Reoffending pilot, specifically. This section highlights key themes relating to their response to the BOLD project overall. Full stimulus material shown to participants can be found in the Appendix.*

**Participants are initially wary of the BOLD project and have concerns that its implementation could lead to the Government holding an excessive amount of information about them. They feel this could lead to increased stigma and negatively impact the support they receive from public services.**

- As mentioned in the discussions around data linking, this target audience group are used to being stigmatised and judged as a result of their backgrounds, especially when it comes to accessing housing and employment opportunities after leaving prison. Many are quick to assume that such a system would allow all other branches of the public sector to see their criminal records.

*“When people come out of prison, they want a fresh start. They don't want every arm of public services armed with that information - so that if you ring the council to say your bin hasn't been collected, you get a sarcastic comment from the council official saying, “Why should we collect your bins when you're a criminal?” Even if that doesn't happen, the suspicion will be there. Private information should stay private.”*

- Underlying this concern among this audience group is the experience they already have when it comes to employment, where they have to disclose their criminal background. Participants have a negative association with data sharing here, as in this instance employers seeing their criminal record almost always leads to worse outcomes for them and often makes finding employment much more difficult.
- Some say that data linking does not take extenuating circumstances into account. These participants say that many ex-offenders have difficult backgrounds and multiple factors that have led to them making bad decisions in life and feel that this is not always recognised by data points.

*“If housing people can see your whole past, they could just see you as criminal. When you start using that, individual circumstances are forgotten. People are put in categories, taking away all individual bits about them.”*

**Participants have a more positive reaction to BOLD when they receive a full explanation of what it will and won't do. In particular, they recognise the need for improvements in the current support system for ex-offenders and therefore respond well to BOLD's intentions to improve outcomes.**

- Participants are especially engaged with BOLD's intended examination of the support system for ex-offenders as a whole in order to identify areas that are specific successes and failures. They are happy that a programme intended to improve the system exists.

*“Too often for many years, [prison] leavers found themselves abandoned and tempted back to offending. Data linkage could be at least one part of a better means to ensure prison leavers are protected and assisted back into their communities.”*

- Despite this, participants point out that many of BOLD’s potential findings are already obvious to them. For example, they can already see the clear link between poor housing arrangements and an increased chance of re-offending. Many claim that the issue is that nothing is done to improve housing in this situation, not that the link between housing and offending is not known.

*“I think it looks good on paper, but I don't think it will reflect in reality. I've been on the housing register for 6 years since I left prison as I live in an overcrowded home and have mental health problems. Despite all these factors, I still don't have much of a chance of getting a home. I highly doubt that this chance would increase as a result of BOLD due to the prioritisation that exists within the council's system.”*

#### **Audience example: Help with housing**

While participants are positive about BOLD’s aims, they are sceptical about how much it will help to improve the extremely challenging experiences ex-offenders have when it comes to finding housing, employment and a life away from crime or substance abuse.

One participant claimed that often the only housing available to ex-offenders when they leave prison is with others who are also on parole or probation, and often with others who have issues with substance abuse. When he left prison previously, as a recovering drug addict, being placed with others who not only had a history of crime but also substance abuse issues, made it much more difficult for him to try and improve his life. Instead, this led him to becoming addicted to drugs again and ultimately re-offending. This participant did not feel that BOLD would help in this situation, as even though it was obviously not a good place for someone like him to be housed, that was the only available option. He felt that the real issue in this instance was the lack of housing available to people like him, not a failure to understand that this situation would likely have a bad outcome.

## BOLD use cases

*During the research, participants were shown three example use cases to demonstrate the types of issues that the Reducing Reoffending pilot would seek to address, and how BOLD would do this. This section outlines participants' responses to the use cases overall, as well as detailed responses to each use case shown. Full stimulus material shown to participants can be found in the Appendix.*

**Overall, all three use cases were seen to be relevant and offer good examples of how data linking can improve outcomes for those who have previously offended. Each example was relevant to at least some of the sample, reflecting the wide range of experiences among ex-offenders, and the need to provide varied examples to communicate the potential benefits of BOLD.**

- Participants initially reflected on each use case by drawing examples from their own experiences and discussing how data sharing would have helped in this particular instance. While this shows that the examples provided are relevant and positive to this audience, it also shows a tendency to understand the application of BOLD for individual cases, rather than to improve the provision of public services overall.

