



Chartered Institute
of Personnel and
Development

Employers and offenders: reducing crime through work and rehabilitation



The change agenda

FOREWORD

Reducing crime is an imperative for society and business. Employers have a stakeholder interest in the issue of tackling criminal behaviour for a variety of reasons, which are covered in the 'business case' included in the annex to this report.

The most obvious reason relates to safeguarding property and resources against theft, fraud and vandalism. Secondly, employers have a common law duty of care to provide a safe working environment that includes protection of individuals from personal harm and violence. Additionally, it is illegal to employ people convicted of certain sexual offences where vulnerable children and adults are likely to be exposed to danger. (The Disclosure service provided by the Criminal Records Bureau enables employers to carry out security checks on employees so that employers don't break the law by employing such people.)

Less obvious perhaps is the self-interest of business in contributing to the creation of safe, inclusive and economically healthy communities in which businesses can gain greater prosperity. This is a key driver for corporate social responsibility initiatives and current signs are that more organisations are realising that business reputations, image and branding are enhanced by involvement in community issues which are of concern to the public.

But yet another reason forcing employers to act is the 'war for talent' phenomenon. CIPD research shows that employers continue to experience problems filling job vacancies. Responses range from offshoring to a growing interest in labour market diversity and the development of employment policies and practices and innovative terms and conditions to attract a more diverse workforce.

These prevailing pressures have created a climate in which the recruitment of ex-offenders is no longer something to be either ignored or avoided at all costs. More employers are beginning to recognise that ex-offenders are not a minority group in society. Startling statistics show they are in fact a large group. For example, one in three adult men under the age of 30 have criminal convictions. Many offences are for less serious crimes and carry sentences of six months or less. However, the stigma attached to offending means the chances of a person with a criminal record getting work is seriously damaged. This may not be surprising given that employers look for honesty and reliability in employees. Trust is a fundamental part of the unwritten psychological contract between employers and employees and once trust is broken down it is difficult to regain it.

Nevertheless, the practice of marginalising people who have a history of offending, even after they have fulfilled a punishment regarded as appropriate, is no longer tenable and may even compromise the rights of ex-offenders under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act. (This law is due for review by Parliament in the light of *Breaking the Circle*, a report published by the Home Office in July 2002 following extensive consultation.)

Evidence in the report by the Social Exclusion Unit, *Reducing Reoffending by Ex-Prisoners* (July 2002), identifies a number of important factors that influence rates of reoffending. Access to employment is key but ex-offenders are 13 times more likely to be unemployed than anyone else. Getting a job is the single most important factor in reducing reoffending, cutting the rate by between a third and a half – a significant impact. It is estimated that the cost of reoffending, excluding damage and repair to property or the impact on the health of victims, is at least £11 billion per year.

Work done by the CIPD shows that, despite a general reluctance among employers to be proactive in employing people with criminal convictions, the evidence from those who have shows their experiences are positive, not negative – contrary to perceptions and expectations.

Our purpose in publishing this report is to add to the suite of guidance and information we have already produced (see Further reading), and to alert employers, policy-makers and opinion-formers to some of the challenges that need to be addressed in order to increase success in the rehabilitation of offenders. This can be achieved through more professional, safe and fair approaches to the recruitment and retention of people with criminal records and/or through involvement and support through employee-volunteering, for example, in offender rehabilitation programmes which deal with issues such as low skills and lack of educational qualifications, work experience, alcohol and drug abuse, attitudes and self-control, institutionalism and life skills.

From our observations, rehabilitation programmes need to be more widely available and better resourced to deliver more successful outcomes in reducing reoffending and could potentially greatly benefit from more employer support and involvement. This could help to build the knowledge and ability of employers in managing the safe employment of ex-offenders and develop their skills and confidence in tapping into this part of the labour market.

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This paper reviews the policy context in which efforts to improve employment opportunities for offenders are being made. In particular, it:

- summarises the debate about the impact of employment on offending
- describes the key difficulties that offenders face in finding work
- explains what is known about employer attitudes to offenders who apply for jobs
- identifies the key ingredients of successful programmes
- makes a set of recommendations about how practice could be improved.

