

IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES FOR PRISONERS IN ENGLAND AND WALES

First, to set the scene. Only around 25% of prisoners in the UK report that they have a job to go to on release. The figure is significantly lower for female prisoners. Only 20% of businesses say that they currently would employ an offender. 75% of businesses say they would treat a job applicant less favourably if they have a criminal record. One in seven would ask about criminal convictions, then reject any applicant with a criminal record, irrespective of the nature or relevance of the offence.

This isn't good enough. We need to do more – to get more employers involved, to get more prisoners ready for work and for a real job, to turn their lives around, to reduce re-offending, reduce victims, to give them a second chance.

But employment is only one element of rehabilitation. If we are going to make a real difference to prisoners' lives on the outside, we need to get things right on the inside. And because of this, the UK Government published a White Paper in early November called Prison Safety and Reform.

Our prison system needs reform. It fails to rehabilitate or make sure criminals are prevented from offending again. Currently, nearly half of adult prisoners are reconvicted within one year of release and that rises to almost 60% for those serving sentences under 12 months. Our aim is to place rehabilitation of prisoners squarely alongside safety, security and cost effectiveness as one of the key purposes of prison.

This white paper sets out the steps the Government will take to make prisons a place of safety and reform. It covers a wide area but in relation to this employment agenda it will:

- it will set clear standards for what we expect from our prisons and give all governors the authority to decide how they deliver these services;
- it will create a modern, fit for purpose prison estate which offers hope, empowerment and opportunities to offenders - building and opening six new adult male prisons, five new community prisons for women and starting the process for a further wave of new prisons in 2017.
- And that in itself will help prisoners gain skills and work experience as part of the new build process – working in prison, working on day release and training for jobs and apprenticeships once they are released.

This is a significant period of reform but it will take time.

But one key part of the reform is our intention to announce an Employment Strategy in the early part of next year to set out the next steps.

So, employment. Where are we now and where do we want to go? We know that around 79% of prisoners are engaged in some form of paid work during their sentence and hours have increased to 16 million hours in 15/16 from 7,500 hours in 2012, involving 11,000 prisoners in our prison industries. More hours are worked in vocational training workshops and in work to support prisons such as cooking, cleaning and horticulture.

Around 70% of the work we do in prison industries is for the internal market – that is prisoners make prison uniforms, do the laundry etc. But they are also involved in some very high quality engineering work – to make cell doors and double glazing units for example. And some of our printing workshops are second to none. We need this work to be of a high quality to ensure the security of the prisons and we do make sure that prisoners working in these workshops can work towards qualifications. But what we don't do is "sell" these prisoners to companies on the outside. We have some very well qualified prisoners and we need to do more to approach external companies to see how this untapped resource can meet their needs and so that prisoners can use their skills on the outside. It helps no one to encourage prisoners to train and learn a skill, only for that to be wasted.

Another avenue where we are working to increase opportunities is in increasing the work we are able to provide for other Government departments. We are able to provide materials for departments such as our Ministry of Defence at a very significant discount – perhaps as much as 40 – 50% because we can provide products at cost.

Never underestimate how many sandbags your Defence Ministry needs! We can also make camouflage nets, fence posts, tool boxes and other things, saving money for the Crown and enabling prisoners and the public to know that prisoners are supporting our Armed Forces.

And we were able to make those same sandbags available to Local Authorities last year when parts of the UK were subject to severe flooding. Stories like these can give a positive impression of people with convictions and we hope, encourage businesses to realise the range of work we can do.

Obviously, as I've said that 70% of work for prisoners in our industries comes from the internal market, 30% is provided by commercial customers. We offer opportunities to businesses either to provide products direct to them or to allow them to develop a workshop within a prison using their own staff to train and supervise prisoners to meet their own company standards.

Many of you will already be aware of Timpson, a well known chain of shoe repairers and key cutters in the UK who also own two photographic chains. Timpson has been working with the UK Prison Service for over a decade and has recruited around 750 people with convictions into the business and around 10% of current employees have come through this route. James Timpson, the CEO, says that ex-offenders can often prove to be some of the most loyal and committed employees his companies have with around 90% are still with the

company after 12 months which for entry level employment where the churn is high can mean a real saving on recruitment costs for the company.

