Working it Out

Improving employment opportunities for women with criminal convictions
About the Prison Reform Trust
The Prison Reform Trust is an independent UK charity working to create a just, humane and effective prison system. We have a longstanding interest in improving criminal justice outcomes for women and our Transforming Lives programme 2015-2020 aims to reduce the unnecessary imprisonment of women in the UK, supported by the National Lottery Community Fund.

The Transforming Lives programme: reducing women’s imprisonment
About 12,000 women are sent to prison in the UK every year, twice as many as 20 years ago, many on remand or to serve short sentences for non-violent offences, often for a first offence. Thousands of children are separated from their mothers by imprisonment every year. Yet most of the solutions to women’s offending lie in the community. The Prison Reform Trust works with national and local organisations to promote more effective responses to women in contact with the criminal justice system. For further information and a range of publications see www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/women

Working Chance
Working Chance is a charity for women who are leaving the criminal justice and care systems. Its mission is to rehabilitate and support these women by preparing them to re-enter the labour market and helping them to obtain and sustain quality, paid employment. It offers employability skills training, programmes aimed at building confidence and aspiration, career coaching and in-work mentoring to help women thrive and succeed in work. It also provides resettlement support and specialist interventions in times of crisis to ensure that the women they work with can successfully re-establish themselves within mainstream society and become financially independent.

About this briefing
This briefing is informed by desk-based research, focus groups, meetings and conversations with service users and providers. Examples of good practice are profiled throughout the report, provided by Working Chance and women whom the charity have supported into employment or training, and many others. The voices of women involved in User Voice women’s councils in London and Birmingham, and women we talked to in Wales as part of the Transforming Lives programme, are also included.

This briefing focuses predominantly on the landscape for women in England. However, where possible information from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is included.

Credits and acknowledgements
This briefing was prepared by Ashleigh Murray, former Research Officer for the Prison Reform Trust Transforming Lives programme, with Emily Evison and other colleagues. We are grateful to women at the following projects for sharing their personal experiences and insights and to staff who facilitated the sessions: Working Chance, the Muslim Women in Prison Project in Bradford, the Good Loaf in Northampton and Women in Prison’s Beth Centre in London. Our thanks also go to PRT volunteer Eartha Heptinstall for initial research, to Francesca Cooney of Prisoners’ Education Trust, and to former prison governor and PRT trustee Julia Killick CBE. We are also grateful to the Department of Work and Pensions, Ministry of Justice, HMP Low Newton and HMP Send for comments on earlier drafts.

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Contents

Key Facts 5
Recommendations 6
Purpose of this briefing 7
Women’s economic position 7
The policy context 8
Ministry of Justice Female Offender Strategy 8
Women’s Policy Framework 8
Ministry of Justice Education and Employment Strategy 8
Barriers to women’s employment 9
Criminal record disclosure 9
Bank accounts 12
Childcare support 13
Insecure accommodation 13
Education, skills and learning difficulties 13
Release on Temporary Licence 14
Universal Credit 17
Women on community sentences 19
Unpaid work requirements 20
Women-only unpaid work opportunities 20
Community Payback Orders (CPOs) – Scotland 21
Support in prison for resettlement 22
Education and training 24
Employment in prison 28
Information and communications technology (ICT) in prison 29
External employer relationships 30
Labour Market Information (LMI) Wales 31
Recommendations 31
Relevant organisations 33
England and Wales 33
Scotland 35
Northern Ireland 36
End notes 38
Foreword from Jocelyn Hillman OBE, Founder and Chief Executive, Working Chance 2009-2019

Working Chance started from small beginnings in 2009 and has grown to be a respected and dynamic recruitment consultancy which is making a real and lasting change in the lives of women who have had contact with the criminal justice system, their children and the community more broadly. It is a centre of expertise on the employment and rehabilitation of women ex-offenders, consulted by many agencies both in the UK and internationally.

Our work has elevated employment for women with convictions up the government agenda, championing the right of women with convictions to work in order to support themselves and their children. Most of the women we work with are mothers and the main breadwinners in their families. By supporting women who have had contact with the criminal justice and care systems into high quality, paid work, we are helping to break the intergenerational cycle of offending and poverty.

