

Working it out

Employment for women offenders

January 2015

*All I want is to be with family, work, and spend time with my son, have a happy life.*¹

St Mungo's resident

*Making sure that women have employment, ideally to prevent them from going into prison, but also having plans for employment when they come out, is crucially important.*²

Justice Minister, 2014

Executive summary

- Employment outcomes for women following short prison sentences are three times worse than for men - fewer than one in ten women have a job to go to on release
- Lack of childcare support, lack of qualifications, and low pay are barriers to employment for many women offenders
- Employment is one of the nine pathways to reducing reoffending for women but much more can be done to tackle employer prejudice and reluctance to employ former offenders
- Lack of women-only unpaid work placements constrains the use of appropriate community sentences for women
- Community services such as women's centres are uniquely placed to help women offenders, and those at risk of offending, address individual barriers to employment and support them to build the skills, training and confidence they need to get ready for work
- Women are more likely than men to have claimed out-of-work benefits prior to, and post, time in custody
- In a recent survey of women prisoners, 61% said they would like paid employment of some kind on release, with a further 27% wanting to do voluntary work
- The release on temporary licence (ROTL) scheme facilitates day-release for women in prison to undertake work and training opportunities in the community and reduces the risk of reoffending but is underused and under threat
- The new statutory provision requiring probation and resettlement services to identify and address women's specific rehabilitation needs must be carefully monitored to ensure it delivers the intended improvements, particularly to employment opportunities and outcomes
- The government should implement a strategy to increase employment opportunities and programmes for women with criminal convictions - this should include employer incentives.³

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that most of the solutions to women's offending lie outside prison walls, yet every year more than 9,000 women are received into prisons in England and Wales on more than 12,000 occasions, many for the first time or for their first offence, most for non-violent crimes. Employment, and the education, training and skills which underpin it, is one of the nine pathways to reducing reoffending for women. Women's centres, providing services and supervision to women on community orders, are ideally placed to support them to build the skills, training and confidence they need whilst maintaining community links. If women have jobs that enable them to find and keep hold of secure housing, look after their children and move away from abusive relationships, they are less likely to turn to crime.

The purpose of this briefing is to:

- summarise research on employment opportunities and outcomes for women offenders
- identify the particular barriers they often face
- highlight good practice in the community and in custody.

It should be noted that not all the reports cited in this briefing provide gendered data, making it harder to identify the impact of policies or practice on women. The dearth of data on the experiences of women in the criminal justice system, and how their needs and outcomes differ from men's, is a barrier to ensuring effective responses to women's offending. This is especially true for information about women serving community orders. The recent joint inspectorate report on resettlement provision for adult offenders, for example, included very little on women.⁴ For that reason, much of the data here relates to women in prison, but as imprisonment itself is a significant and lasting barrier to training and employment opportunities it is hoped that this briefing will encourage more community-based options.

Women in prison: key facts

- Between 1995 and 2010 the women's prison population more than doubled
- At 16 January 2015, there were 3,807 women in prison in England and Wales
- In 2013, women were received into prison on more than 12,700 occasions
- More than eight in ten sentenced women entering prison have committed non-violent crimes
- Most women entering prison serve very short sentences
- Women are imprisoned further from home, and receive fewer visits, than men
- Around a third of women in prison lose their homes, and often their possessions, whilst in prison
- Women in prison are more likely than men to have no previous convictions
- Six in ten women in prison have dependent children
- 45% of women leaving prison are reconvicted within one year.

(Source: Prison Reform Trust (2014) *Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile*, London: PRT, MoJ (2015) *Population and Capacity briefing for Friday 16 January*, London: MoJ and *Offender Management Statistics January - December 2013*, London: MoJ)

Barriers to employment

*I want to work as being on benefits is embarrassing. Any job will do.*⁵

Former offenders, both male and female, face a number of barriers to employment. A combination of factors including mental health problems, low self-esteem and educational gaps, as well as the legal requirement to declare unspent (and sometimes spent) convictions if asked by employers, can make it extremely difficult for people with a criminal conviction to find work.

Mental health and substance abuse

Evidence suggests that mental illness, drug and alcohol dependency and lack of confidence disproportionately affect women in the criminal justice system.⁶ It has been recognised that “the combination of two or more disadvantages can severely restrict women’s ability to access, stay the course and succeed in learning and training. Chaotic lifestyles and complicated patterns of multi-agency involvement can restrict their availability to attend learning appointments.”⁷

This echoes the 2007 Corston Report finding that “chaotic lifestyles and backgrounds... disproportionate prevalence of learning disabilities and difficulties result in many women in the criminal justice system having very little employment experience or grasp of some very basic life skills.”⁸ There is no doubt that a significant number of women in prison need substantial assistance to become job-ready on release. At the same time, the dual stigma of mental health need and offending history creates extra obstacles. For example, research on the employment of offenders with mental health problems has cited the “apparent near total exclusion of prisoners with mental health problems from vocational rehabilitation, often on the basis that they are ‘not ready’.”⁹ Excluding them from employment support is a barrier in itself, despite the evidence that work promotes recovery from mental illness and desistance from crime.

Insecure accommodation and financial exclusion

Other practical barriers include living in insecure accommodation and not having a bank account, with financial exclusion a significant problem for many in prison and on release.¹⁰ According to UNLOCK, a charity providing advice, support and advocacy to people with criminal convictions, access to banking for prisoners pre-release is one of the foundations of successful resettlement, making a positive contribution towards reducing reoffending. Their landmark report on banking in prison found that whilst many women’s prisons have links with banks to facilitate opening of accounts, the numbers that are opened varies, with HMP Holloway and HMP New Hall, for example, seeing zero accounts opened in 2013.¹¹

Childcare

Further barriers to employment for women include “low wages, low self-esteem, child and dependent care”.¹² Chief of these is the impact of primary caring responsibilities, such as looking after children or sick or elderly relatives. Two thirds of women in prison have dependent children, and a third of mothers are single parents prior to their imprisonment.¹³ For many of these women, finding flexible and affordable childcare is likely to be an additional barrier to employment, and the need to care for children and family may explain why women are somewhat less likely than men to consider having a job important in stopping offending.¹⁴

Low pay

The low pay that many women experience is another factor, as it means that employment is not a clear route to financial independence particularly for those with children to support. A recent report by Gingerbread found that single parents face a high risk of low pay, as well as increasing under-employment and job insecurity; strong competition for the few jobs which allow them to juggle childcare duties; and pressure to take any job.¹⁵ Relative child poverty in working single parent families has increased in the past couple of years: over one in five (22%) children in families where single parents work full-time are now in poverty, and this rises to nearly one in three (30%) where single parents work part-time. Two-thirds (67%) of working single parents surveyed found it difficult, at best, to make ends meet.¹⁶

Data produced by the Ministry of Justice in conjunction with the Department for Work and Pensions and HM Revenue and Customs show that the “median gross income was lower for female offenders than for male offenders for all years following conviction/caution or release from prison in 2003/04.” In 2012/13, for example, the median adjusted income for female offenders was £10,000 compared to £17,200 for males.¹⁷

Nature of offending behaviour

For some women, having dependants can be a factor in their offending. Research on mothers in custody, for example, found 38% attributing their offending to ‘a need to support their children’, with single mothers being more likely to cite a lack of money as the cause of their offending than those who were married.¹⁸ It is vital therefore that training and employment opportunities take account of women’s caring responsibilities and how these impact on their availability, capacity to engage, and financial needs.