And that is one of the key things we need to do better. We need to explain more clearly to business that this is not just a tick in the corporate social responsibility box. This is something that can really help their business by providing a pool of untapped talent.

Halfords is a chain of stores in the UK that provides bike and motor accessories and bike repair. The huge popularity of cycling can't have escaped anyone here. Lycra is king across Europe's streets! And so Halfords found they had a genuine problem recruiting sufficient bike mechanics for their business. Enter the Prison Service. Halfords realised that there were prisoners who could be trained to do this work and so they opened a "training academy" at HMP Onley where prisoners were put through the same selection and training process as would happen in the community and who, if they were successful, might go on to work on day release and would be offered a real job once back in the community.

This was a REAL business need. A lack of skilled staff that WE could provide. And Halfords has gone on to launch a new workshop at a female prison in the north of England. This goes on to support the need Halfords have to support women interested in cycling and would prefer to deal with female staff but also helps to move women in prison beyond some of the more stereotypical employment options such as hair and beauty, valuable though they are, that female prisoners tend to aim at.

Another generic offering which might come as a bit of a surprise to some other prison staff here is our new scaffolding workshop at HMP Brixton. Ok, it was a bit of a security challenge but the first 4 prisoner graduates of the programme went straight into well paid full time work and there is a waiting list for the next 20 graduates to meet a serious construction skills shortage in London.

There is a significant benefit to other prisoners here too. We know how, anecdotally, seeing prisoners get up for breakfast dressed in their company uniform can inspire others. Prisoners tend to have no hope. They don't really believe that any serious employer will give them a chance on the outside. So knowing that Halfords and Timpson and Lendlease and Balfour Beatty and so many others are there to give them a second chance really makes a difference.

I could go on and on about the opportunities we are trying to build. The Clink is a social enterprise which is growing a chain of excellent restaurants inside and outside of our prisons. The Clink at HMP Cardiff has been voted the 10th best fine dining restaurant in the whole of the UK. And no, that's not because English food is rubbish, because HMP Cardiff is in Wales!

And we now have a company called Census Data who operate across 7 of our prisons. They run a call centre operation. Call centres is an area of really significant skill shortage. Census Data have 200 prisoners working in prisons daily and they have taken on around 90 prisoners on release. Getting these new industries involved really matters.

We know that there are businesses who get this. Who know that we have this untapped pool of talent. That is why we support the Employers Forum for Reducing Re-offending. This is a pool of about 200 employers who are already working with us. It is chaired by Roisin Currie from Greggs the Bakers and whose sausage rolls are to die for! What this business forum can do which, as Government we never can, is to talk to other businesses who are just starting out on this road, tell them what works, what doesn't work; what the benefits are; how to avoid the pitfalls. We really see this business mentoring as a key way forward.

So far, so good. But we need to do more to practise what we preach. I've said earlier that as part of the prison reform programme that we are beginning a process of building a new prison estate more fit for purpose. And we want to make sure that prisoners and people with convictions will be part of that. We want to ensure that contractors who will be building the estate will use the prison workforce in prisons, will take prisoners on day release or on the new house blocks to be built on existing prison sites. And we want them to tell us how they plan to make sure that, for those prisoners who have performed well, they get real, permanent jobs on release.

Which leads me to another initiative which we hope will really make a difference and which was launched in the White Paper – the Prisoner Apprenticeship Pathway. The UK Government is committed to creating 3 million more apprenticeships during the life of this Parliament. We want prisoners to be part of that. What we are asking employers to do is to work with us to engage with prisoners, select the right people for them and to make sure that we offer within prisons the same quality of work experience as an apprentice would gain in the community. We also want employers to recognise when training has been successfully completed in prison and do not expect them to repeat that training in the community.

And crucially, because by this stage, the employer will have worked with the prisoner, they will know that he has performed well and has shown his commitment so the jewel in the crown is that the employer should guarantee the prisoner a minimum of a 12 month apprenticeship on release. So the prisoner knows what he has to gain and equally importantly, so does the employer from engaging with us to give the prisoner the chance of a real job and real stability on release.

So that is about where we are. It isn't perfect and we have a long way to go but we do have a vision. We know that employment is one of the key factors in reducing re-offending – around 5-10% so one of the best interventions that have been looked at to date. I've set out some of the best things that we think can work – more businesses working in prisons, more prisoners inspired to see there is a chance out there and more about what the public sector can do .

