



# Out for Good

lessons for the future

Katie Pedder

# Contents

Executive Summary	1
1. Introduction	3
2. Working with HMP Brixton	3
3. Liaising with Employers	5
4. Preparing prisoners for employment through their sentence	12
5. Data collection and follow up	21
6. Conclusion	23

The Prison Reform Trust works to create a just, humane and effective penal system. We do this by inquiring into the workings of the system; informing prisoners, staff and the wider public; and by influencing Parliament, government, and officials towards reform:  
<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk>

© Prison Reform Trust

Cover image: Andy Aitchison [www.prisonimage.org](http://www.prisonimage.org)

ISBN: 978-1-908504-17-3

Printed by Conquest Litho

## Executive Summary

This report details the findings of a two year action learning project, *Out for Good* set up in memory of the late treasurer of the Prison Reform Trust, Andrew Fleming-Williams, and funded through the efforts of his family and friends.

The project took as its inspiration Andrew's passion for realising the potential of prisoners to solve their own problems – in this case how to secure sustainable employment on release – and embedded itself in the work of HMP Brixton, a resettlement prison. It was made possible by the openness and practical support of the governor and staff at Brixton, determined to focus on the prison's potential to improve the life chances of its prisoners, despite an exceptionally challenging operational context of significant staff reductions and unremitting pressure on the prison estate as a whole. This report makes recommendations for significant changes to a system that is not delivering the outcomes it should. But that learning has only been made possible by the willing engagement of the prison and all the agencies working with it, for which they deserve great credit.

At its inception, the project expected to be working in a context where many prisoners would be eligible to leave the prison on a daily basis on release on temporary licence (ROTL), but where employers were suspicious of taking on serving prisoners. The task would be to reassure employers and build communication networks. In the event, the project rapidly found that:

- access to ROTL was actually restricted to a small percentage of the prisoners theoretically eligible for it. This reflected both a cautious approach and a failing assessment process;
- potential employers were both easier to find and less reticent than anticipated, due in part to a shortage of appropriately skilled labour in the local area;
- the pattern of provision within the prison to help prisoners into sustainable employment was very complex, and lacked co-ordination;
- there was no target to achieve sustainable employment shared by the prison and the seven different agencies within it variously contracted in different ways and by different commissioners to help;
- the process of data gathering and sharing was very poor and inadequately supported by ICT.

The project was able to make some progress through the resource it brought to co-ordination and communication, both within the prison and between the prison and employers. Over 60 prisoners found jobs through job fairs organised through the project, for example. But there was no means to measure whether employment was sustained following release. And before the project closed, a crisis of overcrowding in the south east prompted a change in the prison's population, with prisoners in the lowest security category being moved out to open prisons much further from London and the job opportunities there.

The report demonstrates conclusively that the potential to secure sustainable employment for prisoners before and after release is both great and going largely unrealised. That could be put right by:

- a step change in the use of ROTL for employment and education in the community prior to a prisoner's release. Under existing instructions, ROTL could be a normal part of most prisoners' sentences. As it stands, most so called resettlement prisons use it hardly at all, and so for most prisoners it constitutes neither a real incentive to use their time in prison well, nor a practical way to overcome their own resettlement challenges;
- a radical simplification of the commissioning and provision of overlapping services to help prisoners into employment;
- adequate resource for the governor of a prison to co-ordinate that provision and build relationships with the local labour market;
- a heavily weighted target for the sustained employment of prisoners after rather than on release, applying equally to the prison and the agencies commissioned to help it, including the community rehabilitation companies;
- improved national systems for data collection and sharing on individual prisoners, saving time in prisons and making possible the routine measurement of achievement after release;
- and, fundamentally, a prison system in which overcrowding does not require prisoners to be held far from the communities – and jobs – to which it makes sense to release them.

## 1. Introduction

The *Out for Good* project was set up in memory of Andrew Fleming-Williams, the Prison Reform Trust's long-standing treasurer, and a passionate advocate for prison reform.

Andrew believed in making prisons more effective establishments by helping prisoners to focus on acquiring job-related skills while in prison, in order to assist them "through the gate" on their release. He was also keen to explain the reality of prison life to an audience who had very little prior knowledge of prisons.

Following Andrew's untimely death, a group of his friends and family concluded that many more people should be encouraged to come and "see for themselves," with the overarching aim of assisting in rehabilitation and resettlement and achieving positive practical outcomes. They raised the money to create the *Out for Good* project. The project set itself two broad objectives:

- to deliver practical opportunities and outcomes for prisoners which make a measurable difference, particularly in the field of employment and training; and
- to develop ways in which prisons can build sustainable local networks to support resettlement.

This report describes the progress the project made, and the emerging themes which point in turn to changes which are needed both locally and nationally to turn good intentions into better outcomes on the ground.

## 2. Working with HMP Brixton

Very early in the project's existence, the decision was taken to start by working very closely with an individual prison. This was designed both to produce the tangible outcomes for individuals that the project's advisory board rightly wanted to see and to develop an understanding of the detail of how the relationship between potential employers and the prison should work, locally and nationally.

The project was fortunate to secure the agreement of the prison service to work with HMP Brixton and its then governor. Brixton was ideally suited as a test bed for *Out for Good*. In 2012 it was decided that HMP Brixton would no longer hold remand and recently convicted prisoners but instead would be the first central London resettlement prison holding low-security category C and D prisoners prior to release in the London area. This decision was forward-thinking and took advantage of Brixton's central location and excellent transport links. These made it much easier for prisoners to rebuild family ties and look for local employment on release. There are significant employment opportunities in most London boroughs including major infrastructure projects.

