

# Sector response to Re:Hub policy changes

Why me? convened an online forum with over 70 practitioners from Restorative Justice (RJ) services across England and Wales to gather views on the proposed Re:Hub policy changes. The discussion reflected deep commitment to improving safety, consistency and multi-agency collaboration, alongside significant concerns about the direction of the proposed reforms. This briefing outlines the themes that arose.

A victim of crime affected by Re:Hub summarised the stakes clearly:

*“Restorative Justice is widely described as a victim-centred and trauma-informed process. Unfortunately, my experience has felt far from that... Instead of helping me move toward understanding and closure, the process created a sense of distrust, uncertainty and loss of control.”*

## 1. Acknowledgement of the need for operational improvements

Participants welcomed the proposed operational and practical improvements, particularly commitments to enhance timeliness, communication and multi-agency coordination. Many noted that Re:Hub’s ability to convene relevant professionals is valuable and should be strengthened.

## 2. Presumptions that restrict victim choice and practitioner judgement

The proposed presumption of unsuitability for certain offence types generated the strongest concern across the sector. Practitioners described the shift as a step backwards that risks removing agency from victims and undermining the professional judgement of trained RJ facilitators.

Participants emphasised that restorative practice requires flexibility, trauma-informed engagement and individualised assessment. A rigid, offence-based framework was seen as incompatible with these principles and likely to retraumatise victims who already face significant barriers to accessing justice.

Practitioners also stressed that international RJ models do not begin with offence-based exclusions. Many argued that a presumption of suitability, subject to robust risk assessment, would better reflect restorative values and established practice. Several noted that the high volume of referrals in recent years demonstrates strong demand for RJ and the value placed on it by victims and practitioners alike.

### **3. Practitioners' views on the new presumption**

Across the forum, practitioners expressed a strong perception that the proposed presumption reflects operational pressures rather than evidence-based practice. Many felt that the changes risk prioritising workload management over victim choice and professional judgement, particularly given that experienced RJ practitioners have safely managed complex cases for many years.

Concerns were also raised about the lack of a clear rationale for the offence categories selected, the potential for the presumption to operate as a functional ban in practice, and the risk of undermining the professionalism and diversity of the sector. Participants emphasised that the core issue is not assessment but gatekeeping, and that meaningful reform must focus on improving capacity, strengthening multi-agency collaboration and ensuring that all victims receive the information and opportunities to which they are entitled.

Practitioners highlighted the importance of trust in the professional expertise of the RJ sector. Many have been delivering Restorative Justice for significantly longer than Re:Hub has existed, and there is concern that centralising decision-making away from accredited, experienced practitioners may inadvertently weaken safeguards rather than strengthen them. Participants cautioned that linking higher thresholds to specific accreditation requirements could unintentionally exclude experienced practitioners, including those from minority backgrounds or those who face digital barriers. Any future model must ensure that competence is assessed fairly, inclusively and in a way that reflects the diversity of the sector.

Several respondents emphasised that the proposed changes do not sufficiently address the wider structural issues that currently limit access to RJ. There is a strong appetite for reform that genuinely widens access, strengthens multi-agency collaboration and ensures that victims receive timely, accurate information about their rights. Practitioners stressed that meaningful change will require a shift away from gatekeeping and towards a model that empowers local services, supported by clear national standards and appropriate resourcing.

#### **4. Increasing barriers that further limit access to Restorative Justice**

Practitioners warned that the presumption would significantly reduce access to RJ, particularly for serious and complex cases that already require careful multi-agency management. Some estimated that up to 80% of their current caseload would fall within the excluded categories.

Even where exemptions exist, the additional bureaucracy, delays and uncertainty were seen as likely to deter both victims and people who have caused harm from engaging. Participants cautioned that the language of “unsuitability” risks sending a negative signal to professionals unfamiliar with RJ, potentially discouraging referrals across all offence types.

#### **5. Contradiction with the Victims’ Code and statutory entitlements**

Attendees highlighted that the new presumption is incompatible with the Victims’ Code, which entitles all victims to information about RJ and access to appropriate services. Many services are contractually required to offer RJ to all victims, and noted that the proposed changes could place them in direct conflict with their commissioning obligations.

