Promoting Employability for Ex-Offenders

This document is based on the work of the National Delivery Group. Thanks to all those involved, particularly those who provided case studies.

Introduction

This document focuses on promoting employability amongst ex-offenders. It builds on Workstream activity sponsored by the Scottish Government and, more recently, on a National Delivery Group (NDG) workshop held in March 2012.

In this guide we consider some background issues relating to offending in Scotland as well as issues around supporting this client group. However, our primary focus is on effective interventions, so following the background section we shift our attention to good practice, setting out a number of case studies working with this client group across Scotland.

Background And Key Issues Around Employability For Ex-Offenders

Offenders are people like everyone else. The vast majority serve non-custodial sentences and they live in all of our communities. However, we still incarcerate more people than most of our comparator countries and on any given day there are almost 8,000 people in Scotland’s prisons, most of whom are on short-term sentences.

Recidivism rates remain persistently high. At present, 64% of short-term prisoners return to custody within two years and research has shown that there is a recycling pattern between prison and our most deprived communities\(^1\). This damages individuals and communities and costs our economy around £40,000 per annum for every person in prison – and that’s before we calculate the wider social and economic impact.

Case Studies

- One Glasgow
- The Personal Development Partnership
- Routes out of Prison
- Fife: Employment Readiness Scale
- Midlothian Training Services
- Youthbuild
- SDS Polmont
- Glasgow Employer Engagement Group
- Falkirk Employability Award
Research\textsuperscript{1} also shows that the two most important factors in breaking the recidivist cycle are having a job and being in a relationship. However, finding employment – particularly for those who have served custodial sentences, is not easy. Jobcentre Plus research from Barlinnie Prison indicates that even when the economy was doing well, the proportion of ex-prisoners progressing into employment was less than 3%. At a time when jobs are in limited supply this challenge is even harder.

However, recent work in Glasgow (discussed below) suggests that there is scope to work with employers to address negative perceptions of offenders as potential employees. And CIPD research from 2007 supported this. Their survey of over 400 employers found that 75% would consider recruiting from this client group, provided they have the right skills set, behaviours and attitude.

This however is one of the key issues. Like many of those furthest from the labour market, this client group often face the established employability barriers – low levels of educational achievement, weak basic skills, low self-esteem, health problems and poor work records. In this respect, ex-offenders differ little from many long term unemployed clients throughout Scotland. In fact, apart from the issue of disclosure, their support requirements are consistent with others with multiple and complex needs.

However, it is important to remember that people with criminal records are leaving their past behind and moving into work in Scotland every day. Looking at the agencies who successfully support them, one of the recurring features is a focus on their talents and abilities – rather than the barriers they face. In the case studies below we present examples of effective interventions across the country, together with contact details if you want to know more. These include strategic initiatives and operational approaches, covering examples of work with women and young people as well as generic approaches throughout Scotland.

\textsuperscript{1} Houchin found that 50% of prisoners in Barlinnie prison on the night of 30 June 2003 came from home addresses in just 155 (principally the most deprived) of the 1,222 local government wards (Houchin R. Social Exclusion and imprisonment in Scotland).
Case Studies

One Glasgow

Like most local authorities facing budgets cuts, Glasgow is looking to make savings. In response, the local authority led on the establishment of One Glasgow, a strategic group whose primary task is to explore ways to maintain or improve services with fewer resources. One Glasgow has prioritised three costly cross-cutting themes, which include “Reducing reoffending in those aged 12-25 years.”

One Glasgow has forecast significant savings under each of these themes.

The approach is based on the principles of early intervention and prevention. It also emphasises the scope for smarter service targeting and more effective tracking of long-term benefits. Preliminary research and partnership activity has led to the establishment of a high-level implementation plan. This is underpinned by thematic work groups leading on operational developments.

Key steps include establishing a coordinating hub to manage offenders; the introduction of a whole systems approach; the development of an information sharing protocol and better-coordinated throughcare. A programme board comprising the key partners is driving this work.

For further information contact Anne Connolly
anne.connolly@glasgow.gov.uk

The Personal Development Partnership (PDP)

The PDP is a joint venture between three of Scotland’s leading youth charities – the Prince’s Trust, The Venture Trust and Venture Scotland. It was established in 2010 in partnership with the Scottish Government, funded through Cashback for Communities. The aim is to provide a coherent support package to young people at risk of offending in three cities – Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee – and with plans to expand.

