The Right Step Employers’ Toolkit
"The National Audit Office has estimated that the social and economic costs of re-offending by those released from short sentences alone are between £7-£10 billion a year.

"Almost half of all adult offenders released from custody re-offend within a year. But evidence shows that having a job has been proven to reduce re-offending by 25-33%." ¹

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Join the BITC National Employers' Forum for Reducing Re-offending by visiting the website:

http://www.bitc.org.uk/community/employability/joining_the.html
Employment is a key factor in reducing re-offending rates as it provides ex-offenders with a legitimate income and stability. As well as benefitting ex-offenders, there are proven benefits to business in employing this diverse group of people including:

- A high level of performance and retention
- An enhanced reputation for corporate and social responsibility
- An inexpensive and transparent method of recruitment (where this is done through partnership with the relevant authorities)

The employment of ex-offenders is not without its challenges:

- How can employers ensure they are making the right recruitment decisions?
- How can perceived (and actual) risks be minimised?
- How can employers be sure they are complying with the law?

These are all valid questions, but as you will read in the following pages, the employers who contributed to this toolkit repeatedly report positive business benefits in employing ex-offenders.

I would like to take this opportunity to show my gratitude to the business representatives who voluntarily gave up their time to contribute to the development of this toolkit. Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues at Business in the Community who continue to campaign tirelessly to support the provision of employment and training opportunities to socially excluded groups.

Mike Brophy, Regional Director, Business in the Community
Introduction

This Employers’ Toolkit gives businesses useful advice and shares best practice gained during the project. It is one of three documents produced to support and encourage employers to engage with the ex-offender agenda giving clear business benefits to employers. In addition to the Employers’ Toolkit, there is a Code of Practice which focuses on getting the right person for the right job by encouraging employers to see beyond the tag of ‘ex-offender’. Lastly, there is a set of Employer Case Studies that showcase real examples of local and national employers who have taken steps to engage with offenders and ex-offenders.

Employers’ Perspectives

Employers’ attitudes towards the recruitment of ex-offenders vary enormously with some good practice and some poor practice in existence nationwide. Clearly, the employers who participated in The Right Step Project have demonstrated their commitment to best practice and are leading the way in terms of providing ex-offenders with the opportunity to develop their skills and experience and reintegrate back into the community.

According to a 2007 CPD survey, only around half of organisations reported having any experience of employing ex-offenders. These employers overwhelmingly report that their experiences of employing ex-offenders are the same as employing other personnel. The same study found that only a small minority of employers surveyed reported a negative experience. In addition, ex-offenders were rated positively for their ability to settle in with colleagues, for good performance and for reliability. These factors were also rated positively by the businesses contributing their experiences to this toolkit.

Many employers are of course employing ex-offenders without knowing they are doing so. As one HR Manager involved in The Right Step Project put it:

"Through this project we’ve received support in implementing a policy on employing ex-offenders. In the past I’m sure we employed people with criminal records, but we didn’t know about it as we didn’t ask."

A large independent retailer based in the East of England

Ex-offenders and Employment

Businesses that participated in The Right Step Project are aware that enabling ex-offenders to access employment is a major factor in reducing re-offending rates.

It is thought that sustainable employment is the most important factor in preventing re-offending. However, gaining employment is difficult for everyone in the present economic climate, and having a criminal record is an additional barrier that ex-offenders have to overcome.

The Right Step Project has worked with businesses in the East of England since December 2009 to establish relationships between employers and the prison and probation services. Some of the businesses involved in the project provided employment and work experience opportunities to offenders and ex-offenders, while others provided support in the form of workshops and training to improve ex-offenders’ employment prospects.

This toolkit draws on both national research and the experiences gained by the businesses through participating in The Right Step Project.

"MITIE recognises the importance of improving the employability of offenders and the correlation between sustainable employment and reducing re-offending."

Colin Dobell, Managing Director, MITIE Care and Custody

Recommendations for Government

In order to improve the employment prospects for ex-offenders and create an environment whereby employers are potentially open to employing them, we recommend:

• Finances be made available to deliver training to employers on the law, policy and practice of employing ex-offenders
• Investment in schemes such as The Right Step Project which enable businesses to partner with the prison and probation services in the recruitment of ex-offenders
• An increase in the availability of support to businesses who employ ex-offenders

Ex-offenders and Employment

• One in three men under the age of 30 has a criminal record
• 75% of those leaving prison do not have a job to go to
• Ex-offenders are 13 times more likely to be unemployed than people without criminal records
• Employment reduces the risk of re-offending by between a third and a half
Facts and Myths

There are many myths surrounding working with offenders and employing ex-offenders. Below are some of the more common ones and the facts that will help businesses to counter them.