*"I don't have any criticisms – that should work brilliantly."*

- Those who took part in the online community had a slightly less positive and more sceptical reaction than those who took part in-person. This may be a result of the fact that participants taking part online received slightly less explanation than those in the workshops, who had a moderator talking through the examples and answering questions. Online participants appear less convinced that BOLD's analysis of ex-offender outcomes at a broader level would lead to an improvement.

*"I think I covered this in previous answers. I don't think it's appropriate to link personal data about prisoners due to it already being so tough to reintegrate into society."*

**Across all audiences, we have used the following overarching principles to analyse the performance of the BOLD use cases.**

- **Relevance:** case studies should depict scenarios that are recognisable and relevant to target audience groups.
- **Impactful:** examples of BOLD outcomes should clearly explain the positive impacts it might have on the target audience groups.
- **Clear and informative:** case studies should be explicit in how BOLD will and won't use personal data, including clarifications about anonymisation where necessary and what BOLD is aiming to achieve.
- **Non-stigmatising:** care must be taken to avoid any suggestion that BOLD may link negative factors together and increase the stigmatisation that these groups experience on a regular basis.

**Below is an overview of the performance of each use case presented to participants in the Reducing Reoffending audience. The ticks and crosses indicate where the use cases did or did not deliver against each respective principle.**



Use Cases	Principles			
	Relevant	Impactful	Clear and informative	Non-stigmatising
<b>Reducing Reoffending</b>				
Use case 1: access to services when leaving prison	✓	✗	✓	✓
Use case 2: access to education and programmes in prison	✓	✓	✓	✓
Use case 3: supporting children of ex-offenders	✓	✓	✓	✗

**Use case 1:** *We know that people with a previous conviction or caution for a crime are more likely to reoffend. Those who leave prison often need access to a range of services to support them to reduce the chance of reoffending and are supported by Probation to do this. However, it can be difficult to coordinate and deliver support services to meet these various needs.*

- Participants find this example relevant and remark that leaving prison is a particularly challenging time, especially when it comes to accessing support services and finding employment. They feel that they are met with lots of judgement by those providing services or hiring, and that it is at this time that ex-offenders need as much help as possible.

*“Forgive me for shouting, but EMPLOYERS DON'T LIKE UNSPENT CONVICTIONS. No amount of training and education for prisoners can overcome that, so employment will continue to be a major problem for prison leavers. Accommodation has a similar problem, and many landlords won't let to the unemployed.”*

- Participants are often unsure what services they are eligible for and how to access them, with support they received in prison (especially for physical and mental health) ceasing suddenly when they were released.

*“You need help in getting benefits set up inside so you can access as soon as you leave.”*

- Housing, benefits, education and employment opportunities are also felt to be extremely difficult to access when leaving prison, especially due to the need to do this quickly on release.
- Participants are surprised that more is not done to effectively share data between essential services for prison leavers, such as probation, prison and housing, and feel that better co-ordination between these services is essential for making the transition from prison to society easier for individuals.
- Some, mainly those who took part in the online community, feel that this use case may lead to increased stigmatisation, reflecting a misunderstanding of the purpose of BOLD here. They claim that those who get out of prison already face a challenge in rehabilitation, and that more sharing of personal data between public services will only make this more difficult.

*“Public services telling one another about who does, and doesn’t, have a criminal record seems to me a Big Brother step which will make rehabilitation more difficult.”*

USE CASE 1: Access to services when leaving prison		
	Worked well	Areas for improvement
<b>Relevant</b>	Most say that <b>the time period set out in this use case is relevant as this is a difficult time for ex-offenders</b> during which they must access multiple services, which often play a key role in their chances for avoiding re-offending.	While almost all find this relevant, some think the bigger issue for those leaving prison at this time is the <b>attitude with which some services treat them</b> , judging them for their criminal record and not providing the assistance needed.
<b>Impactful</b>	Participants feel there is <b>clear need to better link and understand services when they leave prison</b> , with most saying this use case is targeting the right area.	While this case study covers an area of need, most feel that the problem here is <b>bigger than just poor data linking, for example, access to good housing</b> . Indeed, many feel that it is already obvious what the issues are, and rather than a better understanding here, efforts would be better placed targeting the actual services themselves.
<b>Clear and informative</b>	<b>Most find this case study clear and easy to understand.</b> Participants recognise the issues being described and use it to reflect on their own situations.	Some are sceptical about how <b>data linking alone can help improve the lives of ex-offenders</b> . These participants <b>do not feel that it is clear how this will improve the essential</b>