The fact that acquisitive crimes predominate in women’s offending may also affect their perceived employability, with employers being less likely to employ those with convictions relating to theft and fraud, and to consider them “unsuitable for work handling property”.¹⁹ In 2013, theft from a shop offences accounted for a third (35%) of all custodial sentences given to women by the courts.²⁰

While mothers may prioritise finding accommodation and organising childcare on release from prison, they could still be motivated to improve their education, skills and employment.²¹ For many, a focus on improving employability in the short term with employment a longer-term goal may be more realistic.²²

Education and skills

There is conflicting evidence regarding the relative skills and education levels of female and male offenders.

A 2005 study found that the educational outcomes of prisoners were significantly poorer than those in the general population, with women in prison being the least likely to have qualifications. Whilst 15% of the general population have no qualifications, this was true for 52% of male and 71% of female prisoners.²³

More recently, 47% of newly sentenced prisoners surveyed for the SPCR longitudinal study had no qualifications,²⁴ with no difference reported between men and women.

More than one in three (35%) women recently surveyed in HMP Holloway had left full-time education before the age of 15, and more than one in four (29%) had no qualifications. The different estimates could reflect divergent measures or methods, how prisoners were sampled, and changes over time. But both studies clearly show that women offenders are far more likely than average to have no qualifications.

Whilst an under-researched area, evidence suggests that the prevalence of learning disabilities is greater amongst women prisoners than men – 8% of women in prison have an IQ below 70 and 32% are borderline learning disabled, compared to 7% and 24% of men respectively.²⁵ These findings were mirrored in the HMP Holloway survey, with more than one in four women indicating they had been diagnosed with some form of learning difficulty or developmental disorder.²⁶

Other factors, such as age or time spent in local authority care, will also be relevant to how, and when, women learn in preparation for work. Many young women, for example, “will have been excluded from school so their last memories of education may not be positive. The building blocks of learning may not be there and they may have limited capacity to learn until these skills are developed.”²⁷

Stigma

*There’s a stigma to being in prison. As soon as people know you’re a prisoner some don’t want to know.*²⁸

In addition to the difficulties caused by educational gaps and a lack of relevant training, ex-offenders often face discrimination from employers when applying for jobs. Indeed, the difficulty that many face in finding work isn’t necessarily a reflection of their skills or education: 20% of women seeking employment through Working Chance, a recruitment agency that helps women with criminal convictions to find work, are graduates.²⁹

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development surveyed 460 employers on attitudes to employing people who are known to face barriers to getting, and retaining, employment, such as those aged 65+, lone parents, the long-term unemployed and ex-offenders. It found that ex-offenders were the most disadvantaged of these groups. Only 12% of employers had employed somebody with a criminal record in the previous three years, and one in five employers (19%) had deliberately excluded those with a criminal record when recruiting. Asked what might best improve their job prospects, 45% of employers said that nothing would make them more likely to employ them.³⁰

A 2010 Working Links study also found that employers often use criminal convictions to reject prospective candidates from the recruitment process. Three quarters of employers admitted that they would use a conviction either to reject an applicant outright, or to choose between two equally qualified applicants where one has no conviction. Only 18% of the 300 respondents stated that they have knowingly recruited an ex-offender, with many employers believing ex-offenders will lack honesty and reliability. In contrast, the overwhelming majority (85%) of those who had employed ex-offenders found that they worked as hard, if not harder than those with no convictions, with only 7% of employers who had employed ex-offenders reporting a negative experience.³¹

Disclosing convictions

When asked which obstacles to employment they expect to encounter, prisoners most commonly cite the legal requirement to disclose a criminal conviction and the state of the economy.³²

The law has recently been reformed to reduce the length of time it takes for a conviction to become spent, and to increase the length of the maximum sentence that can become spent.³³ Introducing the changes, the justice minister acknowledged the need to “support routes into employment” as research shows a “positive association between employment and a reduced risk of reoffending.”³⁴

Under the new rules, prison sentences of up to and including four years can become spent – previously, the maximum was 30 months (2.5 years) – and the rehabilitation periods for most sentences and out of court disposals have been reduced. For example, adults who serve a sentence of over six months up to 30 months used to have to wait 10 years before their conviction was spent, but now it is spent four years after the end of their sentence.³⁵ The rehabilitation period for community orders has been reduced from five years to 12 months from the end of the order.³⁶

This is welcome progress but experts believe that the changes “don’t go far enough” to address the fact that “being an ex-offender is the most significant barrier to employment”³⁷ and there are some jobs which require prospective employees to disclose both unspent and spent convictions, regardless of the relevance of the offence to the job including roles which involve working with children or vulnerable adults.

Business in the Community’s Ban the Box campaign

In 2013, Business in the Community (BITC) launched Ban the Box, a campaign calling on UK employers to give people a second chance by removing the tick box that asks about criminal convictions from job application forms and asking about criminal convictions later in the recruitment process. The campaign recognises that women leaving prison “face multiple barriers – accessing safe and secure accommodation, reuniting with their families (more commonly broken up when the mother is incarcerated than the father) and accessing employment to sustain it all”, and that these are often compounded by “women’s marginalisation within and exclusion from the workforce. In the UK, women’s unemployment is now at a 25 year high [and] the UK gender pay gap in median hourly pay is 10.2%”.³⁸

More than thirty employers with a combined workforce of over 200,000 have committed to the campaign, including Alliance Boots, Carillion, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, Southbank Centre, Land Securities, Ricoh UK and Interserve Support Services. The campaign details how, when and why these companies removed the tick box from application forms and provides resources to employers on regulations, legal or contractual considerations.³⁹

Information and communication technology (ICT) in prison

Access to information, utilities, government departments, and support is increasingly designed for internet use so the ability to use ICT is a functional skill of increasing significance for communication, accessing public services, applying for housing and benefits, managing finances, employment and self-employment. The digital divide between people in prison and in the community is widening and will make resettlement much more difficult if the skills deficit is not addressed in custody.