**Myth: It’s illegal to employ people with criminal records**

**Fact**

There are a limited number of very serious offences which could ban people from working with children and/or vulnerable people. For other ex-offenders, the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 means that after a certain number of years, employers are not entitled to know about their criminal records. Where criminal records do need to be disclosed to employers, it is very often down to the discretion of the employer to decide whether or not to employ that individual.

**Myth: Once a criminal always a criminal; leopards never change their spots**

**Fact**

Statistically, the majority of offenders are convicted only once. Ex-offenders who go more than two years without re-offending are no more likely to commit a crime than those without criminal records. The provision of training and employment is one of the most significant factors in reducing re-offending rates.

**Myth: If word gets out that I employ ex-offenders, I’ll lose customers/clients**

**Fact**

Fear of damage to their reputation means that few organisations publicise the fact that they employ ex-offenders. However, amongst those organisations that did promote it, 65% say it had a positive impact on their corporate reputation. Promoting the fact that your business stands for fairness, equality and community cohesion can generate positive media coverage. Some of our best known brands such as B&Q, Morrison Utility Services and Marks & Spencer have excellent reputations and employ ex-offenders.

**Myth: Ex-offenders are unreliable employees and won't fit in with my other staff**

**Fact**

A CIPD survey showed that less than one in ten employers recorded a negative experience in the employment of ex-offenders. Employers who participated in the The Right Step Project reported that ex-offenders had a positive and proactive approach to work, were willing to give new tasks a go and developed good working relationships with their colleagues and managers.

“I find the staff we’ve recruited from prisons are among the best colleagues we’ve got.”

James Timpson, Managing Director, Timpson
The Business Case for Employing Ex-offenders

Organisations that refuse employment to ex-offenders are potentially missing out on a pool of skills and experience that could enhance their business. Research has demonstrated a range of business benefits in employing ex-offenders, many of which were specifically reported by the employers who participated in The Right Step Project.

High Performing, Reliable and Committed Staff

The majority of employers surveyed as part of The Right Step Project said that the ex-offenders they employed demonstrated a positive attitude in the workplace, were reliable and worked well in a team environment. One employer had found that staff turnover had dropped and absenteeism had reduced as a result of employing ex-offenders. Offenders on work experience do not take sick days valuing the opportunity to be out at work; which has had an affect of encouraging other staff wanting to match their excellent attendance record.

Minimise Risk

Being open to the recruitment of ex-offenders and having appropriate policies and procedures in place reassures an ex-offender that they can be honest and upfront throughout the recruitment process, thereby reducing the potential risk to the employer of unknowingly employing ex-offenders. Risks can be further reduced by employers building relationships with prison and probation services who will provide a much more thorough overview of the individual’s background.

"By employing offenders who have been part of the Chapelfield Custody & Community Project we have gained some valuable permanent team members who have already demonstrated their enthusiasm for Chapelfield. They are committed members of staff who are proving to be a real asset. The business benefits have far outweighed the risks."

Davina Tanner, General Manager, Chapelfield Shopping Centre

"87% of employers who employ ex-offenders consider them at least as productive as other members of staff and 75% find them at least as reliable.”

Enhanced Reputation

In tough times, gaining a reputation for being a forward thinking and progressive employer can help businesses stand out from the crowd. It provides proof that an organisation is taking corporate and social responsibility seriously. Demonstrating a commitment to making your employees representative of the local community can improve a business’ reputation and distinguish it from competitors. Amongst the relatively low number of employers who do promote the fact that they employ ex-offenders, almost two-thirds report that it has a positive impact on their corporate reputation.

"We have won a number of accolades for our commitment to corporate social responsibility including: the EDP Business Award for Community Impact; the Business in the Community Awards for the East of England Most Innovative New Programme and National Award for Excellence - Employability Award 2010; and Tricia Fuller, our Group HR Director, was appointed The Prince’s Ambassador for the East of England in 2008.”