The vision statement of the prison is:

*HMP Brixton aims to reduce the likelihood of reoffending and assist offenders to prepare them for release by providing and improving employability skills, promoting law abiding behaviour, successful resettlement and encouraging the development of self-confidence and responsibility.*

The governor of Brixton and head of reducing reoffending were keen to pilot *Out for Good* and were consistently supportive and open to new ideas and ways of working. This report is only possible because of the openness of staff and managers at all levels and their willingness to share their experience with *Out for Good*. This combination of lower-risk prisoners at the end of their sentences, a central London location and a committed governor should have meant that Brixton could achieve employment for many of its prisoners on release.

However, Brixton also faced many of the generic challenges facing prisons nationally. It had had to absorb very significant efficiency savings; the majority of its population lived in overcrowded, 200-year-old accommodation; the illegal trade in new psychoactive substances had contributed to serious issues of control and good order, as well as posing health risks to a vulnerable population; attracting and retaining staff to work in such difficult conditions was challenging, especially given the cost of living in London; and fundamental change in the way probation services were delivered was still at an early stage. The “day job” of keeping the prison safe and secure was immensely challenging, and consumed the majority of the resources available throughout the year. From the summer of 2016 this became even more acute as staff shortages led to a limited regime for prisoners, which in turn caused the resettlement agenda to slip down the priority order. In practical terms staff shortages meant that most training and education places were only ever half full and that it was often difficult for resettlement workers to see their clients.

In late 2016 a decision was taken to move category D prisoners out of Brixton. This decision was driven by the need to fill spaces in open prisons, to find closed prison spaces for convicted sex offenders, and concerns about the trafficking of illicit substances. But it was also true that the prison has not been able to generate the volume of ROTL decisions originally envisaged. As a result, ROTL came to be seen as being out of reach of the majority of prisoners (even those categorised as eligible for open conditions) and therefore had not become a major incentive for prisoners to commit to Brixton's resettlement ethos. The low rate of ROTL prevented the impact it could have had either on the running of the prison or securing long-term employment for prisoners on release.

The key reasons for this failure to fully realise the potential of ROTL were a lack of priority given to allocating resources to complete the ROTL risk assessments and the high numbers of category D prisoners allocated to Brixton with a relatively short time left on their sentence so that by the time the paperwork was completed they were already almost at the point of release.



The prison service instructions that govern the use of ROTL (PSO 6300 and PSI 13/2015) do not restrict ROTL use to category D prisoners. Prisoners held in closed conditions – the majority of those in Brixton – are eligible for ROTL once a certain proportion of their sentence has passed, if they are deemed not to be high risk and if the ROTL activity is clearly linked to resettlement goals. In practice, and in common with most other prisons, Brixton did not consider category C prisoners for ROTL. This was, and continues to be, a missed opportunity to engage with employers and assist prisoners to gain employment on release.

The experience of working closely with Brixton (in practice, the project manager spent two of her three days a week in or around the prison) showed that there was no “quick fix” to the challenge of transforming the number of prisoners who go to full time employment on release. The fine detail of current practice – and how it might need to change – is all important. Some of the solutions are local; but more concern policy which only ministers will be able to change. However there are key themes which run through this paper and understanding these is fundamental to any successful strategy to improve the employment outcomes for prisoners on release:

- There is a significant number of employers who are open to employing ex-offenders and willing to work with prisons to achieve this.
- Prisons must co-ordinate the efforts of multiple agencies to identify, train and prepare prisoners who are motivated to gain work on release. Many of these organisations report to bodies external to the prison and are not within the governor’s direct control.
- Data on employment outcomes for prisoners is poor or non-existent.
- Securing sustainable employment on release is not reflected in prison targets.

### **3. Liaising with Employers**

In the early stages of *Out for Good*, it was always envisaged that the major challenge would be to persuade employers to consider employing ex-offenders. Surprisingly this proved to be the most straightforward aspect of the project. It was helpful that organisations such as The Clink and Bounce Back were already embedded in Brixton and had built up strong relationships with employers in their respective sectors of catering and construction. Beyond these existing links it proved relatively easy to interest other employers in attending job fairs or employing prisoners on ROTL

#### **ROTL**

ROTL offered a perfect stepping stone from prison to employment. For the employer it was relatively low risk as the prisoner had already been rigorously assessed by the prison and the employer had the opportunity to get to know the prisoner and watch him work before offering him permanent employment on release. The advantages for the prisoner were even greater as he could gain new skills and experience and

potentially obtain paid employment, with an employer who was already aware of his criminal history, before being released. A portion of the prisoner's wages were allocated to victim support charities but he would be able to save the majority of the salary and use it on release for expenses such as a deposit for accommodation.

When *Out for Good* initially started working in HMP Brixton in September 2015 there were 130 category D prisoners in Brixton of which approximately 40 had been risk-assessed as suitable to be released on ROTL. These risk-assessed prisoners left the prison each morning, to work in a variety of both voluntary and paid work placements, and returned to the prison at the end of the working day. One initial issue was the high number of prisoners in voluntary placements, such as Sue Ryder charity shops or local libraries, with no possibility to lead to paid employment. Whilst for some prisoners, particularly those coming to the end of a long sentence, this might be an entirely appropriate first placement, in the main it represented squandered opportunity to help prisoners gain paid employment before release.