A recent report on the use of ICT in prisons by the Prison Reform Trust and Prisoners Education Trust found that prisons surveyed for the project were using ICT mostly for education. ICT was less often used for training and employment, much less for resettlement and hardly at all to help maintain family ties. Ninety four per cent of staff who responded to the prison survey agreed ICT skills were necessary for everyday living, and 88% agreed that prisoners need computer skills for most of the jobs they could enter on release. Nearly three quarters (74%) agreed that prisoners should have access to the internet. ICT skills are particularly important for women, given their concentration in white-collar and administrative work, and their need for flexible work arrangements to accommodate family and caring responsibilities.

There is huge potential for technology to improve education, resettlement and family ties for prisoners by enabling controlled, secure access to the internet, email, Skype and in-cell telephones. The report recommends that more ICT skills to a higher level be offered; controlled internet access to online courses and research be enabled in order to improve learning; and access to the virtual campus be significantly improved.⁴⁰

If it wasn't for me having access to online courses during my sentence, I would not be leaving prison in six weeks with a full-time paid job in which I'll use a computer throughout the day.⁴¹

Women in the community

Women offenders account for around 15% of those supervised by probation in the community. There are a number of options for sentencers and probation officers to develop women's training, skills and employability as part of their sentence. This section looks at examples of sentencing and referral pathways in place across the country, focusing particularly on where services working in partnership have addressed barriers to training and employment – from practical help with travel and childcare to nationwide schemes tackling the prejudice against employing former offenders. To maximise chances of a successful outcome, it is important to assess an individual woman's needs, establish a plan to address any and all barriers to her employment, and ensure that interventions are sequenced appropriately. Very often employment is the final stage in a woman's recovery from a life that involved offending.

Unpaid work as a sentence can empower a person, providing a work structure and new skill sets. The National Offender Management Service's (NOMS) guide to working with women offenders emphasises that placing women in male-dominated work environments should be avoided as there can be a higher rate of non-compliance; such work may be insufficiently flexible to accommodate childcare or other recurring commitments and may expose vulnerable women to risks of male abuse or exploitation.⁴²

One woman, a mother with three children, sentenced to unpaid work described her experiences:

I couldn't do the community service hours. So they breached me and sent me back to court... They automatically send you to the bike workshop...and I told them there was no way I could get there for that time in the mornings and it was too far to walk...So they said, OK, to make it easier they'd put me in Oxfam cos it didn't start till 10...But then I left earlier than everyone else, I'd leave at 2.30pm to go and pick my children up...I was willing to do weekends, cos normally I don't have the children at weekends, and I just wanted to get the hours out of the way but it just didn't work out. That's how I ended up getting breached.⁴³

By contrast, unpaid work in a women's community service often works well - women from Merseyside, for example, can undertake unpaid work as part of a community order at the ISIS women's community centre in Kirkdale,⁴⁴ whilst Adelaide House approved premises delivers a women-only community payback project which allocates work assignments, such as painting, decorating and gardening, in the local

community. Beneficiaries include local churches, community centres and the North Liverpool food bank.⁴⁵ This option is not available in many areas of the country.

*I was told there was no community service for women otherwise they would have gladly given me community service...I think I would have benefited more from community service because it would show that I'm able to have a routine and it would get me back out into a routine, as in working. I haven't got a job so it would help me for the future.*⁴⁶

The Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 has changed the way in which offenders are supervised in the community, with probation services being contracted out to the private and voluntary sector, and the introduction of a new activity requirement for those serving community sentences. Importantly, in recognition of the distinct needs of women offenders, Section 10 of the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 places a duty on the Secretary of State for Justice to ensure that arrangements for the supervision or rehabilitation of offenders identify specific provision for women.⁴⁷ In terms of unpaid work orders in the community, for example, this will mean “female offenders should, where practicable, also have the option of not being placed in an all-male work environment.”⁴⁸ Given the unsuitability of much of the work available, the incompatibility of hours offered with caring responsibilities and placement alongside men on work teams, it is unsurprising that women on unpaid work are “at greater risk of failing to report to the designated work place than male offenders, and therefore being sent back to court for re-sentencing”.⁴⁹

Section 10 could provide a boost to local women’s centres as Community Rehabilitation Companies may sub-contract them to provide women-only services and supervision to those on community orders and on release from custody. Close monitoring will be needed to ensure that this new legal provision has the intended effect of achieving better outcomes for women offenders, particularly in relation to employment.

Changes to community sentence requirements should provide further opportunities for women’s centres. Where previously supervision and activity requirements included a specific employment activity, this has been replaced with a single rehabilitation activity requirement (RAR) that is intended to give “greater flexibility and potential for innovative interventions for providers of probation services to determine the rehabilitative interventions delivered to offenders.”⁵⁰ RARs could include activities provided by women’s centres that focus on employability skills. The RAR can stand alone or be undertaken alongside other requirements such as community payback, which is an unpaid work placement.

Women’s centres provide “a supportive learning environment and a wide range of education, training and employment opportunities tailored to the needs of vulnerable women”.⁵¹

As has been well documented, women’s centres are uniquely placed to help women offenders, and those at risk of offending, address their own barriers to employment and provide the practical help many need to get ‘back on track’,⁵² and have been proven to reduce reoffending.⁵³ Women’s centres provide the focus on life skills, self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as access to the mental and physical health services, which many women in the criminal justice system need.⁵⁴

A good example of this working in practice is the Together Women Project (TWP), a regional organisation based in Yorkshire, which offers a strengthened community order. Once a woman reaches court, TWP can provide a sentencing package that enables sentencers to confidently impose a community order and avoid custody. Typically, some community orders can be difficult for women to comply with, so TWP works in close partnership with probation services to offer intensive, centre-based programmes alongside a range of holistic support options. This approach enables women to meet the requirements of their orders and to develop new behaviours and lifestyles. Included in these programmes are weekly education, training and employment sessions and eight-week accredited courses for IT, numeracy and literacy.⁵⁵ In Hull, a similar package is offered to women identified by Humberside Police as suitable for pre-charge diversion.⁵⁶

Education, training and employment services at ISIS Women's Centre, Gloucestershire⁵⁷

For many clients who come to ISIS, education, training and employment are high on the list of priorities. ISIS provides support which helps women to:

- Identify their goals and education needs from basic skills to vocational qualifications
- Take part in a range of different courses
- Access courses at local colleges and other providers
- Get advice about job-searching
- Find out about volunteering opportunities in the community
- Write CVs, job applications and manage the disclosure of any criminal convictions.

ISIS has close links with the adult education equalities team at Llanthony Warehouse in Gloucester, which makes it easy for women to access specialist support, for example if they need one-to-one help with improving their reading, writing or numeracy skills.

Stephanie's story:*

When I started going to education, training and employment (ETE) at ISIS I wasn't really sure what I was going to get out of it, I thought my criminal record meant I had no hope of getting a decent job. After a few sessions I realised that by taking little steps I could get closer and closer to where I wanted to be. When I first turned up at ISIS I was really anxious, so the ETE worker took me to college to enrol on a course which we managed to get funding for. My first day at college was really scary and I felt out of place as I was about 20 years older than most of the students. ISIS let me go there to do my homework on the computers which really helped me, home with the kids was so noisy that I couldn't concentrate. I'm now on my second course, having passed my first one with flying colours! My confidence has really grown and I'm starting to make plans for going back to work and, although the thought is daunting, I have a bit more belief in myself now. What's more, my kids are really proud of me!