Peter Hawes, Managing Director, Norse Commercial Services

Save Money

The average cost of recruiting a new employee is more than £5,000. Using partnership schemes such as those set up under The Right Step Project can dramatically reduce costs as the prison and probation service take responsibility for vetting an individual’s appropriateness for the role, based on their skills and experience before recommending them to an employer. They may also be able to provide appropriate training to up-skill an individual, saving an employer further costs.

Working in partnership with third party organisations can help to manage the process and the perceived risk associated with recruiting ex-offenders.
Staff Motivation and Staff Development Opportunities

Openly demonstrating to your current employees that you are an inclusive, open and forward-thinking employer can be a great motivator. In addition, employing ex-offenders may provide development opportunities for your existing staff through coaching, transferring skills and mentoring individuals.

"As a mentor, it is very rewarding to help young people and see them develop so significantly in just a fortnight. It also helps me feel more in touch with the community where I work."

Ivan Storey, Project Manager, UK Power Networks

“Try” before you “Buy”

Working in partnership with the prison and probation services to provide work experience placements to ex-offenders offers employers the opportunity to find out for themselves the extent to which employing ex-offenders would benefit their business.

Ex-offenders on work experience can demonstrate their skills and abilities in an environment where they don’t feel under pressure, giving the employer the chance to see how they perform within the workplace and the ex-offender a trial as a potential employee in the position.

"MITIE established an Enterprise Centre at HMP Hollesley Bay which gives participants experience of actual industry standards and conditions. It is a fantastic platform for them to fit into a MITIE work placement or that of another commercial organisation upon release."

Paul Ferry, Business Development Director, MITIE

Case Study

As part of their business, DHL Supply Chain supply to, and manage retail workshops within prison establishments for prisoners serving custodial sentences. Operational activity is primarily the transportation of foodstuffs into retail workshops within the prisons that store and pick goods for individual prisoner orders.

Ex-offenders on work experience can demonstrate their skills and abilities in an environment where they don’t feel under pressure, giving the employer the chance to see how they perform within the workplace and the ex-offender a trial as a potential employee in the position.

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Commitment to Diversity

Many organisations have policies highlighting their commitment to equality and diversity. Employing ex-offenders is evidence that organisations are taking such policies seriously, and a demonstrable commitment to supporting socially excluded groups may better enable organisations (particularly in the statutory and voluntary sectors) to win bids for work.

"Our Prison Volunteer Programme has led to a more diverse volunteer demographic – more male volunteers, a lower average age and more volunteers from ethnic minority communities enhancing our equality and diversity agenda."

Carol Davis, Prison Volunteer Programme Manager, Sue Ryder
The Social Case for Employing Ex-offenders

There is a strong social argument for employing ex-offenders, not least in reducing re-offending, but also the impact of crime on society and the cost to the public purse.

Reduce Re-offending

The positive consequences of reducing re-offending include the reduction in the number of victims who may experience loss or trauma, safer neighbourhoods and improved relationships between communities and authorities such as the police.

"The garden centre gave me an opportunity to move on and away from crime and I am very grateful for that."

Ex-offender trainee, Camden Garden Centre

Reduce Costs to the Taxpayer

Employment has a huge role to play in reducing re-offending rates and consequently there is a significant economic benefit to the taxpayer in employing ex-offenders. It has been estimated that partnership schemes between employers and the prison and probation services to provide training and employment opportunities to ex-offenders could potentially save the taxpayer more than £300 million annually.

Providing ex-offenders with opportunities to keep them out of prison has great financial implications to the public purse as the average cost per prison place per annum is £45,000. In addition, ex-offenders in employment are taxpayers themselves and therefore contributing to the economy.

"It is for these people that there must be hope and opportunity. Employment is a key part of that hope and opportunity as it provides an income, self respect and the chance to turn away from crime and a reliance on benefits."

Tom Wolstenholme, Managing Director, Wingspan Community Works

Route to Independence

Enabling ex-offenders to access employment reduces their dependency on welfare benefits and provides them with a route to independent living. Parents, with convictions, who are in employment have improved opportunities to provide for their children’s futures.

Sustained employment provides ex-offenders with the opportunity to buy or rent their own property and reducing their dependency on social housing.