Partners provide initial Personal and Development support then refer clients onto whichever partner is best placed to meet their needs. Each partner provides a different type of support – including Get Ready for Work, mentoring and a supported wilderness experience. The partnership works with young people aged 14-19 and to date has supported 284 clients, 60 of whom have progressed into positive destinations.

For further information contact Malcolm Jack
Malcolm@venturetrust.org.uk

Routes out of Prison (RooP)

RooP is a partnership service led by the Wise Group operating in 7 prisons in Scotland. It supports prisoners resettling in communities with a service that is available on both sides of the prison gate. The RooP model is provided by Life Coaches, many of whom are ex-offenders, offering support around all aspects of community reintegration, including employability support.

There are few effective projects in Scotland supporting women leaving prison. To date, RooP has supported 287 female prisoners and the service is offered in Cornton vale and Greenock prisons. Support is provided by 7 female life coaches, 2 of whom are ex-offenders. In addition, the RooP model includes support to prisoners’ families provided by Families Outside. As well as supporting women in prison, this aspect of the service supports other family members – partners, mothers, and children – affected by the imprisonment of male relatives.

For further information contact Fiona Benton
Fiona_Benton@thewisegroup.org.uk
**Fife: Employment Readiness Scale**

Next Steps provide community-based employability support within the Opportunities Fife Employability Pathway. Amongst their client groups are residents on Community Payback Orders (CPOs) referred from Criminal Justice.

On behalf of the local partnership, Next Steps have piloted the use of the Employment Readiness Scale (ERS) with these clients. This was in response to the lack of any shared assessment tool, which was inhibiting partnership support. For example, there was no standardized starting point or shared mechanism for gauging progress achieved.

By working through a series of statements, clients produce a snapshot of their employability and personal attributes. The process identifies their support needs and, critically, places the client at the centre of the process. It also underlines their own role in moving forward – rather than relying on others.

The initial pilot stage is nearing completion and the ERS is about to be rolled out within the wider Fife partnership.

For further information contact Sandra Webster  swebster@carnegiecollege.ac.uk

**Midlothian Training Services (MTS)**

MTS (part of Midlothian Council) staff and colleagues in Criminal Justice (CJ) discussed ways in which they could collaborate around Community Payback Orders (CPOs). They agreed that MTS would provide the employability dimension to CPO clients referred by CJ. Following consultation with the Countryside Rangers, a series of landscaping projects was identified and an MTS charge hand oversees small groups (maximum 4) doing this work as part of their community sentence.

The relationship which is established, provides an opportunity to introduce those on CPOs to a wider range of MTS employability services – including a weekly Workclub, job search support and core skills training (including IT). For those with children under 16 there is also keywork support available through the Working for Families team. The programme is in its early stages, but it potentially raises awareness of and access to the employability services on offer in the locality.

For further information contact Marina Miller  marina.miller@midlothian.gov.uk

**Youthbuild**

Youthbuild is run by Action for Children in 7 locations across the Central belt. It supports young people with multiple employability barriers. Referring agencies include Youth Justice and the probation service and around 65% of clients have criminal records.

The Youthbuild model comprises 6 weeks training then 6 weeks construction placement whilst receiving a £55 per week training allowance. Those progressing beyond this have a 6 month supported employment placement paid at industry rates split between AF and the employer.

85% of those who complete the 6-month placement continue in paid employment with the company. Of these, 88% are still in work 3 months later. Although the model has suffered during the construction downturn, it is attractive to troubled young people (principally males) interested in construction-related work.

For further information contact Tony Scally  tony.scally@actionforchildren.org.uk
**SDS Polmont**

Since May 2010 SDS have had a full time careers adviser working with prisoners in Polmont aged under 18. The adviser also provides a part time service to young women in Cornton Vale. On average the adviser works with up to 15 prisoners at the pre-release point per month, although the service is available to all 16 and 17 year olds.

The service provides information, advice and guidance relating to opportunities in the community. Typically, clients will have low levels of educational achievement and limited, if any, work experience. The Skills Development Scotland (SDS) role in Polmont focuses on identifying options and in liaising with services within the young person’s home area. The availability of SDS keyworkers and Activity Agreement coaches is particularly helpful in ensuring this process works smoothly.