		<b>services</b> they access when they leave prison.
<b>Non-stigmatising</b>	Most acknowledge that for ex-offenders <b>housing, employment and other essential services are vital for successfully rebuilding their lives when they leave prison.</b>	Some, especially those who participated online, feel that <b>data linking could lead to more stigmatisation.</b> But this likely reflects a slight misunderstanding of BOLD's use in this instance.

**Use case 2:** *We know employment is important in reducing reoffending. What we want to know in more detail is which education, skills and work programmes undertaken in prison have the best outcomes for those who have left prison.*

- Participants react with enthusiasm and positivity to this use case, as education in prison and support for employment opportunities outside of prison is a salient issue among ex-offenders. It speaks to their personal experiences and covers an area that they think can help ex-offenders to break the cycle.

*“I think people with similar experience to me would definitely welcome anything that can increase access to relevant education if they want to use it.”*

- Participants reference examples of courses they had taken that had failed to support them in accessing opportunities and employment once leaving prison. Participants feel they were not provided with appropriate documentation to prove their qualifications when leaving prison.
- Participants see BOLD as having the potential to be particularly useful in identifying which courses in prison are most likely to lead to employment opportunities upon release. Participants are particularly keen to see the disparities between courses provided in public and private prisons assessed, with those who have served multiple sentences across various types of prisons referencing the courses that they took in private prisons are of a higher quality than those available in public prisons.
- Participants agree that the organisations shown in the diagram are all relevant to one another and that data should be shared between them.

*“It feels relevant, and it needs the engagement of all parties.”*

- As with the other use cases, there is some scepticism over how much of an impact this will have from those participating in the online community. Some feel that the main issue is the criminal record they have that prevents them from being employed, and not access to education or courses while in prison.

*“It is of deep and abiding relevance, but I am unconvinced that data linking would be used as a solution that we would recognise as such. We come up against the prejudice of potential employers who demand a clean DBS*

*check for every category of job, and having better data available to the authorities seems irrelevant.”*

<b>USE CASE 2: Access to education and programmes in prison</b>		
	<b>Worked well</b>	<b>Areas for improvement</b>
<b>Relevant</b>	This issue is seen to be <b>especially relevant as many have experienced frustration</b> related to a lack of access to courses or no data linking of qualifications upon their release from prison.	
<b>Impactful</b>	Participants feel that the <b>impact of data linking in this context could be extensive</b> , especially if it leads to a more consistent offering of better-quality educational courses across the different types of prisons.	Some participants, mainly those who participated online, again are <b>sceptical that this kind of programme can improve outcomes significantly</b> . They instead mention the difficulty of <b>finding employers willing to hire them</b> as a more pressing issue.
<b>Clear and informative</b>	Participants feel this use case is looking at an area <b>where there is a clear need and potential for positive outcome</b> .	An <b>overwhelming majority appear to understand the use case</b> and why it will provide a beneficial outcome for ex-offenders. Therefore there is little to improve in this respect.
<b>Non-stigmatising</b>	Participants view this use case as a positive development, <b>focusing on things that help people improve their chances of successfully avoiding re-offending</b> .	Participants <b>do not mention</b> stigmatisation as an issue in relation to this use case.

**Use case 3:** *We know that children of parents who are or who have been in prison are likely to be impacted by this. Yet, little is known about the scale of this impact, outcomes for these children and how public services can better support them (e.g., support for mental health, education).*

- This use case is received particularly positively by participants with children, who speak of a lack of support for their families while they were in prison as well as when they were released. Participants claim that this issue currently receives very little

attention and is an area that needs to be focused on, especially as the children of ex-offenders should not be punished for actions not involving them.