*Out for Good* worked with the prison's head of business and community engagement to engage more employers and increase the percentage of prisoners going to paid ROTL placements. It proved easier than anticipated to attract new employers: Lambeth Council introduced the prison to employers working at some of the major developments in the borough and other employers were also keen to employ prisoners on ROTL.

It was much more difficult to ensure that the prison had a steady stream of risk assessed prisoners to put forward for ROTL placements. There were several reasons for this:

- The ROTL risk assessment process was managed by the prison's internal Offender Management Unit (OMU). OMU was consistently working under its complemented staffing and was further hampered by the frequent cross deployment of its members to cover tasks in other areas in the prison.
- The number of men on ROTL was not one of the prison's key performance indicators (KPIs) and so the governor was unable to justify making ROTL risk assessments a priority over other work in the OMU which had targets attached.
- Prisoners were regularly sent to Brixton without a completed OASys risk assessment document, which must be taken into consideration as part of the ROTL process. As OASys documents were supposed to be completed by the sending prisons, Brixton had no resources allocated to complete these and this further delayed the ROTL process.
- Other prisoners were sent with such a short time left on their sentence that there was no realistic chance of completing the ROTL risk assessment process before they became eligible for release on home detention curfew (HDC).

Thus the number of prisoners going out on ROTL remained relatively static – never rising much beyond 50. Employers were clamouring for ROTL prisoners and prisoners



were desperate to access paid employment before release, but the scheme was never used to anywhere near its full potential and did not meet the demand that existed.

A key issue was that the governor had no incentive, beyond his own commitment to helping prisoners gain employment, to give time or resources to expanding the ROTL programme. There were no targets associated with positive ROTL outcomes or indeed prisoners finding employment on release. If anything, there was a disincentive to do so as failure on ROTL was measured. The priority understandably given to reducing illicit drug use in the prison also encouraged a more risk averse culture, since ROTL placements were seen as one of the more straightforward routes for drugs to be brought into the prison.

In the autumn of 2016 a decision was made to move all the category D prisoners out of Brixton prison. This was mainly due to an unexpected increase in the national prison population, which in an overcrowded estate meant that the priority for the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) was to find additional beds for prisoners requiring secure conditions.

The impact this decision would have on employers did not appear to play a significant part in the decision-making process. Staff at Brixton attempted to limit the damage by arranging for all working prisoners to move to open prisons where they might be able to commute to work. The reality however was that many prisoners were not be able to continue their ROTL placements once they left Brixton.

The central importance of ROTL to the future employment of prisoners prompts a series of recommendations:

For the Minister:

- ROTL processes should be urgently reviewed to allow more prisoners, particularly those coming to the end of long sentences, to benefit from ROTL. There should be a performance indicator associated with successful extension of ROTL to sit alongside that proposed for avoiding individual failures.

For NOMS:

- Prisons with a resettlement function should be expected to release significant numbers of eligible prisoners (including those not judged suitable for open conditions but meeting the criteria for ROTL) daily. Staffing for the assessment process should be planned and protected on that basis.

For governors/directors:

- ROTL should be central to the prison's preparation of eligible prisoners for release;
- There should be a senior management team focus on building and maintaining relationships with employers and supporting their engagement with the prison.

## **Job Fairs**

The project also looked at the situation of prisoners not eligible for ROTL and those who were eligible but for the practical reasons outlined above were unlikely to obtain ROTL.

One way to introduce these prisoners to prospective employers prior to release was through setting up a job fair. In order for a job fair to be an effective method of helping prisoners gain employment it was important that they should be held regularly, there was adequate follow up after the job fair, and that prisoners were properly selected and prepared for the job fair.

*Out for Good* worked with the prison to set up and run a series of job fairs every four months. These job fairs were aimed at prisoners in the last four months of their sentence to roughly correspond with the twelve-week community rehabilitation company (CRC) resettlement programme. Three job fairs were held during the project and the experience of organising them illuminated gaps in provision and systems that would allow a more coordinated approach to prisoners gaining employment.

The job fairs were well received by prisoners with approximately half of those eligible wanting to attend. Those that were not interested either had a job already lined up on release, or were not looking for employment.

There were many different organisations and agencies within the prison that actively sought to build links with potential employers, including:

- Novus – education provider
- Prospects – National Careers Service
- Penrose – sub-contracted by the London CRC
- Bounce Back
- The Clink
- NOMS – London regional lead for employer engagement
- Job Centre Plus

Once again persuading employers to attend the job fairs was straightforward in large part through the contacts of the various organisations listed above. These included employers such as:

- Transport for London
- Sainsbury's
- Tottenham Hotspur
- Kier Services
- McGee construction
- Conway
- Keltbray
- Landlease (BeOnSite)

- Premier Inn
- Changing Paths (Thames Tideway project)
- Blue Sky (various grounds maintenance contracts)
- Jamie Oliver
- Hilton hotels

Translating the enthusiasm of employers towards the offenders they met at job fairs into real jobs on release was not a straightforward task. To a certain extent this was because the employers' recruitment processes were often not designed for people leaving custody and many ex-offenders fell away through the process. A greater problem was the prison's internal processes and priorities and a lack of coordinated support on release. The job fair highlighted a number of key issues which can be roughly grouped in four areas:

#### Lack of coordination

- Whilst organisations in the prison were receptive to the idea of a job fair and could see that it would be beneficial, no one felt it was their responsibility to coordinate it or that they had the resources to do so. Most of the considerable work that went into organising this was done over and above people's core jobs and it would not have happened without *Out for Good* taking the initiative.
- This uncoordinated approach often meant that companies were approached by more than one organisation working within the prison.
- Another disadvantage to this piecemeal approach to approaching employers was that organisations could be protective over "their" employers. It followed that if the key relationship was between the employer and a contracted provider who might not work in the prison long term, the prison's relationship with the employer might be lost if the provider stopped working in the prison.