BACKGROUND

The relationship between unemployment and crime is complex and indirect. Whether unemployment is a fundamental cause of crime and whether the gaining of a job is associated with a reduction in criminal behaviour has provoked considerable debate. Politicians have been quick to take sides. This has determined whether crime control policies adopted by previous governments have, for the most part: emphasised the function of the criminal justice system to provide effective punishments; attempted to change the behaviour of individual offenders through treatment programmes; or sought to address the socioeconomic and environmental contexts in which crime takes place, including addressing such social factors as unemployment.

As is well known by now, the present Government's crime-reduction strategy is based on Prime Minister Tony Blair's assertion that society must be 'tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime'. An important change in emphasis from the previous Conservative administration has been the recognition that because there are many causes of crime, there need to be many responses to it. Therefore, as well as strengthening the criminal justice system and increasing the number of treatment programmes for offenders, the present Labour Government has also developed policy intended to address the underlying environmental, social and economic causes of crime. A report by the Social Exclusion Unit (1998) sets out a strategy for neighbourhood renewal that equates crime reduction with policies to regenerate local economies, including the provision of education, training and employment for marginalised groups in the labour market. This was followed by a second report, *Reducing Reoffending by Ex-Prisoners* (Social Exclusion Unit 2002), which recommends that support programmes for offenders should be 'measured against a number of factors such as reconviction rates and levels of employment, education and training, drug use and stable accommodation'.

All of this is taking place at a time when it is widely acknowledged that, in spite of massive investment, previous attempts to foster the integration of marginalised groups through employment have failed to demonstrate a sustainable improvement in their situation. There are four major reasons for this.

First, the demand for unskilled and semi-skilled manual labour has diminished throughout much of the developed world. *Skills in England 2002* (Learning and Skills Council 2002) points out:

'Occupational employment growth over the next decade is projected to be concentrated in professional, associate professional and personal service and caring occupations. In contrast, job losses are expected for many manual and blue-collar occupations, especially those with lower-level skills ... While there will be considerable growth in demand for some types of job, which do not require significant levels of skills, these will often be of a temporary nature rather than providing good long-term employment prospects.'

Second, the deregulated market economy does not deliver the kinds of jobs for low-skilled workers that provide them with personal job satisfaction and good rates of pay. The unemployed are often unwilling to take jobs that offer wages below the level of available state benefits, or to take part in education and training, which they perceive to be merely a means of forcing them into poorly paid and monotonous work.

Third, education and training has taken little note of what employers are looking for in terms of qualifications, skills and experience, thereby raising doubts about its quality, value and effectiveness.

Fourth, little has also been done to overcome the reservations that many employers have about recruiting marginalised groups. Indeed, as far as offenders are concerned, it is surprising that no reference was made to the role that employers can play in reducing crime in the White Paper, *Criminal Justice: The Way Ahead*, the Department of Trade and Industry's *Business and Society*, nor in the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act which paved the way for locally based Crime and Disorder Partnerships (Hardie and Hobbs 2002). Given that the contribution of employers can make to reducing crime has not been defined by Government, it isn't surprising that little has been done to address their concerns regarding the recruitment of offenders.

The consequence of all this is that if efforts to transform and reintegrate offenders through employment are to be effective they must:

- Establish relationships with offenders that demonstrate how acquiring skills can help them secure stable and well-paid employment and empower them to effect real change in their lives.
- Provide high-skill training that is in keeping with the present and future requirements of employers. According to *Skills in England 2002* (Learning and Skills Council 2002), these include formal qualifications, job-specific and technical skills and core skills such as communication, teamworking, IT, etc.
- Ensure that training is relevant to the needs of employers and customised to sectors that are suffering skills shortages and which offer job opportunities.
- Engage more effectively with employers to make the case that offenders with the right training and experience can become valued members of staff.