Participants also raised concerns that the presumption could have a chilling effect beyond the listed offence types, leading professionals to assume that other cases are unsuitable and further reducing access. Respondents stressed that the presumption risks disempowering those affected by some of the most serious and often gender-based crimes, who already face significant barriers to accessing justice.

## **6. A functional ban on Restorative Justice for certain offence categories**

Despite assurances that the presumption is not a ban, practitioners reported that very few cases within the listed categories have been approved in recent years. Many therefore believe that a functional ban is already operating informally, and that formalising the presumption will entrench this further.

While practitioners agreed that some cases require enhanced safeguards or higher thresholds, they strongly opposed an approach that excludes victims before their needs have been understood. Participants stressed that victim wishes must remain central and that offence-based exclusions risk preventing those who could benefit most from accessing RJ.

## **7. Risk assessment must be individualised, not determined by offence category**

Practitioners emphasised that risk cannot be meaningfully assessed by offence type alone. Trauma, mental health, motivation, resilience, community context and support networks all shape suitability. A six-year-old witnessing a robbery may experience trauma comparable to a victim of sexual violence; offence type alone cannot determine need.

Participants stressed the importance of local knowledge, community insight and lived experience in assessing risk. They noted that victims of the listed crime types already undergo rigorous risk assessment and expectation-setting, and that offence-based exclusions undermine this established practice.

## **8. A localised model to improve efficiency and maximise resources**

There was strong support for a localised model in which RJ services lead case management, convene multi-agency panels and apply standardised risk assessment frameworks. Practitioners argued that this approach would reduce bottlenecks, improve timeliness and ensure that decisions are grounded in specialist restorative expertise.

## 9. Current sector safeguarding and risk practices

Practitioners outlined the robust safeguarding measures already in place across services, including:

- Continuous assessment of suitability
- Clear expectation-setting with participants
- Wellbeing and safeguarding support
- Co-facilitation and enhanced supervision
- Advanced training for complex cases
- Multi-agency assessment with police, probation, VLOs, IDVAs/ISVAs and others
- Use of established risk assessment frameworks

These practices demonstrate that the sector already manages complex and sensitive cases safely and effectively.

## 10. Areas where national guidance would be valuable

Practitioners identified specific contexts where national guidance or specialist input would be helpful, including:

- Terrorism
- Serious organised crime
- Hospital orders
- High-risk domestic or sexual violence
- Cases with significant media or community impact
- Multi-victim or multi-offender cases

Respondents emphasised that guidance should be developed collaboratively and draw on specialist expertise.

## 11. How Re:Hub can best support safe delivery of RJ

The sector was clear that Re:Hub should act as an enabling and advisory body rather than a gatekeeper. Practitioners valued Re:Hub's ability to convene multi-agency panels and its understanding of the HMPPS landscape, but stressed that decision-making should sit with local RJ services.

Practitioners expressed reservations about proposals for Re:Hub to lead on national guidance for Restorative Justice. While there was broad support for clear and consistent national standards, respondents emphasised that such guidance must be developed collaboratively. Many noted that Re:Hub's current remit and experience are primarily operational and do not reflect the full breadth of restorative practice across community, youth and custodial settings.

Participants stressed that national frameworks should focus on enabling access, supporting safe practice and strengthening multi-agency collaboration, rather than creating additional barriers. A more inclusive, sector-wide approach was seen as essential to ensuring that any national guidance enhances, rather than restricts, the delivery of Restorative Justice.

## 12. Clarity and implementation concerns

Practitioners requested greater clarity on:

- How the presumption will operate in practice
- Who will be involved in initial assessments
- How demand will be managed
- How Re:Hub's capacity challenges will be addressed
- Timescales for implementation and consultation

Several noted that the proposals currently feel too vague to support effective planning or expectation-management with victims.

## 13. Key calls from the sector

- Reframe the presumption of unsuitability
- Provide clarity on staffing levels and capacity
- Set out clear next steps and timelines
- Ensure full consultation with victims, survivors and practitioners
- Adopt a localised model supported by national standards
- Strengthen multi-agency collaboration and reduce gatekeeping