Making it work

Crucial to the success of the programme is that ISIS offers practical support such as accompanying women to all kinds of appointments, assessments and interviews. This includes supporting women at court hearings and meetings with social services. Furthermore, if a woman has difficulty travelling to the centre, ISIS may be able to help with fares or transport or can arrange to meet women somewhere more suitable at or close to home.

* Not her real name

Alongside developing employment skills, women need 'real life' work experience in order to prepare for, secure and sustain employment. Women's centre partnerships with other service providers, programmes and local employers are essential for accessing job opportunities. Adelaide House – a women-only approved premises in Liverpool – works in partnership with probation services in Merseyside to deliver a specialised women's education, training and employment project on site as part of Achieve North West's programme to improve the employment prospects of people with convictions. Achieve North West is funded by NOMS and the European Social Fund.

Through the programme, Adelaide House residents have achieved qualifications in employability, community volunteering and have gained first hand volunteering experience across a wide range of areas, including retail, furniture restoration, warehouse work, administration roles, cleaning and domestic services, and conservation work with the National Trust. In the past two years residents have gained permanent employment with a local domestic contractor, others have been successful in gaining employment with Marks & Spencer and at a local superstore warehouse.⁵⁸

Adelaide House has also tapped into the training, resources, support and work placements offered by Business in the Community's Ready for Work programme which, since 2001, has encouraged businesses to support people from disadvantaged groups to gain and sustain employment. One in three (32%) of those who have taken part in the programme have unspent convictions. Over 3,000 people have gained employment from the programme - currently 56% of programme participants gain work following their placement. Three quarters (76%) of those who move into a job sustain work for over three months. Research shows that this employability programme returns £3.12 in benefit to society for every £1 invested.⁵⁹

Programme activity is underpinned by eight national partners, Accenture, Bain & Company, Barclays, Carillion, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, Marks & Spencer, Royal Mail, and Waitrose, who support the programme around the country as well as driving programme strategy. A total of 150 organisations provide training, placements, volunteers or financial support. A wide range of hostels, community organisations and probation services across the country help identify who would benefit from Ready for Work. By working together with local charities, participants have access to ongoing support while they complete the programme.

The programme comprises:

- two days pre-placement training concentrating on building self-esteem, motivational skills, expected workplace behaviour and CV and interview skills
- two-week work placements which involve structured tasks with real work, not work shadowing, and support from a trained buddy from the business
- post-placement support through a selection of job coaching and Ready for Work club sessions.

Business in the Community in partnership with Adelaide House

Over the past five years 35 residents of Adelaide House have participated in the Ready for Work programme:

- 31 completed a two-day training course
- 22 completed two-week work placements with employers including John Moores, Carillion and Marks & Spencer
- nine women have since found employment
- four women went into work at their placement provider
- five women have found employment due to the skills and experience gained through the Ready for Work programme.

Each woman participant is also helped by their support worker from Adelaide House who is crucial for maintaining motivation and commitment.

(Source: Business in the Community Ready for Work programme)

Innovative work is also being carried out in the community to help prevent at risk groups from entering the criminal justice system. For example, the Young Mums Support Network (YMSN) is a community interest company set up by young mothers that targets teenage girls and young women from deprived communities. Its programmes engage them with positive tools and activities with the aim of steering them towards better opportunities. YMSN offers a personal development service to young women, young mothers and high-risk teenagers based in the London boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark. It is funded in part by housing associations including Metropolitan.

Young Mums Support Network (YMSN) Ready Steady Work programme

During September and October 2014 YMSN ran a five-week Ready Steady Work programme which aimed to equip young mothers with the confidence and skills to find and keep a job. The programme consisted of sessions on communication skills; knowing your skill-set and identifying transferable skills; CV writing; presentation skills and role play. This was then bolstered by one-to-one coaching sessions.

The programme included presentations from three major employers: NHS, Metropolitan Police Service and Transport for London. Participants were able to hear first hand work experience stories, including from a paramedic, find out about work opportunities currently available and advice on what these employers look for from applicants.

A crèche was provided to enable mothers with young children to attend the course.

YMSN also provides money management advice in partnership with Lambeth FACE, part of Metropolitan housing provider. Changes to the welfare system and the introduction of Universal Credit means more women need advice about applying for benefits, and balancing work with the costs of childcare.⁶⁰

Women in prison

Employment pre-custody

Around one in five women prisoners (19%) report having been employed in the four weeks before custody, (compared to one-third of men), earning less in their last job than men prisoners (£167 and £250 per week respectively).⁶¹ This is significantly lower than the national employment rate for women (67%).⁶² Similar proportions of women and men (13%) were likely to state that they had never had a paid job at any point.⁶³ Statistics also show that women are more likely than men (94% vs. 80% respectively) to report having been employed by someone else rather than self-employed, are less likely to have worked full time (71% vs. 87% respectively) and are less likely to have had formal responsibility for supervising the work of other employees (14% vs. 25% respectively).⁶⁴ These figures reflect patterns seen in the general population, where women are more likely to work part time, and less likely to be managers or senior officials than their male counterparts.⁶⁵

Almost two-thirds (63%) of prisoners (male and female) who had been employed prior to their imprisonment expected to return to their jobs on release. For those who didn't, the reasons were varied, with a quarter citing factors connected to their offending.⁶⁶

A needs assessment survey undertaken with women prisoners in HMP Holloway in 2013 found "a noticeable discrepancy between [the women's] employment status before prison and their plans for release." Thirty-one per cent of the women surveyed said they had never had a job. Whilst 28% had been in paid employment during the year before their imprisonment (18% in full time work, 10% part time), the majority (61%) said they would like paid employment of some kind on release, with a further 27% wanting to do voluntary work. This desire to work was matched by the women's recognition of the centrality of paid employment to desistance, with the need for a job or training scheme on release being the second most cited factor after accommodation that women thought would help them avoid returning to prison.⁶⁷

It's a sad fact that most women in Holloway are there because of the men they associate with, so by helping them become financially independent you transform their lives.⁶⁸

Education and training in prison

*Employing me at the arc has prepared me for my return to work.*⁶⁹

Research has shown that investing in employment-related interventions in prison can lead to reductions in reoffending on release.