THE LINK BETWEEN UNEMPLOYMENT AND CRIME

The unemployment rate among offenders is much higher than among the general population. A study of over 1,000 offenders under probation supervision found that only 21 per cent were in employment compared to around 60 per cent of the general population (Mair and May 1997). The figure for those leaving prison is claimed to be nearer 10 per cent (Nacro 1993), with ex-prisoners comprising 2–3 per cent of the average monthly in-flow to the unemployment pool (Fletcher 1998).

At face value, then, there is a link between unemployment and offending. However, views vary as to the nature of the relationship, particularly in respect to whether unemployment is a fundamental cause of offending. Box (1987) identified a link between levels of unemployment in one year and levels of crime in the next and concluded 'unemployment is causally linked to crime levels.' On the other hand, Orme's (1994) analysis of police force areas found that 'overall there was not enough evidence to suggest that a consistent correlation existed between unemployment and recorded crime.' Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) found that differences in the rates of criminality between employed and unemployed were 'small, non-existent, or even in the wrong direction'. And, as evidenced by Naffine and Gale (1989), women, who historically have been detached from employment opportunities, commit far fewer crimes than men.

In between, a large number of studies suggest that unemployment does contribute to the level of crime, but that it is only one of many factors. For example, Tarling's (1982) review of 30 studies concluded, 'unemployment is a factor in the causation of crime, although it may not be a major factor; furthermore it appears to be inter-related in some complex way with other aspects of economic disadvantage or social deprivation.'

THE LINK BETWEEN UNEMPLOYMENT AND RECIDIVISM

While the establishment of causal links between unemployment and offending may be inconclusive, the literature is much clearer on the link between unemployment and recidivism. A large number of studies (Gormally et al 1981; Shover 1985; Farrington et al 1986; Dickinson 1993; Sampson and Laub 1993; Farrall 1995; Lipsey 1995; Graham and Bowling 1996; May 1999; Raphael and Winter-Ebmer 1999) suggest that offenders are more likely to reoffend if they are unemployed. For example, May's (1999) study of the records of more than 7,000 offenders starting community sentences in 1993 found that, in all six of the areas studied, 'employment variables were, by themselves significantly related to reconviction rates ... and this result confirms the relationship found in other studies.' The study of 411 young male offenders carried out by Farrington et al (1986) found that young men who persistently committed crimes for material gain committed around twice as many offences when unemployed as when in work. And Lipsey's (1995) analysis of 400 studies covering over 40,000 juveniles aged 12–21 concluded that, 'the single most effective factor in reducing re-offending rates is employment.'

However, although the literature confirms that employment does have an effect on the propensity of offenders to reoffend, there is less agreement on whether Lipsey is right in his conclusion that it is the single most effective factor. Education and completing schooling (Farrington et al 1986), getting married (Warr 1998) and becoming a parent (Leibrich 1993) have also been cited as significant influences. While others (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990, for example) have argued that desistance from crime is primarily a consequence of the ageing process. This view is supported by Uggen (2000) who found that age interacts significantly with employment in that the gaining of poorly paid, low-quality jobs had an effect only on those offenders over the age of 26.

What all of this shows is that employment by itself does not affect recidivism. Rather it acts in combination with a number of other factors including age, marriage and education. Furthermore, as argued by Sampson and Laub (1993), it is only when employment is 'coupled with job stability, commitment to work, and mutual ties binding workers and employers' that it is most effective in reducing criminality. In other words, it is not the job, it is the quality of the job that really matters.

THE DIFFICULTIES OFFENDERS FACE IN FINDING WORK

The above evidence highlights the benefits, in terms of reducing crime, of increasing employment opportunities for offenders. In order to ensure that programmes are successful and that offenders desist from reoffending in the long term, input is required to address the specific difficulties offenders face in finding work. Some of these difficulties are common to other groups of unemployed people, while others are unique to people with an offending background.