Recent government strategies include welcome promises but do not go far enough. The successful work being done by Working Chance and other projects around the country needs to be given a higher profile and sustainable, long term investment — so that all women in contact with the criminal justice system can receive the support they need to achieve their full potential. I was pleased to work with the Prison Reform Trust and welcome this briefing as a tool to encourage further progress.

Foreword from Natasha Finlayson OBE, Chief Executive, Working Chance from June 2019

Employment is key to desistance from crime. Many of the reasons for this are obvious: a job provides income, status, increases social capital and helps people with convictions to see themselves differently – as people who are good at something and who are ‘giving back’. For women who have convictions, the economic independence that employment provides is pragmatically important but also contributes to a positive sense of self. Given that over half of women in prison report childhood abuse and well over half say they have experienced domestic violence, it is easy to see how regarding yourself as strong and capable, and being able to support yourself and your family, are key elements in building a new, different life.

Working Chance helps women to change the way they see themselves. We believe in them. Our tailored one-to-one support builds confidence and helps women to become work-ready. When they start applying for jobs, we act as recruitment consultants for them and support them through the process. It is a unique charity that truly changes lives. More broadly it creates economic value by expanding the labour market and reducing the stereotyping and stigma around employing ex-offenders. The overall reoffending rate of the women we place into jobs is 4% — which brings even greater societal and economic benefit.

The success of our work depends on our partnerships with employers and with other charities in the criminal justice and women’s sectors. We are pleased to have supported the Prison Reform Trust in the research for this important report.

Ex-offenders who have served their sentence and want to change their lives deserve a second chance. Prisons, the Government and employers all have a responsibility, and an interest, to help them take it.

House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee
Key Facts

- Individuals who leave prison and find a job are between six and nine percentage points less likely to reoffend than those who do not.¹

- The proportion of women in employment six weeks after release from prison is three times lower than for men — 4% of women compared to 11% of men were in employment.²

- A longitudinal survey of prisoners found one in five women compared to one in three men were in employment prior to imprisonment.³ Women were also less likely than men (20% compared to 33%) to be in employment at the start of a community sentence.⁴

- 47% of women received into custody had no qualifications, this figure was the same for men.⁵ The study also found that 47% of women had been suspended or temporarily excluded from school, and 32% had been permanently excluded. Both figures are even higher for men.⁶

- Women’s offences are more likely to be financially motivated than men’s (28% compared to 20%).⁷

- 38% of women attributed their offending to ‘a need to support their children’.⁸

- The use of Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) for women in prison decreased by 40% between 2007 — 2017 compared to an 18% decrease for men over the same period.⁹

- 53% of women convicted or cautioned in 2011/12 were claiming out-of-work benefits one month prior to their conviction or caution, compared to 40% of men.¹⁰

- The Department of Work and Pensions found four out of five employers failed to provide a special recruitment process for disadvantaged groups, including women leaving prison.¹¹

- The gender pay gap increases for individuals involved in the criminal justice system - on average women released from prison earn 33.2% less than men.¹² Financial hardship is especially acute for some foreign national women with no recourse to public funds and no right to work, potentially trapping them in a cycle of offending.¹³

- Three quarters (73%) of prison sentences given to women are for six months or less, which have the highest reoffending rates.¹⁴ Women talk about the “revolving door” and coming in and out of prison, often on sentences too short to engage in education or training or work opportunities.

- Reoffending rates for women released from prison are twice as high as for women given a community sentence.¹⁵

For more key facts and briefings on women’s imprisonment see www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk
In light of the findings of this report we recommend:

- The government should act swiftly to make the necessary changes to the disclosure and barring system to comply with the recent Supreme Court judgment, and undertake a comprehensive review of the proportionality of the wider criminal record disclosure system, including its impact on women.¹⁶

- Employers, employer organisations, recruitment agencies and human resources personnel should be proactive in ensuring there are no unnecessary or disproportionate barriers to employing women with criminal convictions, and should regard this an integral part of fair employment practices.

- HM Prison and Probation Service should increase the availability and quality of paid and unpaid work placements for women and provision should be appropriate for those with dependent children, including support with childcare arrangements.