*“This final point is very important for me. I think that when the kid has a parent who is a serious offender or user, they are much more likely to offend. I think support for the kids when the parent gets out is very important.”*

*“I think more needs to be done to understand the effect of having a parent in prison and this goes some way to addressing it.”*

- One participant with children both above and below the age of 18 emphasises that although his oldest child was over the age of 18, he would still like to see support available to him. This is particularly emotive in the context that the children’s mother had passed away prior to their father entering prison, leaving the older child to care for the younger child during their father’s incarceration. As such, participants agree it is important to understand what support the family of an offender requires as a whole.

*“They also need to identify the fact that there’s a need for multiple age groups. There isn’t any support in place to [sic] older children of adult age.”*

- Some concern is expressed that a parent’s criminal record could tarnish the reputation of their children, causing them to be categorised through no fault of their own. But most agree that it is more important to acknowledge the effect of offending on children and try to provide support as soon as possible. This feedback reflects the fact that participants are more likely to misunderstand BOLD at this use case than at others, as they think it might be applied to personal cases rather than wider systematic changes.

*“Will your children be tarnished with the same brush as you? If you have a prolific offender, they’ll see the bit of paper, they’ll label them and think this kid has got no chance in hell. They shouldn’t be labelled like this.”*

- Participants are particularly eager to see support for children of offenders to ensure they do not follow the same path as their parents and reduce the risk of intergenerational offending and other harmful impacts, such as substance use.

*“There is no support for children, the amount of children who slip through the net is so high.”*

- Participants, especially those in the online communities, mention the need for consent for this use case, in contrast to the other use cases. They claim that parents should be able to opt-in or opt-out, reflecting a tendency to misunderstand BOLD here, and heightened sensitivity when families and children of ex-offenders are involved.

*“I think participating in BOLD should be voluntary. Parents should have the choice to opt-in to this or opt out.”*

USE CASE 3: Supporting children of ex-offenders		
	Worked well	Areas for improvement
<b>Relevant</b>	For those with children, this use case <b>is especially relevant and important</b> . Even those without children can recognise the issues it raises, and often refer to those they met in prison who had children and talked about this issue.	While this use case is not necessarily relevant to those without children, <b>most who do not feel it applies to themselves are at least able to recognise its importance anyway</b> .
<b>Impactful</b>	<b>As participants feel this an area of neglect currently, the potential impacts they recognise are significant</b> . They believe that improving this area of public services would help address an unmet need.	Some argue that <b>focusing on a child's family background may prime them</b> to become offenders or substance abusers themselves in the future.
<b>Clear and informative</b>	Most understand this case study and see a <b>clear link between the children of ex-offenders and the potential to experience challenges in later life</b> .	Participants are quicker to misunderstand BOLD here compared to the other use cases, possibly because <b>the mention of children and family members accentuates fears that data will be applied at a personal level</b> . It is especially important to highlight what BOLD will and won't do for this use case.
<b>Non-stigmatising</b>	For those who see this case as especially relevant to their situation, the issues it raises are <b>so important that they are happy for these issues to be highlighted and discussed openly</b> .	Many are <b>worried about stigmatisation</b> at this use case; they feel that identifying children as the family of ex-offenders may lead to them being <b>judged unfairly</b> .

**Participants also mention that BOLD should look into employment as an additional area that is highly relevant, and important, for prison leavers.**

- Employment plays a key role in prison leavers' ability to build a life following their time in prison, such as being able to secure housing and food. In particular, participants say that both accessing the relevant training needed to boost

employment opportunities and finding places of employment that will consider them despite their criminal record are two key areas that should be addressed.

- Participants see this as being a critical factor in reducing reoffending, and allowing prison leavers to 'break the cycle'.