#### Lack of information

- Accessing data about eligible prisoners in a central master list was essential to organising the job fair. Obtaining a list of prisoners due for release in the four months prior to each job fair was not difficult. What was more problematic was that there was no information relating to the area of employment they wished to go into or any relevant training or experience they had gained in the prison or prior to custody. In the end, each prisoner had to be interviewed individually to obtain this information.

## Lack of employability skills

- Attendance at the job fair was made dependent on prisoners having an up-to-date CV and disclosure letter. Despite the range of organisations working in the prison to assist prisoners into work most prisoners did not have either of these. Prisoners also received no assistance with interview practice or the other “soft skills” necessary to gain and keep employment and there were no courses in the prison addressing this gap.

## Lack of follow up

- After each job fair the majority of prisoners had at least one employer who expressed an interest in offering a job on release. In the end, out of the 300 prisoners that attended the three job fairs over 60 prisoners obtained work through a contact made there. There are several reasons for the discrepancy between the number of prisoners obtaining work and the number in whom employers expressed an interest. Many of the employers had no system for following up with these candidates other than requesting that they complete an online application form, which was not possible in prison because of restrictions on access to the internet. Prisoners also often left the prison without having a bank account or the necessary identification documents, which meant they were unable to start work.
- Most of the organisations working in the prison referred offenders to a corresponding worker in the community on release but there was little feedback from this approach and it did not appear to be very successful. Bounce Back and The Clink provided a more seamless support where the same team, and often the same individual, supported offenders in prison and then on release and worked with employers with whom they had built strong personal relationships. The relatively high number of positive results from the job fairs was almost entirely because Bounce Back case workers had strong pre-existing relationships with employers and continued to work with the men on release from prison.

### Case Study

Prisoner A attended the job fair and received a number of job offers. He was keen to work with the construction firm Keltbray and Bounce Back arranged for him to obtain a CSCS card (a requirement to work on a construction site) before he was released so that he could go straight into employment. It was only after he had left the jail that we realised he did not have a bank account, without which he could not start work. In addition he did not have stable accommodation and so found it difficult to obtain the proof of address documentation necessary to open a bank account. He also had very little money and therefore struggled to travel to meet the Bounce Back workers who were trying to help him.

He was unable to take up the job offer.

- Some of the employers attending the job fair had already employed ex-offenders and therefore had systems in place for the recruitment process to work as smoothly as possible.
- Other employers, although keen to get involved, were new to employing ex-offenders and were more cautious or unaware of the obstacles facing prisoners as they left prison. These employers usually had not thought through the process from meeting an impressive candidate at a prison job fair through to employing him on release from prison. Many employers looked to the prison to guide them in this process but there was nothing in place and no key point of contact to take this forward.

In short, the problem which the project had expected might be the hardest to solve - finding employers willing to take prisoners on - turned out to be one of the more straightforward. But a disconnected approach to working with employers, and a lack of support on release, risked squandering the network and goodwill which the project helped the prison to generate.

## **Recommendations**

To the Minister:

- Make employment sustained after release a key performance target shared jointly between the prison governor and CRC.

For NOMS:

- As part of the empowerment agenda, give governors a greater say over the work of the various organisations in the prison and input into what is commissioned in the first place.

For the governor/ director:

- If organising a job fair, allocate a job fair coordinator(s) to lead the job fair process to coordinate and manage the job fair organisation and follow up
- Over time, the prison should aim to be more strategic, as it understands the skills base amongst prisoners, its capacity to grow that base, and the opportunities for employment in the areas to which prisoners are discharged.

## 4. Preparing prisoners for employment through their sentence

### Arrival at HMP Brixton

All prisoners were supposed to arrive at Brixton prison with a completed OASys report (an assessment to measure an individual's risk and needs) and a sentence plan. In reality a high proportion of prisoners – sometimes 50% - arrived in Brixton without an up-to-date OASys report or sentence plan. As these should have been completed prior to arrival, Brixton prison was not resourced to complete this paperwork which immediately put the prison on the back foot in any attempt to manage an offender through his sentence and ensure that he attended relevant training or other resettlement interventions in a rational sequence. This was compounded by the cross-deployment of offender supervisors from the OMU department which meant there was little sentence management taking place for the majority of prisoners.

Prisoners should have attended an induction session shortly after arrival at the prison. The purpose of induction was partly to communicate to the prisoner about the prison but also to find out key information about them. From an employment perspective, all prisoners were expected to complete an education assessment and were banded – gold, silver and bronze - according to an assessment of their readiness for employment. From the summer of 2016, staff shortages had an inevitable impact on the frequency of the induction programme. Even when induction did take place regularly it was usually rushed and impersonal with prisoners seeing many different organisations who all asked similar questions.

The information gleaned at induction was then used to make an initial allocation to education or training, but beyond this it was not recorded in a way that meant that it was easily accessible to other organisations or could be kept updated. Thus, whilst individual tutors or prison officers often attempted to help prisoners improve their chances of employment on release there was no coordinated system to track prisoners' progress, offer appropriate interventions in any meaningful sequence or work to improve prisoner's employability until they were picked up by CRC staff at 12 weeks prior to release.