In addition, employment helps to ensure that people who are recovering from drug or alcohol-related crime are less likely to lapse back into their old ways.

"I have to concentrate a lot in my job, all day. It means I don’t have time to think about getting back on the gear [heroin]. I’ve been clean for nearly two years now and I think that’s got a lot to do with working."

An ex-offender who is now working in the manufacturing industry

"I am now out of jail, turned my back on my previous life and associates, and have never been happier. I cannot thank Sue Ryder enough for the faith and trust they have given me. Thanks to them this doesn’t feel like I have a fresh start, it feels more like my life has just started."

Martin, an ex-offender now in full-time employment
Case Study

Camden Garden Centre was set up in 1983 as a Social Enterprise with a remit to employ disadvantaged groups.

In 1997 Mike Jackson joined Camden Garden Centre as Training Manager and undertook a review of the work programme, which had previously been aimed at recruiting young people with learning difficulties.

Garden centres at peak trading times are fast moving businesses and it was felt that they needed to look to other disadvantaged groups to balance the needs of those with learning difficulties and the demands of a busy garden centre. Discussions took place with the Probation Service to see whether Camden Garden Centre could work with ex-offenders.

The work programme was adapted to meet the needs of ex-offenders and some guidance and criteria set down including a restriction of the offences acceptable for a placement. Camden Garden Centre has supported the rehabilitation of offenders back into work by offering a two-year work experience placement.

Mike Jackson said:

"Giving ex-offenders a second chance and the opportunity of employment breaks the cycle of re-offending which in turn impacts on society. By providing offenders with new skills and training, we aim to improve offenders' chances of employment and move them towards independent living in the future. As with any new employee, encouragement and praise are crucial where due, but also direction and guidance where necessary. Regular reviews early on are critical to the success of the programme."

Give a Second Chance

One in four adult males in the UK have a criminal conviction, and you may already be working with an ex-offender without realising it.

Many leading businesses now advocated the employment of ex-offenders and have amended their employment policies to reflect fairness and openness in the employment of ex-offenders. Not only does this give ex-offenders a second chance but also opens up an untapped pool of talent and skills for employers and significantly impacts on reducing re-offending rates.

"Ex-offenders aren’t so different to any other member of staff. People have problems, it’s human. Be prepared to give more than one chance."

Mike Jackson, Training Manager, Camden Garden Centre

"Since leaving prison I have cut ties with my previous associates. Going to work every day has kept me busy and I haven’t once been tempted to go back to my old life. I see a much more positive future for myself now."

James, ex-offender employee

Improvements to Individuals’ Wellbeing

It has long been accepted in academic literature that unemployment has a variety of consequences on psychological wellbeing. It is widely recognised that unemployment has a negative effect on both self-esteem and perceptions of self-worth, while exacerbating feelings of lack of control and helplessness, which can lead to depression. Employment improves people’s confidence and self-respect.

"The worst thing about prison is the boredom. It’s really bad. It made me really down. Getting out to work every day over the last year of my sentence made me realise how important it is to feel like you’re contributing something in society."

Mandy, an ex-offender on work placement

"Ex-offenders aren’t so different to any other member of staff. People have problems, it’s human. Be prepared to give more than one chance."

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James, ex-offender employee
Steps to Recruiting Ex-offenders

Build Relationships with the Local Prison and Probation Services

Find out about the local prison’s Employer Engagement Strategy and offer to support the prison in implementing this by providing knowledge and expertise that can enhance their existing skills and experience. In return, the prison and probation services may be able to provide appropriate training and transferable skills opportunities to your employees, thus saving costs for both parties.

"Working with HMP Bedford’s Resettlement Manager has been a great opportunity to refresh my own mentoring and coaching skills. I have been able to help her understand the language of the corporate environment and establish solid foundations for a programme that provides alignment and sustainability with their Employer Engagement Strategy."

Lisa Hall, Customer Services Manager, Groupama Healthcare

Offer Training and Up-skilling for Ex-offenders

Work with the prison and probation services to establish the skills, experience and training needs required for ex-offenders to successfully secure employment.

Consider whether your business’ in-house training courses could be opened to prisoners and ex-offenders to help them up-skill.

Provide training workshops in your local prisons to enable them to develop the skills your business needs.