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) examined interventions including basic education, vocational and apprenticeship training and industrial employment. All the studies suggested that in-prison educational and vocational interventions reduced offending compared with prison alone, with net benefit to the public sector ranging from £2,000 to £28,000 per prisoner. When victim costs are included in the analysis the net benefit ranges from £10,500 to £97,000 per prisoner.⁷⁰

These findings are supported by analysis from the Justice Datalab, a Ministry of Justice pilot supporting organisations delivering offender services to demonstrate their effectiveness at reducing reoffending. It found that Prisoners Education Trust grants for prisoners (for Open University courses, accredited courses and arts materials) were associated with a reduction in reoffending of between 5-8% overall.⁷¹

Despite this, in 2008-09 just £1,631 per prisoner per year was spent on education - less than half the average cost of secondary school education, which many prisoners have missed.⁷² The National Audit Office found that only around a fifth of prisoners with serious literacy or numeracy needs enrol on a course that would help them.⁷³

Women in prison can face particular difficulties with access to educational programmes. The relatively small number, and geographical spread, of female prisons can mean having to transfer in order to access specific education or training courses, or having to repeat education programmes because the prison they have been moved to has a different education provider. In addition, because women are disproportionately likely to be imprisoned for short periods they are less likely to access or complete specific courses whilst in custody and many experience difficulty obtaining funding to complete them on release.⁷⁴

In addition, there are concerns that education and skills programmes in prison are not sufficiently tailored to the needs of employers on the outside. According to the Prisoners' Education Trust "employability skills are often narrowly identified with learning skills for a particular occupation, basic literacy and numeracy or CV writing. True 'employability skills' sought by employers encompass much wider capability in self belief, resilience and ability to work with others that are best promoted by a wider vision of learning."⁷⁵

Ofsted, which inspects education standards in prison, has also highlighted on-going failings, with just one-third of prisons' learning and skills work judged to be good for overall effectiveness or leadership and management.⁷⁶

Recent inspections of women's prisons have echoed these concerns. The 2013 inspection of HMP Bronzefield highlighted that "the range and level of vocational training and work did not provide women with an appropriate level of skills to support employment, education or training on release"⁷⁷ whilst elsewhere, inspectors found insufficient "opportunities for women to obtain formally accredited vocational qualifications."⁷⁸

The spring 2013 inspection of HMP Eastwood Park found that the quantity and quality of work was reasonable, but prisoners did not have sufficient opportunities to receive accreditation. The prison was developing productive links with employers and exploring how employers could supplement prison-based learning for those women working outside in the community. However these links were still in their early stages.⁷⁹ In 2013 Weston College, in partnership with the Shaw Trust and Eastwood Park prison, launched an innovative social enterprise project: Eastwood Soaps. Eight people at any one time are employed to develop business enterprise skills through the production of luxury soap products at HMP Eastwood Park.⁸⁰ There are other promising examples of innovation in collaboration with statutory and voluntary sector partners.

Published in 2014, the new expectations for women's prisons, HM Prison Inspectorate's criteria for assessing the treatment and conditions, make clear that prisons must ensure "all women can engage in activities that are purposeful, benefit them and increase their employability. Women are encouraged and enabled to learn both during and after their sentence. The learning and skills provision is of a good standard and is effective in meeting the needs of all prisoners." Indicators against which prisons will be

judged include: the prison has productive links with suitable employers; women are occupied in activities that benefit them, enhance their self-esteem, and improve their wellbeing and chances of successful resettlement; and the learning and skills and work provision is based on an effective women-centred analysis of the needs of the prisoner population, relevant research and local and national labour market need.⁸¹

London College of Fashion collaboration with HMP Holloway

The Fashion Training and Manufacture Unit at HMP Holloway is a social enterprise initiative, supported by Sir John Cass Foundation, aimed at providing skills and meaningful employment for serving and recently released offenders.

The initiative fills a recognised skills gap within the London area. It employs a specialist production instructor and a cutting room lecturer and aims to regularly train and employ up to 20 women in HMP Holloway and support them on release to gain work placements and employment within the fashion manufacture sector in the UK.

The social enterprise aims to deliver a structured training module that sees participants studying for NVQ qualifications as well as work on commercial contracts which will be secured to generate income and to run the project on a sustainable basis.⁸²

To tackle the education and skills deficit, the Ministry of Justice has announced a package of reforms for women in prison, including English and maths skills assessments on reception, assessments for special educational needs, and the introduction of ‘tailored learning plans’ to meet individual needs, offering “a mix of ‘life skills’ and formal educational skills” complimenting programmes already on offer. Finally, there are also plans to work with other partners to make it easier for women to continue education and training placements on release. On 4 October 2014, the Minister with responsibility for women offenders stated “I want to see all women benefit from targeted education and training in prison which meets their needs. This will prepare them in the best way possible for eventual release and future employment opportunities.”⁸³

Employment in prison

Being in employment in prison has a statistically significant relationship with reduced reoffending rates. More than half (53%) of prisoners surveyed for the SPCR study reported undertaking paid work during their sentence, with prisoners who worked having lower reconviction rates in the 12 months following release than those who did not (50% vs. 57% respectively).⁸⁴ The 2013 inspection of HMP Drake Hall, meanwhile, praised the outwork project scheme, which saw 30 women find work, training or education outside the prison, for delivering “an extremely low 5%” reoffending rate amongst participants.⁸⁵

Inside Out (formerly the arc), HMP Askham Grange

Set up in 2012 as the arc (administrative resource centre), Inside Out is run by Together Women in conjunction with HMP Askham Grange. It is a social enterprise bringing together private, public and voluntary sector stakeholders from the local community. It offers business administration work experience to women in prison with a view to supporting them into employment and self-employment on ROTL and on release, with ‘backroom’ office support services (such as book keeping, data entry and marketing through social media) produced by prisoners sold to prison enterprises, local businesses and third sector organisations.⁸⁶ Since its inception, Inside Out has successfully placed women on extended work trials, paid ROTL placements and even into paid employment on release from prison. It has also been instrumental in building better ties between the prison and local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and “enabling [SMEs] to consider what roles they might create within their businesses...resulting in...paid work offers”.⁸⁷

HMP Askham Grange, one of only two open prisons for women, has been earmarked for closure, pending “the successful implementation of community resettlement regimes in strategic hubs”.⁸⁸

Use of release on temporary licence (ROTL)

A principal aim of the release on temporary licence scheme is to encourage those who are assessed as low-risk and suitable for day release to gain experience and skills that will aid resettlement. However, recent inspection reports demonstrate wide variations in practice,⁸⁹ whilst statistics show that the overall number of women being released on temporary licence each quarter is static.⁹⁰

Even when they are eligible for release on temporary licence, administrative barriers can sometimes discourage women from finding work. A woman in an open prison, interviewed as part of research on resettlement, described her experiences:

I have been in [prison] a long time. It doesn't look good on my CV. So I wanted to do some work as a volunteer. I looked in the Yellow Pages and found six to eight possible places to work. I phoned them. Three said they would see me. Then the prison said that I couldn't be a volunteer at the business, because it wasn't charitable. So then I went to education. I thought if it wasn't volunteering, perhaps I could get it as training. But then the cost came into it. The prison said if it was training, then the place I would work would have to pay my travel expenses. I was already having to explain that I was a prisoner. It just seemed designed to make things harder.⁹¹