The factors that cause offenders to become disadvantaged in the labour market have been acknowledged for some time. Throughout the 1970s, writers such as Lawson (1970) and Boshier and Johnson (1974) highlighted the difficulties offenders face when a lack of relevant skills and qualifications is combined with a criminal record. According to more recent studies carried out by Fletcher et al (1998) and Nacro (1997), some of the specific barriers to employment that offenders face include the following:

- employer attitudes
- criminal records and offenders' concerns about disclosing their records
- low self-esteem, confidence and motivation

- behavioural problems
- poor health
- lack of qualifications, including poor basic skills
- lack of recent work experience
- participation in segregated social networks (they lack informal contacts for jobs)
- poverty and debt
- insecure housing.

Analysis of data carried out by Nagin and Waldfoegel (1995) suggests that some offenders continue to face such difficulties throughout their lives. This is because early criminal convictions can deny young offenders job opportunities by precluding entry into apprenticeships and training opportunities. Thus, young offenders' long-term career advancement is limited and this, in turn, places a cap on their potential earnings.

What all of this shows is that in order to be successful, employment programmes for offenders must work in partnership with other agencies in order to address the multiple problems faced by offenders so that they stand a reasonable chance of benefiting from employment opportunities.

EMPLOYER ATTITUDES TOWARDS OFFENDERS

A number of surveys of how employers respond to job applications from offenders have shown that recruiter discrimination makes it extremely difficult for offenders to find employment. Surveys carried out by the Apex Trust (1991), Conalty and Cox (1999) and Fletcher (2001), for example, have identified a general reluctance among employers to recruit offenders, with offences of a violent and sexual nature or offences against property being considered the most serious. In addition, most employers seek criminal record information from job applicants and relatively few have knowingly recruited an offender in the past.

In the survey carried out by Fletcher (2001), the reasons for this level of discrimination were explored. When recruiters were asked to rate the individual attributes that were considered the most important in new recruits, traits such as honesty, reliability and motivation were cited. As employers have a natural desire to recruit low-risk employees, the disclosure of a criminal record was frequently equated with a lack of reliability and was therefore considered reason enough to reject the application.

Fletcher et al found that discrimination is further increased because employers are largely unaware of the two pieces of legislation that govern the recruitment of offenders in England and Wales. The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 provides that offenders applying for jobs do not have to disclose criminal convictions that have become 'spent'. Of the 400 employers surveyed, 'less than half felt that they fully understood its main provisions in relation to their recruitment practices.'

The same is true of the Police Act 1997, which includes provision for a Basic Disclosure system that will enable all employers to obtain criminal record information about all prospective employees and volunteers, irrespective of whether the posts they are seeking to recruit to involve working with vulnerable people. The survey showed that employers will make extensive use of the Basic Disclosure system and are likely to make inappropriate use of the information it will provide. As a consequence, the researchers concluded that the Basic Disclosure system 'will heighten discrimination against offenders in the labour market'.

However, this situation is likely to improve in the future as the Government has accepted recommendations contained in a recent review by the Home Office (2002) of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, which proposed, *inter alia*, that: a voluntary code of practice be developed for employers to govern the use of Disclosures in the recruitment process; and that sanctions are available if an applicant or existing employee loses their job on the grounds of a previous conviction that they were not required to disclose. Guidance is also to be made available to offenders so that they understand how the Disclosure requirements apply to them.

EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES FOR OFFENDERS – DO THEY WORK?

Research carried out during the 1970s into the effectiveness of employment programmes for offenders found little evidence of reduced reconviction rates. The conclusion of Davies (1974), for example, that, 'on the basis of the existing evidence, it does not seem likely that the employment problems of offenders can be significantly alleviated by manpower programmes, or that these programmes will have a noticeable impact on the rate of crime' was in keeping with a 'nothing works' approach to offender rehabilitation, which remained unchallenged until the beginning of the 1990s.

Since then, a growing number of studies have provided evidence that offender programmes can have a significant impact on criminal behaviour (for example, Andrews et al 1990; Lipsey 1992) and some studies have begun to show that employment programmes can be effective. For example, Bridges (1998) examined the experiences of 739 offenders under probation supervision by 11 probation services and found that offenders who were unemployed on commencement of probation supervision and received an employment intervention were twice as likely to gain employment before supervision ended than those who received no employment intervention. The research also found that employment interventions were as effective in areas of high unemployment as they were in relatively prosperous areas.