Assist with the delivery of basic skills training in partnership with the prison or probation services to improve offenders' literacy, numeracy, IT and communication skills.

Offer employability skills training in prisons on: job search preparation, CV writing, application and selection processes and interview techniques. Employers could also consider running recruitment / assessment days for prisoners and ex-offenders.

"The level of engagement and commitment from businesses to reducing re-offending is illustrated by the generous donation of a mini digger to HMP Highpoint."

"This piece of equipment has enabled us to enhance our street works qualification and to offer the most relevant training to our offenders hence maximising opportunities of employment on release."

Governor Jarman-Howe, HMP Highpoint

Placements and Employment Opportunities

Work experience is extremely valuable for ex-offenders who may have a limited work history or workplace skills. It provides an opportunity for ex-offenders to build confidence, gain knowledge and experience, and improve their CVs. It also provides employers with the option to ‘try before they buy’ by getting to know an individual before offering formal employment.

Employers and their employees can act as mentors for new recruits which can be mutually beneficial for both parties.

"The scheme has been very attractive in terms of recruitment of staff, it’s increased our profile across a certain community which we most probably wouldn’t have direct contact with. It’s been a tremendous benefit for the profile of the organisation and from an employer’s prospective in the personal development of our employees as a result of being mentors."

Chris Degg, Director of Human Resources, Training and Communications for UK Power Networks

• Get to know the ex-offenders and understand the challenges they face upon return to the employment market
• Take time to train your staff and explain why you will be employing ex-offenders
• Be open minded, don’t pre-judge individuals because of their past
Give Prisons the Opportunity to Undertake Commercial Work

If your business requires products or services that could be undertaken in prison workshops then this is an option you could investigate.

"As a logistics specialist, DHL Supply Chain has established and operate a commercial workshop within the prison service. This enables offenders serving custodial sentences to work and gain skills in an warehouse environment that will enhance their employability prospects upon release.

"Offenders are able to improve their basic skills and gain a qualification in Storage and Distribution. There are also further opportunities for work experience placements and potentially paid employment."

Andy Monsey, Regional Manager, DHL Supply Chain

Promote the Ex-offender Agenda

Join one of the local Employers’ Forums or BITC National Employers’ Forum to support reducing re-offending and play a proactive role in encouraging other businesses to support the agenda.

"By representing SMEs on the BITC National Employers’ Forum focusing on the employment of ex-offenders agenda, I am able to lead by example and encourage other SMEs to engage and work with the prison and probation services."

Mike Jackson, Training Manager, Camden Garden Centre

Donation of Goods

If your business has unwanted or surplus goods such as timber, equipment, tools or old work clothes which could be used by the prisons within their training sessions or workshops, contact your local prison. This is another way in which businesses can help to support offenders back into employment.

"Following a Seeing is Believing visit to HMP Highpoint arranged by Business in the Community, we were inspired to support the rehabilitation of offenders back into employment and entered into discussions with the prison. We have since supplied suitable materials from our stores to be used in the training workshops at the prison and will be looking at offering work placements in the future."

Chris Greaves, HR Director, Ridgeons

Case Study

Timpson - the high street chain synonymous with all things shoes for almost a century and a half with over 650 branches and 2,400 employees is the UK’s largest shoe repairer, key cutter, engraver and watch repairer.

For the last 10 years, Timpson has been developing links with various prisons to find suitable candidates to work in their shops. During this time the company has forged relationships with some 60 prisons, including working with the majority of the prisons in the East of England, and has had over 120 ex-offenders pass through their workshops. Timpson selectively recruit both men and women directly from prison. The company has over 100 examples of ex-offenders who have quickly become a crucial part of the shop’s team and have not returned to their previous criminal past.

They currently employ 157 ex-offenders within the business who undertook training at the company’s in-prison workshops before being offered full-time employment.

James Timpson, Chief Executive of Timpson said:

"We look beyond the label of ‘offender’ when recruiting to see the skills and potential each individual possesses. This benefits us because we find people who are motivated and enthusiastic about working for us.

"It also benefits the individual as employment gives them the best possible chance to avoid re-offending. It’s great seeing our colleagues gaining confidence as they learn the required skills to run a Timpson shop.

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Support from the Prison and Probation Services

The prison and probation services will provide thorough risk assessment information to employers with whom they are working in partnership.