- HM Prison and Probation Service and the Ministry of Justice must make a concerted effort to increase the use of release on temporary licence (ROTL) for women in prison and put measures in place to make sure ROTL placements are accessible and beneficial to individuals. Any barriers to ROTL should be promptly addressed.

- The availability and take up of ROTL for both paid and unpaid work from all women’s prisons must be monitored on a quarterly basis and all barriers to its use urgently addressed – including travel time and costs of travel.

- The impact of the Victims Levy on women’s earnings should be assessed and the policy reviewed.

- The Education and Employment Strategy committed to testing how digital access could be increased within women’s prisons and a clear implementation plan and timescale for this should be provided.

- The Department of Work and Pensions should work with the Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service to ensure that individuals can set up benefit claims, including for Universal Credit, prior to release from prison and to address other barriers to this income support.

- Central government, local councils and others should invest in women’s centres to provide ‘one-stop shops’ where women can access training, education and education support in a women-only environment, delivering well-evidenced benefits. Funding needs to be long-term on the basis this is necessary community infrastructure.

- Prison governors should ensure that when working with the New Futures Network the specific employment needs, skills and aspirations of women are taken into account, as well as their caring responsibilities. Employment conditions and opportunities in a woman’s resettlement area need to be well-understood.

- The Ministry of Justice must work with governors of women’s prisons to ensure they have the necessary information, skills and training to commission education effectively for women with diverse needs and abilities.¹⁷

- The provision of affordable childcare as an integral part of initiatives aimed at supporting women in contact with the criminal justice system to engage in employment, training and education urgently needs to be improved.
Purpose of this briefing
It is widely acknowledged that most of the solutions to women’s offending lie in the community. Addressing the economic marginalisation that is a factor in many women’s offending, and compounded by a criminal conviction, is therefore critical. Unemployment has been identified as one of “the strongest dynamic predictors of reoffending for women” yet Ministry of Justice figures reveal significant disparities between employment outcomes for women and men on release from prison, outstripping inequalities in the general population.

This briefing provides an overview of the evidence on women’s employment opportunities and barriers, considers the national policy context, profiles good practice, and makes recommendations to accelerate progress. Drawing on the experiences and insights of women themselves and the organisations that support them, its purpose is to inform policy and practice and improve employment outcomes for women in contact with the criminal justice system.

Women’s economic position

A report on ‘The Female Face of Poverty’ highlights that:

- 73% of people working part-time are women.
- 54% of people in temporary work are women.
- 55% of people on zero-hour contracts are women.
- 22% of women compared to 4% of men fall below the low pay threshold.
- 90% of single parent households are headed by a woman and nearly half of these families live in poverty.

In the UK, eight times as many women as men are not in paid employment due to caring responsibilities for children and others. Many others have to work part-time which is generally very low paid. Inequality in the labour market and in the division of caring commonly results in women having to rely for economic support either on men or on welfare benefits. Women in the general population from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are more at risk of unemployment than BAME men or white women. Participants in the Muslim Women in Prison Project focus group talked about their experiences of ‘closet racism’ — facing discrimination on the grounds of gender, race and religion before they had even disclosed their conviction.

A lack of financial independence is a significant risk factor for women who offend, their offences more likely to be financially motivated than men’s (28% compared to 20%). Research on imprisoned mothers found that 38% of women attributed their offending to ‘a need to support their children’. Financial hardship is especially acute for some foreign national women who may have no recourse to public funds and no right to work, potentially trapping them in a cycle of offending.

Data collected on entry to prison reveals that only 10% of women reported being employed before custody, compared to 23% of men. Women were also less likely than men (20% compared to 33%) to be in employment at the start of a community sentence.
The policy context

Ministry of Justice Female Offender Strategy
The government’s Female Offender Strategy (June 2018) recognises the need for a gender specific approach when working with women in the criminal justice system. The strategy aims to reduce the number of women sent to prison for minor offences, increase the use of community sentencing, promote early intervention and diversion, and tackle the underlying causes of women’s offending. It acknowledges that women’s childcare needs and family relationships must be better accommodated, and the second Farmer Review (June 2019) also recommends much more support in this area.