A more recent study, a Home Office evaluation (Sarno et al 2000) of two probation-based employment programmes, showed positive employment outcomes for 12 and 25 per cent of participants respectively. The research also showed that offenders who attended the programmes had lower reconviction rates than non-attenders.

In the United States of America, three recent studies by Finn have shown that prison-based programmes can also be effective. The last of these (1999) evaluated four prison-based programmes that aimed to place offenders in jobs after release. The research showed that the programmes placed nearly 60 per cent of offenders in work, 85 per cent of whom had not reoffended and returned to custody five years after they had completed the programme.

THE INGREDIENTS OF SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMMES

A major reason for the importance of employment in reducing reoffending put forward by writers such as Graham and Bowling (1986) and Farrall (1995) is that it provides structure to daily life, aids the maturation process and develops independence and self-worth. Graham and Bowling (1986) suggest that, 'the experience of work has considerable significance in structuring identity through providing the social and cultural capital necessary for successfully making the transition to adulthood.'

However, as explained earlier, the literature also shows that the capacity of employment to reduce reoffending is not merely a matter of matching any offender to any job. Soothill and Holmes' (1981) study of the reconviction rates of 65 men who had received employment support concluded that employment was particularly beneficial to those with a medium risk of reconviction. This may be because persistent offenders are less likely to have any formal qualifications and do not possess the life, social and thinking skills necessary to avoid reoffending and hold down a steady job (Gottfredson and Hirsch 1990).

Success is also dependent on the seriousness of the offence, the attitude of the offender and the level of co-operation and attendance on a programme. For many offenders, securing a job is often only one of many problems they may face, including drug/alcohol addiction, debt and homelessness. In addition, as Downes (1993) has pointed out, 'desistance from crime is strongly associated with finding stable jobs of sufficient income and quality to support a family.' This view is supported by Gill (1997) who, in a study based on interviews with offenders, employers, probation officers and training providers, concluded, '... for many it is not a case of any job will do. Some ex-offenders had been successful criminals and they were not prepared to work unsociable hours for a pittance when easy pickings from crime were readily available.'

An increasing number of researchers have also begun to argue that the failure of some programmes to achieve lasting effects is more to do with specific flaws in the way they have been designed, managed and funded. For example, Crow (1989), Roberts (1997), Downes (1998), Fletcher (1998) and Vennard and Hedderman (1998) have all suggested that performance is improved when certain principles are adhered to. These include:

Consistent practice. A growing body of research has shown that the most cost-effective interventions are those that are skills-based and which also include a cognitive component in order to address the values, attitudes and beliefs that support offending behaviour. A set of principles has been formulated by Vennard (1997) to improve the effectiveness of programmes for offenders. These include:

- targeting dynamic risk factors – programmes should focus on factors directly related to offending
- risk classification – more intensive programmes should be targeted at high-risk offenders; lower-risk offenders should receive less intervention
- community-based programmes – programmes that otherwise follow 'what works' guidelines are more effective when delivered in the community than in a custodial setting
- responsivity – the way a programme is delivered should reflect the learning styles of offenders
- treatment modality – interventions combining training in social skills, problem-solving and cognitive behavioural modification seem to be most effective
- programme integrity – programmes should be properly managed and run by well-trained staff; aims and objectives should be clearly defined and adhered to consistently.

Multi-agency co-operation. Employment programmes are most effective when they address the range of disadvantages faced by offenders, such as drug, debt and housing issues, in partnership with other agencies. Programmes should be integrated and the various components developed on the basis of an adequate assessment of offenders' needs, as well as their interests and ambitions (Roberts et al 1997; Downes 1998).