Recent changes to the ROTL scheme are reducing its availability and are likely to have a disproportionate impact on women prisoners, whose levels of risk are generally lower than men's (as recognised in the Bangkok Rules) but who are subject to the same restrictions as men.⁹² Where previously, women approved for release on temporary licence could use day release to look for work, this process has been made harder by new rules which state that they must have a job secured before they will be granted access to ROTL. Finding a job or voluntary work in the community whilst in prison is challenging given lack of access to the internet, the high cost of phone calls and the inability to meet potential employers face to face. In addition, the proposed closure (see below) of the only two open prisons in the women's estate would result in the loss of local partnerships with employers which have been built up over many years, and could increase the distance women are held from home, making it less likely that employment and training opportunities undertaken through the ROTL scheme can be continued on release. Distance from home is a significant factor for women⁹³ and precludes effective resettlement with respect to employment, housing and social care.

Sue Ryder Prison Volunteer Programme

Marilyn's story

Before I came I was really nervous about what the people at Sue Ryder would think about me as they knew I was in prison. I was worried about whether or not they would see me as a person and not as a prisoner. I didn't know if I'd fit into an office and how I'd get on with the people who worked there. I was really anxious about whether or not I'd be able to cope with the work as I hadn't done anything like it before.

Now my confidence has grown dramatically. I didn't think that anyone would want to employ me and was really worried about what I was able to do. I have found out that I am capable of far more than I ever thought and I'm not anxious about my future any more. Before I would have aimed at a much lower level type of job but working here has been a real eye-opener, I have now completely changed my outlook about work and my future.

I'm more determined than ever to succeed and to lead a happy life, and I'm confident and excited about my future. Without this my future could have been very different.⁹⁴

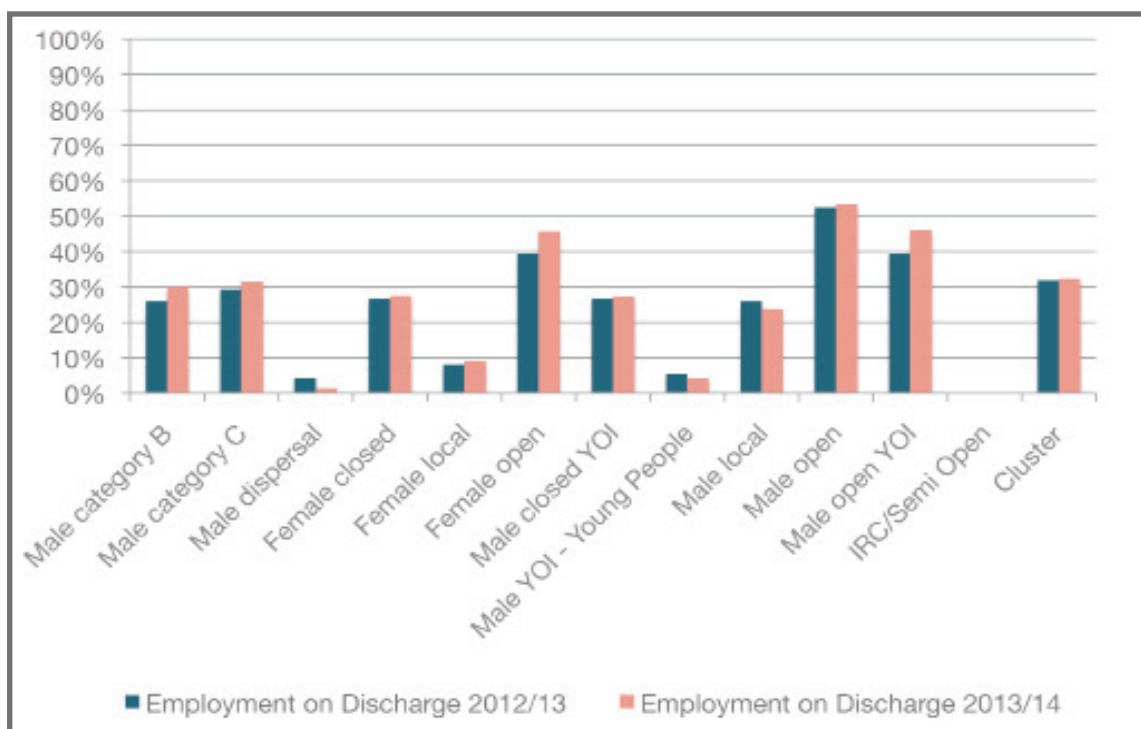
Employment on release from prison

Research confirms a positive correlation between employment on release and reduced reoffending. A Ministry of Justice survey of prisoners and ex-prisoners, for example, found that the reoffending rates of those who reported having been in paid employment since release from prison were significantly lower than those who had not secured employment.⁹⁵

Other Ministry of Justice research has shown that being in work in the year after release is associated with both a reduction in reoffending and an increase in length of time from release to any first reoffence.

Amongst those who served sentences of less than 12 months, the one-year proven reoffending rate was 9.4% lower for those who had worked after release than those who had not, whilst amongst those serving longer sentences, the difference in reoffending rates was 5.6%.⁹⁶ Although most people in prison expect to seek work on their release⁹⁷ statistics show that, for short-sentenced prisoners at least, finding employment is difficult, with women much less likely to be successful than men. In 2012/13, for example, “employment outcomes for females [released from prison sentences of less than one year]⁹⁸ were far worse than for males, with only 8.5% of females having a positive employment outcome compared to 26.2% of men”.⁹⁹ As the chart below shows, employment rates on discharge from prison vary according to prison type, with outcomes for females continuing to be worse than for males across all comparable prison functions (local, open, closed).¹⁰⁰

Percentage of prisoners entering employment upon release in 2013/14 compared to 2012/13 by prison function



The Department for Work and Pensions estimates that in the year following release from prison, a person spends about six months claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance, Incapacity Benefit or Employment Support Allowance. Overall, 49% of ex-prisoners were on benefits twelve months after release,¹⁰¹ with women being significantly more likely than men to be claiming out of work benefits at specific points both before and after custody, as the table below shows. This contrasts with the general population, in which men are more likely to be on out of work benefits than women.¹⁰² It is unknown what proportion of those not claiming benefits at the twelve-month point were in employment, and how many were reliant on partners and families.¹⁰³

Proportion of working age offenders released from prison in 2010/11 claiming benefits¹⁰⁴

Claiming out of work benefits	One year before sentence	One month before sentence	At release from prison	One month after release	One year after release
Male	42%	40%	13%	53%	43%
Female	54%	54%	25%	61%	58%

Working Chance, the restorative recruitment agency which supports women with criminal convictions into sustainable jobs, has been able to evidence the impact that its work has on reoffending rates, with women benefitting from the service experiencing “a reduction in reoffending between 0.2-13%” and committing fewer offences than women in a control group.¹⁰⁵ The Working Chance model includes advising women on CV writing, practice interviews, one-to-one mentoring sessions, training events and support into voluntary and paid work. Their support extends to providing advice and guidance on housing, childcare, benefits and domestic abuse thereby tackling many of the barriers to employment under one roof.¹⁰⁶

Working Chance – Alex’s story

When Working Chance first met Alex, she was living in a council house with her 17-year-old daughter. The situation was dangerous for both of them because of conflict with their neighbours and at one point Alex went as far as moving out to stay in a B&B.