For prisoners serving over one year, oversight of their time in jail and preparation for release was the responsibility of offender supervisors. In reality staff shortages mean that these staff were consistently cross-deployed so that offender supervisors were not able to offer much meaningful management of a prisoner's time in custody and actively engage prisoners in their resettlement goals. Many prisoners were unaware who their offender supervisor was.

The many different departments and organisations in the prison, with some remit to prepare prisoners for employment on release, operated on a fairly independent basis. There was no attempt to coordinate support until prisoners were picked up by a CRC case worker prior to release by which time it was often too late to make much impact.



In addition CRC workers had too great a caseload to take on the intensive support work necessary to try and make up the lack of personalised support previously in a prisoner's time in custody.

A CRC case worker should have seen each prisoner at 12 weeks before release but, for a large proportion of the time covered by this report, the CRC staff were unable to meet this target and only began to engage with prisoners nearer to their release date. In addition, many of the prisoners most likely to be suitable for employment on release were also most likely to be released early on Home Detention Curfew (HDC). CRC staff were routinely only informed that a prisoner had been given HDC a day or two before release and so these prisoners were even more likely to miss out on assistance immediately prior to release.

Attempts by the CRC staff to meet regularly with other departments and organisations that may have been working with the prisoner previously in order to share information and plan for release were hampered by concerns over data sharing and poor attendance and again by the lack of overall coordination and leadership.

## **Organisations working in Brixton**

### **NOVUS**

Novus holds the Offender Learning and Skills (OLAS) contract for all the prisons in London as well as other areas of the country. As such they work with the prison to provide education and training and aim to “raise the aspirations of learners to increase employability and reduce reoffending” and “give offenders the knowledge, self-esteem and confidence to thrive in the world of work.”

At Brixton Novus ran vocational training in:

- industrial cleaning
- horticulture
- construction skills (in partnership with Bounce Back)
- barbering
- fashion and design
- prison radio
- hospitality and catering (including Bad Boys Bakery)

Employability skills were increasingly embedded within these vocational training courses although they did not offer any specific employability course focusing on key skills such as CV writing or interview skills.

Novus employed a regional employment broker for London who worked to build links with employers and with vocational tutors within the prison to identify men suitable for employment and establish employment pathways.

The most successful of these appeared to be for prisoners working in Bad Boys Bakery, thanks in no small part to a passionate and committed tutor, but the numbers going into employment were still small.

Outcomes of prisoners gaining employment were reported to NOMS but were not regularly reported back to the prison and did not feed into any prison-wide recording system.

### **National Careers Service**

For most of the period of this report the National Careers Service (NCS) was funded by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) although the funding and management of the contract moved to NOMS towards the end of the project. Their remit was to help prisoners into jobs or training and they had 2.8 FTE members of staff working at the prison. NCS were contracted to see 80 new prisoners every month with a payment attached to each prisoner; they could then receive a further payment if a prisoner engaged in a “career management outcome” such as CV writing or distance learning. There was a final payment if a prisoner was successful in finding a job or training placement on release from prison.

The contract did not allow payment for prisoners who had previously been seen in another establishment, which ruled out around 30% of prisoners in Brixton. The contract also did not allow any financial recompense for follow-up visits so it was difficult to build up the strong and supportive relationship necessary for many prisoners to succeed in ventures such as distance learning. There was also a financial disincentive to work with prisoners who had previously approached NCS, and were therefore likely to be some of the most motivated to find work. In reality NCS staff did try to prioritise support for prisoners but were often frustrated by the financial constraints of the contract. A counterbalance to this problem was that NCS was allocated funding under an inspiration fund and this was used to fund resettlement work such as involvement with the job fairs.

NCS staff reported figures to the SFA, and latterly NOMS, via the management information system and also figures back to the prison on a monthly basis, but these did not feed into a wider system of recording prison employment outcomes.

In addition it was difficult for prison-based NCS staff to know if prisoners had actually gained sustained employment on release as they were referred to NCS workers in the community to follow up and there was only informal feedback between prison and community workers.

### **The Shaw Trust/ Change Grow Live (CGL)**

The Shaw Trust and CGL won the contract for the third round of the NOMS/ European Social Fund co-financing programme. The aim of the programme was to improve the social inclusion of the hardest to reach offenders both in prison and the community.

Although the ultimate goal was to prepare offenders for education, training or employment through an intensive case-management approach the programme was not specifically employability focussed and there was only an 8% target for moving offenders into employment.

The contract is measured on the following KPI's:

- enrolments onto the programme
- specialist support referrals
- short courses undertaken
- vocational/education/ training courses undertaken
- secured employment

The current round of funding (CFO3) was aimed at offenders who were perceived as having the most difficulty accessing other mainstream services and were furthest away from employment. In London that means they are contracted to work with:

- dual diagnosis offenders
- non-English speakers from the EU
- offenders with gambling/ debt issues
- offenders with mental health needs

The programme went live in July 2015 and is funded until 2020. At the time of writing there were two part-time members of staff based in Brixton although the programme has rarely operated at full staffing capacity. Each case manager had a maximum case load of 44 offenders spread across the prison and the community.

At the start of the programme there were significant problems with referrals from the prison and issues around access to prisoners have also made it difficult for the case managers. Currently case managers work predominantly in the community where they can be assured a steady flow of referrals and only spend a take on a limited amount of prison referrals.