Delivering multi-agency partnerships is an issue that has been explored extensively by Crawford (1998). He concludes that in order to be effective, partnerships should reflect the locality in which they are operating, have clear priorities and a sense of focus, respect the different contributions made by each of the partners and contain measures by which conflicts can be addressed. This research has particular resonance for partnerships formed to improve job opportunities for offenders as they frequently involve the participation of partners with vastly different priorities, cultures and working practices, as well as different power relations and access to resources. Training programmes for offenders therefore must take into account the expertise and the constraints of partners such as the prison and probation service, public and voluntary sector training organisations, social services, job agencies and private companies.

Identifying skills gaps in local labour markets. Programmes that target realistic areas of employment or address local skills shortages are more likely to produce positive results than those that provide training for jobs in general. They are also less likely to raise false hopes and expectations, as there is a greater chance of offenders finding real jobs (Roberts et al 1997; Downes 1998; Fletcher et al 2001).

This is an issue addressed directly in *Skills in England 2002* (Learning and Skills Council 2002), which reported that skills-shortage vacancies are heavily concentrated in construction, health and social care and among certain occupational groups including professionals, associate professionals and skilled trades. In addition, retailing and personal services, such as hotels and catering, are finding it difficult to recruit good-quality staff. It is also being addressed by the new Prison Service Custody to Work initiative, which has set a target of getting 31,500 prisoners into jobs or education or training after release during 2003–04. In order to achieve this goal it has adopted a sector-based approach to training and has targeted construction and utilities, catering, industrial cleaning, sport and fitness, and driving and distribution as primary areas for attention.

Establishing more productive links with employers. A survey of 190 employment programmes for offenders carried out by Fletcher (1998) found that almost all of them (92 per cent) had not established productive links with employers. While acknowledging that supply-side responses, such as basic skills training and employment, are important, Fletcher et al have since argued that programmes should also be provided that aim to meet the training and recruitment needs of specific employers. In addition, more should be done to break down the high levels of discrimination that offenders face when they apply for jobs (Fletcher et al 2001).

Again, this issue was addressed in *Skills in England 2002* (Learning and Skills Council 2002), which concluded that although supply-side initiatives can help they are not the key issue. What is most important is how policy-makers persuade employers to become much more proactive in investing in skills training for existing staff and to determine to a far greater extent the types of skills that are supplied by training organisations. This is especially true of smaller employers, which tend to train to a much lesser extent than do larger organisations.

In terms of offenders specifically, more needs to be achieved in terms of breaking down employer discrimination. In a general sense, efforts should be made to help employers understand more about the nature and extent of crime committed throughout England and

Wales, including the types of offences most commonly committed, the role of the criminal justice agencies in combating crime, and training and employment organisations that work with offenders and the courts. In addition, such judicial terms as ‘criminal record’ as opposed to ‘civil record’, etc should be explained. More specifically, information and support should be provided to employers so that they are fully conversant with the requirements of the criminal record Disclosure system and the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

Finally, although it is perfectly possible for Parliament to pass legislation to ensure employers adhere to codes of practice concerning the fair treatment of offenders who apply for jobs, it is more likely that it will continue to rely on the corporate social responsibility of business to adopt fair practice. However, as explained above, there is considerable evidence to suggest that at present corporate social responsibility doesn't even extend to a responsibility about crime in general, let alone about the employment of people with a criminal record in particular. Some kind of encouragement is therefore necessary. This could perhaps be achieved by making funding available to employers for training, provided by Learning and Skills Councils, for example, or the Investors in People award, dependent on the existence of recruitment policies and practices that cover offenders.

Adequate funding. The question of funding has serious implications for the long-term viability of employment programmes for offenders. Successful programmes require funding arrangements that enable them to bed in after the initial project development stage and to establish trust and effective working arrangements with different partners and individuals. However, as noted by both Downes (1993) and Roberts et al (1997), funding for such programmes is frequently provided in the short term only. This is because funding is either ‘pump-priming’ in nature and so doesn't facilitate the long-term survival of projects established as pilot or demonstration projects, or it is time-limited, as in the case of the larger funding streams such as the Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund.