Implementation of the Strategy should lead to better employment outcomes for women, but this is subject to sufficient investment in women’s support services and childcare, and delivery of the promised National Concordat on a joined-up approach across government.

Women’s Policy Framework
The Women’s Policy Framework replaced Prison Service Order 4800 in December 2018 and includes the expectation of prisons and probation services that:

Women are given support to find somewhere safe to live, learn how to manage their money, access education and training and improve their employability.

It recognises the importance of ‘helping women become financially independent’ and requires that whilst in prison:

... women are given the opportunity to access appropriate education, learning, skills (including parenting skills), and employment.

Ministry of Justice Education and Employment Strategy
At the heart of this strategy is the recognition that employment on release is a key component of a prisoner’s rehabilitation.

The New Futures Network (NFN), launched as part of the Ministry of Justice Education and Employment Strategy, works to create partnerships between prisons and employers. The NFN is a team of employment brokers who analyse local labour market information, current and potential training opportunities in prisons and identify employers willing to work with individuals who have a criminal record. The NFN has one broker working across the women’s estate (12 women’s prisons) to improve employment opportunities for women.

The strategy also reiterates the changes made to prison education, which gave governors more control over education provision and introduced new measures to improve employment outcomes, following Dame Sally Coates’ review of prison education.

Since 1 September 2019 a National Partnership Agreement between the Ministry of Justice, HM Prison & Probation Service and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) governs the obligations of each agency to improve employment, training and welfare support in custody.
Barriers to women’s employment

Criminal record disclosure

Because I have got that [conviction] they just automatically think I am still in that society. But I have changed my life around. I am not that person now. I am not that person that got convicted.

Woman in London

An estimated 11 million people in the UK have a criminal record. The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS, formerly the Criminal Records Bureau) enables an employer to check whether a potential employee has any criminal convictions. Around five million criminal record checks are carried out each year, with the level of check depending on the job and the industry.

The most common sectors for women in the general population to work in are health and social work (21%), wholesale and retail trade (14%) and education (12%). Women hold nearly 80% of all jobs in health and social work, and 70% of those in education. These jobs are mostly subject to an ‘enhanced check’ – meaning that even spent convictions must be disclosed (see below). There are detailed rules governing when a conviction is ‘spent’ – for example a prison sentence of six months or less is spent after two years, but a person subject to ‘enhanced check’ would still have to declare it, however much time has elapsed. The organisation Unlock publishes a useful chart showing when different types of conviction are spent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of check</th>
<th>Basic Checks</th>
<th>Standard Checks</th>
<th>Enhanced Checks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is disclosed</td>
<td>Only unspent convictions</td>
<td>Unspent and spent convictions, cautions, reprimands</td>
<td>Unspent and spent convictions, cautions, reprimands and any relevant information held by local police force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples of positions eligible</td>
<td>- Government, Civil service, Airport staff - Office work - Hospitality, Retail, Delivery</td>
<td>- Security, Stewards, Wardens - Solicitor, Barrister Accountant - Vets</td>
<td>- Working with vulnerable adults and children - Teachers - Social, NHS, Care workers - Taxi drivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate number per year</td>
<td>1 million (20%)</td>
<td>250,000 (5%)</td>
<td>4 million (75%)</td>
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</table>

I worked in care…I can’t do that anymore because of my criminal record.

If I go into a job and you lot can see that I’ve changed and I am not that person that is written on the DBS, why can’t you give me a job?

Woman in London
In July 2018 The Cabinet Office issued a call for evidence on supporting people with convictions on their path to employment. Responses revealed that 84% of the organisations with experience of hiring individuals who have a criminal conviction rated it as positive. The report concluded that having specific recruitment practices and employability initiatives is important and has a positive impact.\textsuperscript{37}

\begin{quote}
It’s a great way of finding amazing people … we look for staff everywhere but a lot of people who have been in prison are desperate for an opportunity and we find they make great colleagues.