Staff recorded data on CATS (ESF reporting mechanism) and did not record outcomes on prison systems or share their case load with other agencies in the prison. Programme outcomes were reported to NOMS.

### **Community Rehabilitation Company**

Penrose was subcontracted by MTC Novo, the London Community Rehabilitation Company to provide “through the gate” resettlement services in seven London prisons including Brixton.

Prisoners held at Brixton were all sent from another prison establishment, rather than arriving directly from court, and should have arrived with a resettlement plan completed by CRC staff at the original establishment based on an in-depth interview held five days after initial reception. The initial resettlement plans of prisoners arriving at Brixton were usually not of a high enough quality to be useful.

Brixton CRC staff were contracted to meet with prisoners twelve weeks prior to release and review and update the original resettlement plan focusing on preparing the prisoner for release across a number of areas including employment.

At the time of writing the report the CRC team had a full complement of five full-time staff although for much of the period covered by this report this had not been the case, which inevitably impacted on their ability to see clients 12 weeks prior to release. Another key factor was that the shortage of prison officers and the subsequent restricted regime meant that it was often difficult for CRC staff to speak to prisoners as they were locked in their cells. A lack of dedicated interview space meant that CRC staff were sometimes forced to conduct resettlement interviews on crowded and noisy wings or even shout through locked cell doors. In this environment it was more likely that crucial information was missed and that prisoners were unwilling to share personal information.

The CRC staff recently started to provide a basic bank account to prisoners who requested this although a surprisingly low number of prisoners had taken advantage of this facility. One potential issue was that the forms were relatively complicated to complete and CRC workers usually did not have the time to help the prisoners complete them.

The CRC also recently started to provide birth certificates (right to work documentation) for prisoners for a fee of £9.25. Prisoners needed to start this process at least nine weeks prior to release.

Five days prior to a prisoner's release date the prison-based CRC workers sent the completed resettlement plans to the outside probation worker or community-based CRC worker. There was no further interaction between prison based CRC staff and prisoners post-release.

CRC staff recorded data from resettlement interviews on a separate IT system which was not accessible to prison staff.

On this data prisoners were either recorded as employed (full-time or part-time), unemployed or unavailable to work. To be recorded as employed the prisoners needed to have already secured a job prior to release. There was no measurement of distance travelled towards employment in the prison or individuals who had interviews set up for release but had not yet secured employment.

MTC Novo provided these figures to NOMS on a monthly basis. The CRC were unable to provide data to the prison about the employment outcomes of individual prisoners and the prison-based CRC workers themselves rarely received feedback on employment outcomes on release.

MTC Novo also employed two employment brokers to run a London-wide employment brokerage service working with employers and local councils to find employment opportunities for offenders on release from prison as well as offenders referred from the community.

Since December 2016 those prisoners assessed as “gold standard” on the job readiness banding - assessed first at induction and then again by the CRC twelve weeks prior to release - were automatically referred to the CRC job brokerage service. The numbers thus far had been extremely low: approximately 30 offenders across all the prisons in the London region had been referred between December 2016 and February 2017.

The service was more advanced in the community although there were still significantly higher number of employment or training places available than there were offenders referred for these opportunities.

### **Bounce Back**

Bounce Back is a charity focussed on training and equipping prisoners with the skills and qualifications they will need to successfully gain employment on release in the construction industry. Qualifications include City and Guilds and CSkills up to Level 2 as well as CSCS cards which they provide, where possible, prior to release. They also take a number of participants into their own Decorating Social Enterprise on release. In Brixton they ran painting and decorating, dry lining and scaffolding workshops.

The Bounce Back team also worked with the men on their training programmes to prepare them for employment on release, helping set them up for self-employment, working on employability and interview skills, ensuring they have all the necessary documentation required for release and also CVs and disclosure letters. The same caseworkers then work with them on release for as long as is needed, partnering with other agencies to provide housing and other support they do not provide themselves. In addition they work closely with employers, making it as easy as possible for both parties to manage the transition of the individuals into work. Because of this, Bounce Back has excellent links with major employers in the construction industry as well as with other corporates and has considerable success in linking up graduates with employment on release in a broadening number of different sectors. Monitoring and impact measurement continues through the gate and is a fundamental part of their programme.

Bounce Back is partially funded by the OLAS contract and reports figures back to NOMS through Novus.

### **The Clink**

The Clink charity runs a restaurant at Brixton which is open to the public and trains prisoners in both front of house and catering in preparation for a career in the hospitality industry.

All prisoners completed a basic induction including food hygiene, health and safety and allergens training. Those with a longer time until release started various level 2 NVQ qualifications whilst those with less time to serve focussed on soft skills such as team building.

The Clink restaurant employed their own support worker who worked with all prisoners in the Clink to prepare them for release including:

- liaising with other agencies such as probation or housing as necessary
- ensuring all the necessary documentation (bank account, right to work paperwork, ID etc) was in place
- arranging for job interviews on release

The Clink charity continued to provide a wide range of support after release for as long as the ex-offender required this assistance. They also had an excellent network of contacts with employers within the catering and hospitality industry and were successful in finding work for their graduates in these fields.

The Clink tracked employment outcomes for individuals and provided monthly feedback to NOMS and to the prison.

### **Job Centre Plus**

Job Centre Plus has capacity for two prison-based members of staff although one of these posts was unfilled. The Job Centre Plus staff member contacted all prisoners six weeks prior to release to invite them to attend a one-to-one appointment to set up any benefit claims the prisoner intended to make on release. The member of staff helped the prisoner fill in the necessary paperwork and arranged an appointment on release at the prisoner's local job centre. Any prisoner who had not yet gone through the work programme was automatically referred to this on release.