Although some attempts have been made to build up the capacity of organisations to secure alternative sources of funding after the initial funding period has ended, this is rarely done effectively (for example, see the Evaluation of the Hertfordshire Enterprise Alliance SRB II Scheme 2003). The consequence of this is that many employment programmes for offenders collapse due to lack of mainstream funding support, thus provoking the criticism that, ‘it is absurd to dismantle successful projects after so limited a life and force their practitioners to reassemble on a different basis, if at all, through the exigencies of the funding process’ (Downes 1998).

Adequate timescales. Offenders need time to make progress. It is unrealistic to expect that success can be achieved quickly with offenders who face a range of personal and social problems. Offenders require ongoing support to help them sustain employment in the long term and to pursue a successful career. In particular, adequate time periods are required to deal effectively with high-risk offenders (Downes 1998).

This view was recognised recently in the Halliday Review of the sentencing system in England and Wales (Home Office 2001), which noted the ‘inability of short prison sentences (those of less than 12 months) to make any meaningful intervention in the criminal careers of many of those who receive them’. Informed by the Halliday Review, the Criminal Justice Bill 2002 proposes the introduction of a new range of sentences, each of which is justified with reference to the opportunities they afford for rehabilitation. These include: custody plus, a sentence for periods of under 12 months comprising a period of imprisonment followed by a period in the community, supervised by the National Probation Service; a new custodial sentence of 12 months or more to be served in full and to include a package of measures to

be required of the offender during an enforceable period of supervision in the community; partial or intermittent imprisonment, including weekend imprisonment or imprisonment during parts of the day or night; and suspended sentence plus, which guarantees a period of imprisonment specified by the court if the terms of a community sentence are breached. The rehabilitative components of these sentences are to be delivered in tandem by the Prison Service and the National Probation Service as well as by partners who provide services such as drug treatment and training for employment in the community.

The need to provide ongoing support over long time periods has also been recognised by the expansion in the number of employment programmes that use volunteer mentors to support both offenders and employers after a placement into employment has been made. Such support is provided in order to help offenders sustain employment over the long term and to address any concerns employers might have about recruiting people who disclose a criminal record to them. (For examples of these, see mbA, 1998–9; Crossroads European Partnership 2000).

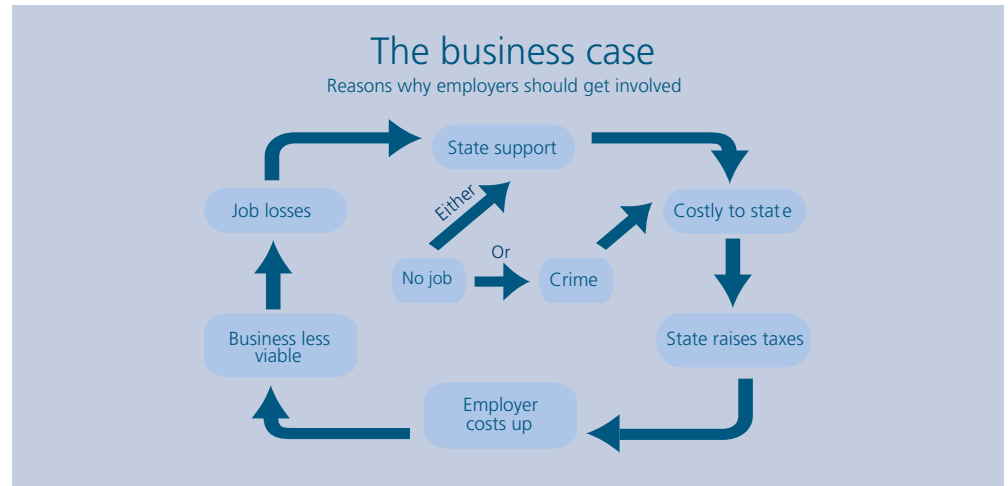
TO CONCLUDE

There is some evidence to suggest that employment programmes for offenders can be effective in reducing crime. However, they are not a panacea. The literature shows that unemployment is only one of many factors that can cause people to offend and it is only by addressing the multiple problems that offenders face that they can be encouraged to desist from reoffending in the future. Forecasts that the labour market will continue to be characterised by professional and higher-skill jobs means that training needs to be reformulated if offenders are to take advantage of the higher-skill work opportunities. Although some low-skill jobs will continue to be available, these are likely to be unattractive to many people because of poor working conditions and low rates of pay. Success is therefore heavily dependent on the motivation of the offender to change, the quality of training provided and the types of jobs obtained.