They will also help identify the right workers for your company based on their prior knowledge of that individual. Employers can work with the prison and probation services to provide pre-employment training; this gives the company a few weeks to judge the risks and see if they are manageable.

"When engaging with prison or probation representatives, be clear about what your organisation can/can’t do and the extent to which you’d like to get involved. Prison and probation are there to work with you and support you, not work against you."

"Spend some time getting to know your local prison and how it works so that you are familiar with the systems and routines. This will help you to plan how you can work positively together."

Peter Dickie, HR Director, May Gurney

Support from Third Party Organisations

Many other charities, including Working Chance, Blue Sky and St Giles support the rehabilitation of ex-offenders and can give employers support and guidance when working with ex-offenders.
Case Study

Chapelfield Shopping Centre opened in 2005 and has created a new retail quarter in Norwich with over 90 shops and restaurants.

Despite the potential risks to the business, Chapelfield launched its Custody & Community Project in June 2009 with the aim of breaking the cycle of re-offending. Davina Tanner, General Manager at Chapelfield has spoken openly and honestly about the risk:

“Our reputation is absolutely paramount to the success of Chapelfield so we were very aware that this project needed very sensitive communication from the outset. We took a view that an open and honest approach was needed with regard to our staff and retailers; we’ve explained our reasons for embarking on the project and taken people with us on the journey.

“The success of the project and the plaudits it has received have actually impressed new retailers. We have always been very conscious that every crime has a victim and we never want people to think that we are simply focused on the needs of offenders.

“There will always be people who think that having serving prisoners working in a shopping centre is a risky decision. But every person on the project is carefully assessed before they begin working here and the vast majority are very grateful for the opportunity and keen to prove themselves.”

This programme has had significant benefits to Chapelfield and to reducing re-offending. The business benefits of the programme have far outweighed the risks:

- Staff turnover has dropped from 16% to 9% and absenteeism has reduced from 5.5% to 3%
- Employees have gained new and valuable skills that have enhanced the business, boosted morale and increased job satisfaction levels
- Chapelfield’s have strengthened business relationships by engaging other businesses and their supply chain to take on offenders for work experience and employment opportunities
- Breaking the cycle of crime in Norfolk has reduced the level of re-offending, benefitted the shopping centre and the local community

‘What’s the Risk’ publication is available by visiting the website:


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Risk Assessment for Employment

Once you have completed your discussions with the Prison or Probation Services, they will carry out appropriate risk assessments on individuals before recommending anyone for a placement or employment.

However, here are some sample questions you could incorporate into a conversation with an ex-offender for the purposes of minimising risk. Remember, this should be separate from the main job interview:

- What offences are on your record and how many do you have?
- What were the punishments you received for these offences?
- How long ago were your offences?
- Could you tell me about the background to the offences?
- Were these offences on impulse or on purpose?
- What have you done since you committed these offences?
- How can you reassure me that you won’t be a risk to my business?

If an ex-offender uses criminal justice terminology that you are not familiar with, (e.g. the name of an offence or the name of a punishment), ask them to explain further or seek advice from elsewhere.

- Focus primarily on the person’s skills, experience and ability to do the job
- Consider in advance of recruitment any possible risks (to staff, customers, property etc) that might arise and how you can minimise them
- Think about whether the conviction is relevant to the type of work the individual will be undertaking
- Decide in advance who needs to know about an individual’s criminal record; try to keep it to senior HR staff and the ex-offender’s line manager only

“Engaging the grass roots of the organisation to the importance of diversity and inclusion requires a top down approach which has a beneficial impact on the business. Employees progress their careers through embedding a culture of support and learning helps them to become more understanding of this community issue.”

Andy Monsey, Regional Manager, DHL Supply Chain

“Careful and thorough preparation before recruiting ex-offenders for work placement or employment is the key to success. It is also important to take the time to train your staff and keep an open dialogue with them about the reasons why you will be working with ex-offenders.”

Chris Paul, CSR Manager, Serco at the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital
Summary and Way Forward

Despite the downturn in the UK economic climate, many employers know they need good staff to give them the edge. Those who struggle to fill vacancies know only too well the negative impact this can have. Today’s employment market reflects these different situations.

Some sectors are booming, driven by highly skilled, knowledgeable staff. Others bear the brunt of a national skills shortage, with unfilled vacancies and too many employees lacking the tools to perform at work.