Although the job title of the prison-based staff had recently changed from employment and benefits advisor to work coach in reality the member of staff was able to do little to help prisoners access work on release. The work coach did have the facility to run job searches but this was not routine and few prisoners requested it. The longer term vision for this role however was that work coaches become more involved in preparing prisoners for work and helping them to find suitable work placements from much earlier in the prisoner's sentence.

Figures from prisoners who were ultimately successful at finding work through the work programme were not fed back to the prison or indeed to the prison-based work coach.

### **Other employment services**

In addition to these contracted-out organisations, the prison also directly employed a business and community engagement lead although in reality his time mostly taken up engaging employers specifically for the ROTL programme. When the ROTL programme at Brixton ended the business and community engagement lead took on additional responsibilities and spent a minority of his time building links with employers.

The NOMS London Area Office also employed a regional lead for employer engagement who was also responsible for building partnerships with employers.



The number of different organisations working within the prison with overlapping objectives around helping prisoners access employment highlighted key areas for concern:

### **Lack of Coordination and oversight**

- Organisations had different funding streams, reporting structures and methods of data collection. There was no comprehensive system for sharing basic information, such as a client list, between the different organisations.
- Organisations within the prison did refer on to each other but this was often based more on informal or personal relationship between staff rather than any defined system. Individual staff members sometimes had only a limited understanding of the role performed by other organisations in the prison. Some organisations were unwilling to disclose their client list which exacerbated the lack of joined-up working.
- No organisation or individual took on the role of overall co-ordination or leadership of preparing prisoners for employment on release or of liaising with different employers.
- This lack of coordination or oversight of the different services contributed to the current situation where there was a disproportionate emphasis on building links with employers at the expense of ensuring that prisoners were actually prepared to take advantage of these job opportunities.
- Despite the number of organisations involved in preparing prisoners for employment there was no system for ensuring that prisoners had a CV or had done interview skills training and a lack of provision of these courses.
- The lack of a joined-up or sequenced approach to preparing prisoners for employment on release was particularly acute in the middle part of the sentence between induction and CRC support at twelve weeks prior to release, by which time it was often too late to make much impact.
- Although the focus of this report has been within prison it is also clear that the lack of coordination and oversight extends beyond the prison gate. The most successful organisations, such as Bounce Back or The Clink, provide a genuinely seamless service with offenders either supported by the same individual on release or by someone else who is in close communication with the prison-based worker and give personalised support. Most organisations however (including the CRC's "through the gate" service) simply make a referral to a community-based worker and typically receive no feedback on any employment outcomes.

## Operational issues

In addition, there were several operational issues that inhibited the smooth working of organisations in the prison working to help prisoners gain employment. These were exacerbated since summer 2016 by chronic staff shortages which led to a severely restricted prison regime. However even before this was the case there were still a number of serious issues:

- Many workers reported significant difficulty accessing prisoners and that there was often no available interview space to have private conversations. Most organisations reported regularly having to talk to prisoners on a busy wing or even through the cell door.
- Resettlement workers did not carry cell keys and therefore relied on wing staff to unlock prisoners that they needed to speak to. They felt that some wing staff did not understand or value their role and accessing prisoners was unacceptably dependent on there being a helpful wing officer on duty.

From the motivated prisoner's perspective, this tended to create, at the very least, a confused landscape. Because "taking part" led to enhanced privileges in the prison and was seen as enhancing prospects for early release, whether on ROTL, HDC or parole, there was an incentive to do whatever was on offer rather than to identify the opportunities which were most likely to suit that person and their prospects for permanent employment on release.

In the absence of any coordinated system, opportunities tended to go to prisoners who were "keen", regardless of whether they actually needed much help to get employment on release. Different agencies could easily end up competing for prisoners to fill their spaces and meet individual targets rather than collaborating to put the right person into the right activity.

For the unmotivated prisoner, the current system made it too easy to avoid the challenge of doing what it would take to prepare them for the world of work. There was no systematic equivalent of what one might find in a good school, where the underachieving pupils are identified and targeted for special attention to motivate and keep them engaged.

The central commissioning and planning processes for resettlement activity were very confused and confusing. The previous Secretary of State strongly advocated for devolution of power to governors locally as the way to cut through the mess, but this will require some radical re-thinking of the central processes, and how money flows through to the frontline. In particular, the most recent attempt to impose a single responsibility for oversight and delivering reduced reoffending - the creation of the CRCs - sits uncomfortably with the agenda around autonomy for governors. There was a good deal of resource going into relevant activity in the prison, and so there was scope to get much better outcomes without spending more. But the governor

could only take this so far, when the organisations concerned were working to conflicting targets, overlapping briefs and in fear of having funding withdrawn if they failed to meet contractual performance indicators which made little sense locally on the ground.

## **Recommendations**

### **For the minister:**

- Whilst there is much that can be done locally to get better value for the significant total resource going into resettlement, the confusion and conflict that comes from central design and commissioning must be resolved. This is very complex, and dismantling central controls to make space for more local autonomy will be controversial and, in many areas, commercially sensitive. But it is essential.