Young people leaving prison often face a difficult transition period. Experience from this work indicates that leaving with a clearer idea of their future goals can help with this. The availability of family support has proven to be another important factor.

For further information contact: Gavin Rennie

gavin.rennie@sds.co.uk

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**Falkirk Employability Award**

The Falkirk Employability Award utilises the SQA accredited framework to create a customised award designed to provide a quality assurance for employers of the work readiness of individuals based on essential work based core skills.

To improve the level and success of ex-offenders accessing, participating and sustaining employability services, all Criminal Justice clients are offered an employability assessment, a core skills assessment (Literacy and Numeracy) and a personality profile. This helps to customise and tailor services to meet individual needs and clients are offered support provided by the Salvation Army to complete an employability action plan focusing on their identified support needs. The support provided sits at stage 2 of the strategic skills pipeline model and facilitates a competence based learner journey towards sustainable employment. In some circumstances, learning hours can be counted towards the offender’s Community Payback Order.

Supported through Fairer Falkirk Funding and although primarily targeted at 16-24 year olds, additional resources from the Forth Valley Community Justice Authority has enabled a relaxation of the age restrictions for Criminal Justice referrals.

Falkirk Council has reached agreement with Jobcentre Plus that participating clients eligible for the Work Programme can defer entry for 3 months providing they attend the local programme. This is a relatively new arrangement, which sits outside Community Payback, so participation is optional. Initial numbers have been modest, and the partnership aims to promote this option proactively.

However, to date, the motivation levels have been high.

For further information contact: Jo Tibbles

jo.tibbles@falkirk.gov.uk
**Glasgow Employer Engagement Group**

Glasgow’s strategic partners are committed to raising the profile of offenders as potential employees. To support this they have undertaken research to determine employer attitudes to this client group.

Following this Glasgow City Council and the Community Justice Authority approached the Chamber of Commerce to engage employers on the issue. One of the consequences was a ‘Behind the Scenes’ event for employers at Barlinnie Prison, which had around 40 employer participants.

The Barlinnie visit was designed as an awareness raising session. Visitors noted that many of the individuals have the same employability issues as those in the community – and applying for work in their businesses.

Following this a number of Chamber members went on to volunteer in the prison supporting employability through mock interviews and help with CV preparation.

Another result has been the establishment of an ‘Employer and Ex-offender advisory group’ which is employer chaired and has 15 employer participants. Its remit is to articulate the employer issues relating to ex-offender recruitment and to produce a set of recommendations. To date, this work has considered issues relating to skills and work experience.

For further information contact Kim Murphy kim.murphy@drs.glasgow.gov.uk

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**Access to Employment – Ayr**

Local partners established an offender employment pilot project in 2008. This involved Criminal Justice referring clients of all ages with a maximum of 50 clients per annum and a target of 65% engagement. After a modest start, the project reached its referral and engagement targets and over three years has achieved good outcomes.

The model combines groupwork and one to one support. The introduction of an employability-screening tool improved needs diagnosis and the model includes a discretionary element, which offers specific support (ECDL, Construction Site Safety Card, driving lessons, etc) linked to an employment prospect.

One of the issues that emerged was the clients’ lack of networks and social contacts linked to employment. In response to this, the project established a Work Club, which meets weekly. As well as an opportunity to discuss issues with peers, the club offers supported access to recruitment sites and an adviser. Although many projects tend to ensure that ex-offenders are integrated into the wider client pool, this particular approach appears to be working well.

Contact: John Reid jreid@acctoemp.org.uk
Top Tips

We’ve given examples of some of the work going on across Scotland promoting ex-offenders’ employability. We’ve also provided contact details if you want to find out more about particular approaches. From these examples and from other work – such as the Scottish Government Workstreams – we can see a number of shared characteristics, which are featured in our list of tips below.

- Ensure you adopt a client-centred approach focused on individuals’ talents and potential, rather than their history
- Use an appropriate assessment tool to establish baselines and to set client determined goals
- Position the role of the ‘consistent trusted adviser’ at the heart of the service – particularly for those leaving custody
- Offer a genuinely integrated service to meet client support needs and fully explore the opportunities to embed employability within community-based sentences
- Look for new and creative ways to engage employers

Useful Links


The views expressed in case studies may be those of participants and are not necessarily shared by their employers or the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government cannot be responsible for the use of third party guidance. May 2012