Soon after registering with Working Chance, Alex was placed on the Pret a Manger apprenticeship scheme, while their support team helped her move into a safer home and source new furniture through other charities. Alex had a stressful time holding the apprenticeship while moving house and nearly decided to quit her job. However, she eventually decided to stick with it, after Working Chance arranged for her to meet up with other candidates who had dealt with similar situations.

Alex successfully completed her placement, while her daughter passed her A Levels and was accepted into university.

Client testimonials

After spending a long time in prison you come to expect everything to take a long time, but not with Working Chance. Before I knew it, I was at my interview and selling myself to my new employer. I am still employed at this position and I am very happy and very, very grateful to Working Chance for helping me along my life’s hard journey.

Working Chance teaches you to forgive yourself and to move on with your life. I can’t do anything to change what happened, all I can do is to try to move forward. It was really helpful working in a group and talking to other people in a similar situation.

Pecan’s Moving On project

Moving On works with young women aged 18-25 who have been in prison and are returning to London. These women present with a variety of risk indicators: some have mental health issues, drug/alcohol problems and may be struggling with homelessness. Some are prolific offenders - others have only been in custody once. Shoplifting, fraud, drug-related offences and violence are the most common reasons for their imprisonment.

Consistency, perseverance, creativity and determination underpin the project’s approach, and mentoring is at its heart. Never giving up is part of the Pecan identity and Moving On has proved how important endurance is in the rehabilitative process. Three quarters (73%) of the young women interviewed for the project evaluation reported that the relationship with their mentor was key to positive outcomes.¹⁰⁷

Women are supported with CV writing, job applications, researching training opportunities, attending interviews and employability skills. This is done through a 1-1 relationship with a designated mentor who can work with them for up to a year, though clients can end the mentoring relationship whenever they feel ready. Support is goal-focused, client-led and consistent. Joint working is essential to the programme, whether with probation services, social services, other voluntary and community organisations or employment agencies, with practical support including helping women to attend appointments and complete forms.¹⁰⁸

Dina's story:

Dina (not her real name) joined the Moving On project at Pecan in November 2012. She was released from prison the following March. Since that time she has met regularly with her mentor; together they worked on her housing application and after several months in temporary housing she secured a permanent place to live. She has worked hard to make changes in her life and her mentor has supported her in forming good relationships with her family and friends. Working with Pecan and with other agencies she has managed to get ID and has looked into applying for jobs and courses. She has recently begun voluntary work at a charity. She is keen to learn how to drive and Pecan has supported her with preparing for her theory test. She has been out of prison for 15 months. Dina says "it's helped me a lot actually, to look into life...my future, other things to do, my driving lessons, my appointments. Having a mentor there is nice, you get a phone call to see how things are going, to keep on track with things you have to get done."

Government action to support women offenders into employment

Transforming rehabilitation (TR) and women

In October 2013, the Women's Custodial Estate Review made a recommendation for delivering "a new way of working for women's prisons", including establishing open units to enable local women to work in the community, providing a pathway from prison to employment. The NOMS annual report for 2013/14 states this "will...provide women with improved resettlement opportunities, including the establishment of employment links outside...for appropriately low risk women" whilst "units at HMP Styal and HMP Drake Hall, and...a further outlet of the successful Clink restaurant...will provide training and employment opportunities for offenders".¹⁰⁹ Expanding the employment pathway in HMPs Styal and Drake Hall is welcome. However, following the "successful implementation of community employment regimes in strategic hubs" the only two open prisons for women, HMP East Sutton Park and HMP Askham Grange may be closed down.¹¹⁰ The combined effect of these changes will exacerbate a longstanding problem of women being held far from their homes. Whereas prisons are organised on a national basis, employment is local and regional. To benefit from relevant employment advice and support, the women need to be detained somewhere close to where they intend to resettle. Fewer women's prisons will create additional obstacles for women prisoners trying to obtain employment. On the other hand, closure of women's prisons could be used to free-up ring-fenced resources and lead to sustained investment in women's centres and effective alternatives to custody for women in the community.

In its March 2014 update on delivery of its strategic objectives, the Ministry of Justice confirmed it was implementing its key recommendation to "work with local partners to develop employment opportunities for appropriately low-risk women across the entire women's prison estate and encourage regional employers to work with women's prisons. This will help women learn the right skills in prison and on licence and make the right employment links to where they will be resettled."¹¹¹

A recent Prison Reform Trust report with the Soroptimists on the state of women's justice in the UK - *Transforming Lives: reducing women's imprisonment* - identified work (alongside housing) as one of the cornerstones to resettlement and recognised the dearth of suitable employment opportunities for female ex-offenders.¹¹²

Tackling stigma and improving skills

A number of government and employer-led schemes have sought to address the skills-deficit of excluded groups such as ex-offenders, challenge negative stereotypes and provide opportunities to those who are keen to work but would otherwise find it difficult to find, and maintain, employment. Employers too need educating in what it means to hire former offenders and those on licence.

Active inclusion learning network

Using European Social Fund (ESF) funding, NOMS is managing this EU-wide programme to tackle unemployment amongst disadvantaged groups by enhancing social inclusion and preventing stigmatisation. With a particular focus on troubled families (including offenders' families), disaffected youth and marginalised communities (which includes offenders and ex-offenders), the network is identifying and sharing good practice from across the EU with a view to helping authorities "make informed decisions about how best to tackle unemployment amongst marginalised communities".¹¹³

The NOMS European Social Fund (ESF) co-financing organisation

Since January 2010, the NOMS European Social Fund (ESF) co-financing organisation (which sees the ESF match-fund participating authorities) has been working with offenders designated as hard to help to enhance employability and increase access to employment and skills opportunities. Sex workers, women with low-level mental health needs and offenders with dependent families are just three of the groups identified for targeted help in specific regions.¹¹⁴ To date, two rounds of funding have been allocated to providers delivering a range of services. A third operational phase is running from 2014-2020. Contracts will deliver programmes in custody and the community, with an emphasis on through-the-gate activity which will complement TR.¹¹⁵

Employer-led initiatives

Some high-profile employers are proactive in providing training and employment opportunities for former offenders.