*"I think employment after prison is very important - you need a job to be able to have housing / pay bills / buy food, and without a job you have little purpose in life. Re-offending is very important, but I personally feel if employment after prison was increased, then re-offending would naturally decrease."*

## Considerations for communicating BOLD with the Reducing Reoffending audience

1. **Use cases should not only cover areas where ex-offenders currently experience detriment, but also highlight how the impact of BOLD could help to improve the lives of ex-offenders.** The use case that resonates most focuses on improving access to education and courses in prison, an area which is seen to potentially improve the lives of offenders once they are released.
2. **Continue to clarify what BOLD will and won't do, especially when it comes to anonymisation.** Participants are concerned that BOLD could further add to the stigma they currently experience when accessing essential services and employment. BOLD's aim to improve outcomes on a macro level should be consistently reiterated in order to address these concerns.
3. **Show how BOLD will both highlight issues and drive change and improvement.** As many in this audience feel that they already know some of the findings that BOLD may uncover, the Programme should be framed as a way of providing evidence to bring about positive change to the programmes or services accessed by ex-offenders.
4. **The Reducing Reoffending audience consistently mention how barriers to employment are a big factor in preventing positive outcomes for people like themselves.** Developing use cases that look at how employment opportunities for those with criminal records can be improved is likely to have resonance among this target audience, as it is seen to be so universally important.

## Appendix

### Stimulus material showed to participants

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#### What is data linking?

Data linking is the process of joining different sets of information together so that we can make as much use as possible of the information that each of them holds.

Data linking may include many different types of information and does not necessarily include personally identifiable information.

Linking different sets of data, rather than treating them individually, means that we can draw insights from across the data.

Often, linked data helps us to find new patterns and insights that we would not see if we only considered the sets of data in isolation.

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#### Better Outcomes through Linked Data (BOLD)

A **public service** is a service **provided by the government** that aims to **address the needs** of the public. They aim to **benefit all people in society**, and include things like health and social care, public transport and waste collection.

**Public services** are responsible for supporting people. However, people often need to **access multiple public services for support** across different needs, such as housing, employment and health.

Currently, data is often not shared between all the relevant support services, even when the individual is the same. The Government has created the **BOLD project** to see how **linking data** across services can improve them.

This will give services a much broader **understanding of someone's journey** so that they can better assess the **full range of someone's needs**, rather than looking at each need separately. Ultimately, this will enable services to make **better informed decisions** about which support they should provide.

**BOLD is initially looking at how linking data can help reduce homelessness, reduce substance use issues, support victims of crime and reduce reoffending.**

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## Better Outcomes through Linked Data (BOLD)

### WILL do

- ✓ Share data through a secure internet-based data sharing platform
- ✓ Follow stringent legal processes to gain approval for data to be shared
- ✓ Have access to information that could identify you (this consistent with the type of information about prison leavers that is currently available - the difference for BOLD is that this information will be streamlined into one place)

### WON'T do

- Collect new data about individuals
- Share your data with anyone outside of government or the criminal justice system
- Use any kind of predictive technology to make decisions about you
- Use your data for any purpose that falls outside of those that have been expressly authorised through data sharing agreements (i.e. the purpose is limited)

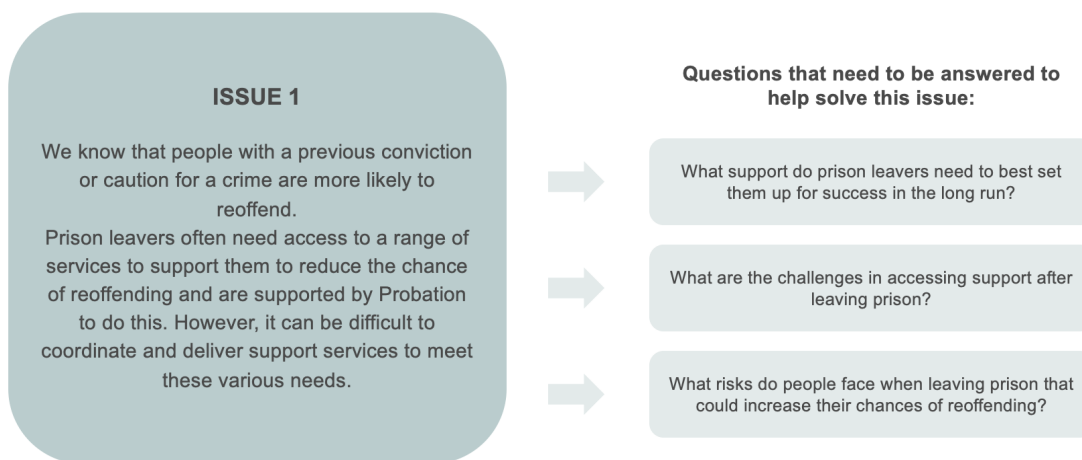
## What BOLD could mean for Prison leavers