Although training for offenders is provided in a number of settings, including in prisons, on probation and with specialist agencies, there is overwhelming evidence that work opportunities for offenders are severely restricted. This is due to the fact that a high percentage of offenders have poor numeracy and literacy skills and need training in basic skills before they are able to progress on to employment programmes; much training for offenders is unrelated to the specific skills requirements of employers and to the discrimination that many offenders face when they apply for jobs; and, because employment programmes for offenders have been poorly funded in the past, they have therefore been unable to develop good practice over the long term.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Work that is adequately paid and offers the potential for career advancement should be the central goal of employment programmes for offenders.
- Training programmes should be developed on the basis of job-specific skills that are in demand in local and regional labour markets.
- Training programmes for offenders should follow good-practice guidelines. These should be written on the basis of available research and include procedures for:
 - carrying out assessments of need
 - working with high-risk offenders
 - developing partnerships
 - engaging with employers
 - understanding the needs and requirements of local labour markets.
- Employers should be provided with information and advice on legislation affecting the recruitment of offenders.
- Promotional information should be made available to employers, at both a national and local level, describing the various ways in which offenders are being prepared for employment. This should acknowledge their concerns and show how they are being addressed.
- Employers should be provided with information and training so they are able to carry out relevant criminal record checks fairly and effectively.
- Consideration should be given to making long-term funding available for employers to carry out training, which is conditional on the development of fair recruitment policies that include specific provisions for offenders.



The business case model - *Breaking the cycle*. This is an illustration of the cause-and-effect cycle we could get locked into, if we're not already, when we don't get ex-offenders into employment. While there are ex-offenders who will never be turned away from crime, or whose crimes are simply too serious for us to contemplate offering them a job, many wish to sort out their lives. Getting a job is a significant milestone on the road to becoming a net contributor, rather than remaining a cost to the state.

Finding suitable employment for ex-offenders who wish to go straight is not only an important role for the community but it's also cost-effective. An offender completing a custodial sentence really has only three options:

- Find employment and become a useful contributor to society.
- Rely on the state to provide benefits, possibly for a long time.
- Return to crime in order to live.

Relying on state benefits or crime is costly. It's estimated that those who return to crime cost us all £11 billion per year. In the end, we all have to cover this cost through taxation of one kind or another, adding to the burden on employers, among others. Increasing costs to an employer can't always be recovered from efficiencies elsewhere and so some employers will need to reduce overheads in order to remain competitive. As we all know, many will reach for the redundancy model, throwing more people on to the job market. Not all those made redundant will readily find alternative employment, not least the young and inexperienced, and older people who are often perceived as over the hill at 50 or less. In due course, the unemployed become a charge on the state, unless they have other means of financial support. And so the cycle continues.

Of course, reality isn't quite as simple as illustrated here, but we are trying to draw your attention to some of the hidden costs of deciding that ex-offenders should continue to be punished long after they have served their sentence, in the belief that 'it's nothing to do with us.'

Other issues include the skills that ex-offenders can offer employers, and whether or not there is a demand for particular skills at the time. Many prisons and young offender institutions are now providing quality training – practical and academic – aimed at some of the skills shortages in their localities. These establishments are more than willing to liaise with employers to ensure that offenders seeking work have the relevant social, lifestyle and occupational skills to reduce the chance of failure from the placements or risk to the employer, workers, and others. The CIPD encourages employers to investigate these opportunities to employ people who generally make very reliable and committed employees, so breaking the crime–unemployment–crime circle that continues to be prevalent today.

FURTHER READING

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