- Sir Richard Branson, whose Virgin Group has used Working Chance to recruit ex-offenders, has championed recruitment of ex-offenders and called on other employers to "create more chances for people who have been in jail to make a positive contribution".¹¹⁶
- Through its 'You Can' initiative "helping and inspiring people to access new opportunities", Sainsbury's has identified ex-offenders as one of the groups facing barriers to work – between 2007-08 and 2010-11, 710 ex-offenders took up new job opportunities, accounting for 7.7% of all those helped by the programme.¹¹⁷
- Pret a Manger run an apprenticeship scheme which offers up to 70 three-month work placements a year to ex-offenders and/or the homeless.¹¹⁸
- National Grid's Young Offender Programme (now open to men and women of all ages) works with more than 80 employers across multiple industries (including logistics, engineering and construction, and gas and electricity) and more than 20 prisons to deliver work-based training using release on temporary licence (ROTL). The programme has a reoffending rate of less than 7%.¹¹⁹

Frontline London prison entrepreneur project

Launched in 2015 as part of the *Evening Standard's* Frontline London campaign, this partnership between the newspaper and HMP's Isis and Holloway will back five prisoners with viable social business plans who are soon to be released from prison. The five, all aged between 18-30 and due to be returning to London or the Home Counties on release, will be chosen from a shortlist of ten male and female prisoners, including three women who are mothers, in a competitive Dragon's Den style selection process. The winners will start a ten-month learning programme at the School for Social Entrepreneurs in May, where they will be given support to turn their idea into reality. They will also receive a start-up grant of £8,000 and a one-to-one business mentor. The scheme is funded by philanthropists Mark Constantine OBE and Mo Constantine OBE, who co-founded Lush Cosmetics.¹²⁰

Conclusion

Employment, and the education and training that underpin it, is a vital pathway to reducing reoffending for women. There are some positive initiatives in place that show what can be achieved, but more concerted action by both government and business would improve employment opportunities for women who have been in trouble. The following recommendations have been developed to spur progress.

Recommendations

- Probation and resettlement services should ensure that women sentenced to unpaid work have the option to undertake placements in women-only groups.
- The government should implement a strategy to increase employment opportunities for women with criminal convictions. This should include employer incentives. This requires a cross-government approach involving the appointment of designated leads in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the Department for Work and Pensions, and the Ministry of Justice and the National Offender Management Service.
- The strategy should include placing greater emphasis on developing partnerships with local employers and on the use of release on temporary licence (ROTL) for women serving custodial sentences to enable them to obtain employment and training placements post custody.
- The governors of all women's prisons should be specifically tasked with improving employment outcomes for women, supported by financial incentives. Steps should be taken to expand use of ROTL amongst women eligible for the scheme.
- In auditing and evaluating probation and resettlement services provided in accordance with Section 10 of the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 (on meeting the particular needs of female offenders), special attention should be given to the provision of employment, training and childcare support for women.

Annex - Organisations working with female offenders and ex-offenders

Blue Sky Development

Blue Sky is a social enterprise which only employs ex-offenders, offering six-month contracts with the aim of moving employees into permanent work on completion. A Ministry of Justice report found short-term full-time employment with Blue Sky within six months of leaving custody was associated with a reduction in reoffending of between one and 23%.¹²¹

In addition to working with ex-offenders in the community, the Blue Sky Inside initiative has seen the 'stitch in time' textiles workshop at HMP Bronzefield employ up to 19 women at any one time, with contractors including Brora and Anya Hindmarch. Since 2012, more than 100 women have been employed in the workshop, one in four of whom have gone on to secure employment on release.

www.blueskydevelopment.co.uk

Clean Break

A women-only theatre company, Clean Break provide specialist theatre-based education and training programmes for women offenders and those at risk of offending to develop personal, social, professional and creative skills leading to education and employment. Through their links with some of the top London theatre companies, women have undertaken placements which have helped them secure permanent voluntary and paid work. Over 70% of women studying at Clean Break go on to further education, training, employment or long-term voluntary placements.

www.cleanbreak.org.uk

Coaching Inside and Out

Coaching Inside and Out (CIAO), set up by Clare McGregor and originally operating only in HMP Styal, provides life coaching to male and female offenders, both in the community and in prison.

www.coachinginsideandout.org.uk

Rebuilders – CAP Enterprise

Rebuilders is a social enterprise supported by Kent-based community development organisation CAP Enterprise. With initial funding from the Triangle Trust and European Social Fund (ESF), it is developing a series of new business units (e.g a cleaning company, a housing association and an upcycling business), providing work and training opportunities for women leaving prison. By 2017, Rebuilders will be a self-sustaining "employer of choice for many women with convictions".

www.capenterprise.co.uk/#!/ventures/c1sip

SmartWorks

SmartWorks provide high quality interview clothes, styling advice and interview training to out-of-work women on low incomes in London. They accept referrals from individual prisons and probation services, as well as voluntary organisations working with women who have offended.

www.smartworks.org.uk

Startupnow for Women

Launched in 2010, Startupnow for Women works in prison and in the community with the aim of getting women back on track and taking responsibility for their lives. The project provides grants of up to £2,500 to cover the cost of tools and equipment needed to set up a business, plus access to mentors and business contacts. To date, the project has advised over 1,000 women, 300 of whom have gone onto further education/employment and 256 into self-employment. Of these 256 women who have received funding, advice and peer mentoring from Startup for at least a year and have set up businesses, only one has re-offended.

www.startupnow.org.uk/women/startupnow-for-women-project/

Sue Ryder Prison Volunteer Programme

Since 2006, Sue Ryder has offered volunteering placements in its shops and offices to prisoners (one in five is a woman) who are released on temporary licence (ROTL). Every year, around 400 participants contribute 111,000 volunteering hours with a value of more than £680,000.

www.sueryder.org/Get-involved/Volunteering/PVP

Working Chance

Working Chance is a London-based charity delivering recruitment services tailored to female ex-offenders. It offers candidates CV advice and practice interviews, and advises on the practicalities of attending interviews and starting work, and works with employers to match them with the best candidates.

Aside from linking women with employers, Working Chance has a 10 week training and education programme designed to equip female ex-offenders with the skills they need to find work. They also have integrated support services to help women to overcome the barriers they face when coming out of prison: e.g. finding work, counselling services, childcare etc.

Analysis by the Justice Datalab showed that women supported by Working Chance “experienced a reduction in reoffending between 0.2 and 13 percentage points compared to a control group”.¹²² Women using Working Chance services have a reconviction rate of less than 5%, and none of those crimes took place in the workplace.¹²³

www.workingchance.org

For a fuller directory of women’s services, including one-stop-shops, housing and mentoring, see the Prison Reform Trust briefing *Brighter Futures: working together to reduce women’s offending*.

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