### Reducing Re-offending

*We know that an ex-offender's likelihood of reoffending is significantly decreased if they have a home, a job and access to healthcare. The Prison Strategy White Paper, published in December 2021, sets out the Government's ambitions to tackle the root causes of reoffending and keep communities safe. The Reducing Reoffending Pilot project will support these ambitions by linking data to better understand the impact of specific interventions to help offenders turn their backs on crime, particularly in terms of their linked outcomes (employment, health, housing and family).*



*Issue 1: Risk of re-offending*



**Issue 1: Risk of re-offending**

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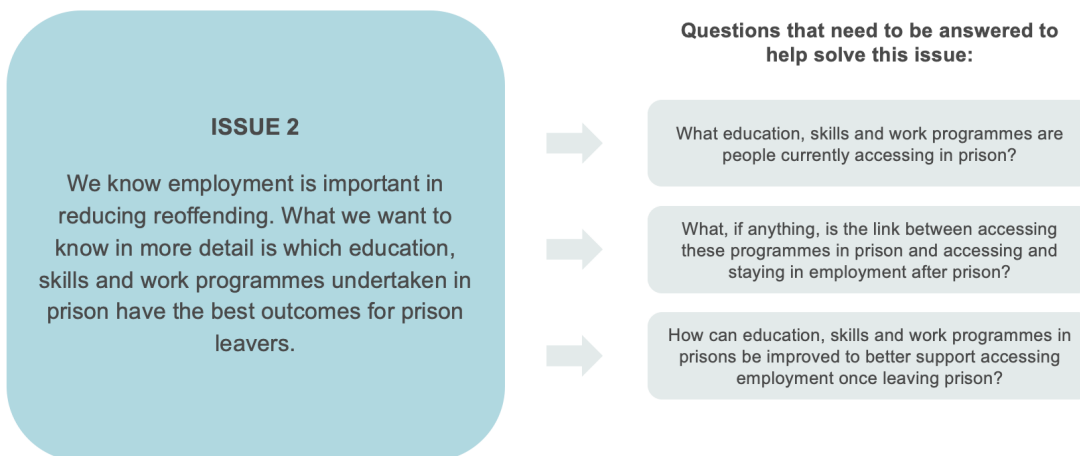
**Data from the following organisations will be linked:**

	Basic demographic information (e.g. name, age, location)	Risk assessment (including offence type, access to housing, social ties, etc.)	Probation data set (including services accessed and self-reported data)
<b>Prison services</b>	✓	✓	
<b>Probation services</b>	✓		✓

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**Issue 2: Employment after spending time in prison**

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Issue 2: Employment after spending time in prison

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Data from the following organisations will be linked:

	Demographic information (e.g. name, age, location)	Records of courses attended during time in prison	Records of educational attainment before entering prison	Employment records once leaving prison	Tax records from employment once leaving prison
Ministry of Justice	✓	✓			
Department for Education	✓		✓		
Department for Work and Pensions	✓			✓	
HM Revenue & Customs	✓				✓

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Issue 3: Children of imprisoned parents

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**ISSUE 3**

We know that children of parents who are or who have been in prison are likely to be impacted by this.

Yet, little is known about the scale of the issue, outcomes for these children and how public services can better support them (e.g. support for mental health, education).

**Questions that need to be answered to help solve this issue:**

What are the impacts of parental imprisonment on children?

How many children are impacted by parental imprisonment?

How can children of imprisoned parents be better supported both now and in the future, to lower the chance of future offending?

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**Data from the following organisations will be linked:**

	Demographic information (e.g. name, age, location)	Self-declared data on people in prison who have children	Records on family needs	Information on educational attainment, exclusions and attendance in school
<b>Ministry of Justice</b>	✓	✓		
<b>Local authorities / Department for Housing</b>	✓		✓	
<b>Department for Education</b>	✓			✓