### **For the governor:**

- The induction process needs to be streamlined, ideally so that the prisoner only meets with one member of staff who records all the necessary information in a way that means it can be easily accessed by others working in the prison.
- Employment services and the different organisations within the prison need to be led and coordinated by prison member of staff with both the time and authority to perform this role.
- Greater priority needs to be given to preparing prisoners for employment on release between induction and CRC intervention. Priorities need to be agreed between agencies and then reflected in the allocation of prisoners to different workshops and training opportunities.
- Multi-agency collaboration is essential to check which prisoners are doing what activities and whether that is getting them job-ready.

## **5. Data Collection and follow up**

Different organisations recorded their data on different reporting systems. This was often to facilitate reporting outcomes to funding bodies rather than with the aim of sharing outcomes and information with partner agencies in the prison.

When partner agencies did use NOMIS, the prison system, interactions were recorded on each individual prisoner's file. This was certainly a significant step in the right direction but even if prisoners' electronic records were well used across the board, it still did not address the key problem of a lack of coordination and oversight of the process. What was needed was a centralised system of recording each prisoner's assessed resettlement needs, allocation to relevant departments and then a record of

outcomes where prisoners could be tracked. In this way organisations could be held to account for their interventions and prisoners could be challenged for not engaging with interventions.

There was a particular dearth of data when it came to the most important outcome of all - how many prisoners gained employment on release from prison.

The CRC collected figures for employment on release but these only captured prisoners who voluntarily declared that they had a job when their resettlement plan was completed. In reality these were primarily men who had kept a job from before they were imprisoned or had work with family or friends. This did not capture any “distance travelled” in ensuring that the prisoner was job ready on release or indeed those prisoners who had interviews set up for release.

The prison no longer held any target around employment outcomes for prisoners. Consequently this was not seen as a priority in comparison to other heavily weighted targets.

NOMS collated the information provided by the CRC on employment figures on release but this information was not detailed enough to be helpful and was not given any priority in the prison. In reality from governor down, no one in Brixton - a resettlement prison - knew how many prisoners entered employment on leaving prison and so were unable to track whether the prison was improving or not on this key indicator. This lack of any robust and detailed performance data around employment outcomes made it more difficult for the governor to make preparing for employment on release a priority for scarce staff and financial resources.

## **Recommendations**

### **For NOMS:**

- There should be central rules on data collection and data sharing and an IT infrastructure that supports this.
- A target should be set on employment and training outcomes which is sufficiently heavily weighted in resettlement prisons to allow governors to prioritise resources towards this.

### **For the governor:**

- Until a national solution is available, the prison and the agencies working there need to agree local arrangements that will provide enough operational lists to at least allow everyone to know who is working with which prisoners, agree priorities and measure progress.

## 6. Conclusion

The detailed work at Brixton has illuminated the challenges facing the prison at all levels. However we do not believe that these challenges are unique to Brixton prison and underpinning many of them are tensions around prison priorities, contracts and resources that can only be resolved by NOMS and the Ministry of Justice.

We were pleasantly surprised that engaging employers to employ ex-offenders on release proved the most straightforward aspect of the project. That is not to say that there is not work to do ensuring that recruitment and 'on boarding' procedures are sensitive to the particular situation facing ex-offenders. But in general it is not a good use of resources to have so many organisations focussed on brokering employment opportunities for prisoners at the expense of actually making sure the prisoners are ready to take up these jobs and supporting them through this process both in prison and on release. In particular it is a great shame that the ROTL programme at Brixton has been curtailed and that so many eligible prisoners are not given access to ROTL as this is the ideal stepping stone from prison to permanent employment. It seems strange that when we know that ROTL is such a successful tool in helping prisoners gain permanent employment on release, which in turn significantly reduces their risk of reoffending, that there is no prison target linked to successful ROTL.

The lack of heavily-weighted targets for the governor around successful employment outcomes for prisoners on release from prison also explains the lack of priority this is given in the prison and goes some way to explain the lack of coordination and planning of these services within prison. This is exacerbated by the large number of different organisations working in the prison - mostly not under the direct control of the governor - with some remit around employment but all working to different contracts, targets and with different data recording systems. There needs to be a radical simplification of the commissioning and provision of overlapping services to help prisoners into employment as well as adequate resource for the governor of a prison to co-ordinate that provision and build relationships with the local labour market.

The willingness of both NOMS and HMP Brixton to engage with this project has illuminated many of the solutions to the problems prisoners face in securing employment after release. Although the situation will vary in different regions, there is every reason to be positive about the potential for prisoners to find work and become tax paying, responsible members of their communities when their time in custody finishes. We hope that the government's forthcoming employment strategy will take up the recommendations in this report and allow prisons like Brixton – and the prisoners they hold – to fulfil their potential.







This report details the findings of a two-year action learning project, *Out for Good* set up in memory of the late treasurer of the Prison Reform Trust, Andrew Fleming-Williams, and funded through the efforts of his family and friends.

The project looked at the opportunities for prisons to engage with employers to help prisoners become job-ready and find work on release from prison. The report demonstrates that the potential to secure sustainable employment for prisoners before and after release is both great and largely going unrealised.

Against expectations the report found that it was not primarily employers' attitudes but the policies and practices of prisons, and the lack of priority given to finding prisoners employment on release, which were the main barriers to getting more prisoners into work. The report includes a toolkit for prisons and employers to assist joint working and outlines practical steps which can be taken to help people in prison lead a law-abiding and productive life on release.

The logo for the "Out for Good" project, featuring the text "Out for Good:" in white, bold, sans-serif font on a blue rectangular background.

*prison reform in memory of Andrew Fleming-Williams*