An increasing number of employers are addressing this by recruiting offenders and ex-offenders as part of a diverse workforce. This forward-thinking approach can bring huge benefits to their bottom line: improved retention rates, committed staff and an enhanced reputation for socially responsible recruitment.

The case for employing ex-offenders, who make up a significant percentage of people of working age in the UK, is clear. Employment reduces re-offending and has significant financial and social benefits both for the individual and for society as a whole. Refusing employment to ex-offenders also means that employers are potentially missing out on a pool of skilled and talented recruits who could enhance the success of their business.

Barriers to employment created through employers being too risk averse, employer prejudice and employer ignorance can be overcome through a programme of training and education and the availability of support to enable employers to provide opportunities to ex-offenders.

Lack of information and support has often been cited as a deterrent to employers considering ex-offenders and it is therefore of upmost importance to establish further programmes such as The Right Step Project in order to forge improved links between businesses, the prison and the probation services.

“For businesses to succeed, especially in difficult times, they must recruit, retain and grow the most talented and skilled people possible. By giving everyone an equal chance to prove themselves, they give their business the best chance to succeed.”

Patrick Clarke, Director, UK Power Networks

Glossary

Category A Prisoners - are those who, if escaped, would be highly dangerous to the public or national security

Category B Prisoners - are those who do not require national security, but for whom escape needs to be made very difficult

Category C Prisoners - are those who cannot be trusted in open conditions, but who are unlikely to try to escape

Category D Prisoners - can be reasonable trusted not to try to escape. These prisoners are given ROTL to work in the community or to go on “home leave”

ROTL - Release on temporary licence. If prisoners are attending your business for either voluntary, paid work or training, they will require a resettlement day release licence - a type of ROTL. The licence will state what times the individual is allowed to be outside the prison. A ROTL will only be granted where the prison service is satisfied that the level of risk will be minimal. This can act as further reassurance to employers taking on ex-offenders.

Footnotes

1 Government’s Green Paper: Breaking the Cycle, December 2010
2 QPD, Employing ex-offenders to capture talent, May 2007
3 Prison Reform Trust, Bromley Factfile, June 2011
4 Tagged for life, 2010
5 Creating the right framework, 2007
6 Volunteering England, Involving ex-offenders in volunteering, 2006
7 QPD survey, Employer attitudes towards ex-offenders, 2002
8 Personnel Today, Hidden cost of recruitment, March 2007
9 Policy Exchange, You’re Hired!, September 2008
10 Prison Reform Trust, Bromley Briefing, June 2011
11 Business in the Community, Business Brief: what’s the risk, 2011
Further Information

Business in the Community Offers advice and support to employers who are working with ex-offenders or who are interested in doing so. Their National Employers Forum for Reducing Re-offending recruits business leaders to campaign and champion the issue of reducing re-offending through employment. You can find out more at www.bitc.org.uk/community/employability/reducing_reoffending/employers_forum.html or consider joining your local forum:

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Probation Service
www.nationalprobationservice.co.uk

Prison Service
www.hmprisons.gov.uk

Ministry of Justice
Government department, created in May 2007 following the reorganisation of the Home Office to take responsibility for the management of the Probation Service, prisons and the prevention of re-offending.
www.justice.gov.uk

Prison Reform Trust
The Prison Reform Trust works to reduce unnecessary imprisonment, improve treatment for prisoners and their families and promote equality in the justice system. The Trust also produces the bi-annual Bromley Briefings publications which provide a wide range of statistical data on prisons and the prison population. This information may be of use to you if you are writing bids which impact on prisoners and if you are making the business case for employing ex-offenders.
www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk

Nacro
Nacro work on a diverse range of initiatives to reduce crime and their Resettlement Plus Helpline provides advice on the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, the process of Criminal Records Bureau checks and related topics.
www.nacro.org.uk

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)
The CIPD has produced a range of good practice guidance documents in relation to the recruitment and employment of people with criminal records.
www.cipd.co.uk

NOMS (National Offender Management Service)
Executive agency of the Ministry of Justice, bringing together the Prison and Probations Services to protect the public and prevent re-offending. NOMS also commissions and delivers adult offender management services in both custody and the community.
www.justice.co.uk/about/noms