James Timpson, in ‘The support never stops' (Guardian 8 April 2019)
\end{quote}

In January 2019, the Supreme Court found aspects of the criminal records disclosure scheme, which was already under review, to be unlawful. The government announced it would reform the scheme but this has not yet happened.\textsuperscript{38}

\begin{table}[h]
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\begin{tabular}{|l|}
\hline
Supreme Court ruled aspects of the disclosure scheme unlawful \\
\hline
The Supreme Court ruled that two aspects of the criminal records disclosure scheme were disproportionate and breached the right to privacy: \\
\begin{itemize}
\item The rule that all convictions must be disclosed if a person has more than one.
\item The requirement that some childhood cautions are disclosed indefinitely.
\end{itemize}
Two of the cases considered by the Supreme Court involved women whose convictions and cautions were spent but due to the nature of the jobs for which they were applying, and the possibility of contact with children or vulnerable adults, they had to apply for enhanced criminal record checks. \\
\textbf{Case 1} \\
In 1996 Ms G was convicted and fined for one count of driving without a seatbelt (£10 fine) and three counts of carrying under 14-year olds without a seatbelt (three £25 fines). In 1998 she was convicted and fined on two counts of driving under 14-year olds without seat belts (two £40 fines). Ms G has no other convictions. In 2013 Ms G was admitted to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Register of Social Care Workers as a qualified social carer and offered a permanent job at a day centre for adults with learning disabilities. When asked to disclose any convictions Ms G referred only to the 1996 fines. On receipt of her Enhanced Criminal Record Certificate, which disclosed all her convictions, even though spent, Ms G’s job offer was withdrawn. \\
\textbf{Case 2} \\
In 1999, when 28 years old, homeless and suffering from undiagnosed schizophrenia, Ms P was cautioned for theft of a sandwich and convicted for the theft of a 99p book, she failed to surrender to the bail granted. Ms P received a conditional discharge for both and has committed no further offences since. Ms P is now a qualified teaching assistant but has not been able to find employment, she believes this is related to having to disclose her convictions when applying for jobs. \\
A number of charities including Unlock, Liberty and Just for Kids Law were involved in bringing these cases. \\
See www.supremecourt.uk/cases/docs/uksc-2016-0195-judgment.pdf
\end{tabular}
\end{table}
They may find they are never getting a proper chance to turn around, I think we need to be sensible and look again at issues like this.

Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP, Home Secretary responding to the Supreme Court decision

Working Chance has transformed the lives of thousands of women and their children to date but it’s vital that we continue to challenge the prejudices and preconceptions prevalent about ex-offenders among many employers and prevent women from becoming trapped in a cycle of poverty and offending. We were delighted to host the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions today and to show her first hand the difference that having secure employment makes to women who have been in prison.

Chief Operations Officer, Working Chance

Some women told us that when trying to find employment on release from prison they felt they were being pushed back into crime. One woman said that she had twice started a new job, having disclosed her convictions at interview stage, but on both occasions when the employer received her DBS certificate the job offer was withdrawn although her conviction had no relevance to her occupation.

I told them about it, but as soon as they saw it, they were like ‘no’.

Woman in London

Another woman reported receiving a negative response when she contacted her previous employer on release, others had been told not to bother applying for jobs if they had been to prison. Women said that when disclosing a criminal conviction on their application form, or once a DBS certificate was received, they were not given the opportunity to explain the circumstances of the offence or their level of involvement in it. The women felt employers “assume the worst” and are unaware of the different drivers to women’s offending.

You can’t be prejudged of off past mistakes.

Confidence, it knocks you down.

Women in London

Having to disclose a conviction to potential employers had a significant impact on women’s confidence. They felt discouraged from applying for jobs they knew they were capable of doing, believing that employers would select someone without a conviction. Women often applied for lower level, lower paid jobs than ones for which they were qualified.

All of us here we are more than capable of doing those high jobs, it’s my DBS that holds me back.

That is all that it is.

Woman in London
Bank accounts
Not having a bank account is a barrier to starting paid work, receiving benefits and making a Universal Credit claim. For women released from prison, opening a bank account can be difficult due to a lack of ID or proof of a stable address.

There are inconsistent arrangements in prisons, and between banks, poor awareness amongst staff and prisoners and a lack of strategic oversight by government agencies. A partnership agreement between the Ministry of Justice and the Department of Work and Pensions promises to “provide access to bank accounts and ID to enable prisoners to enter employment; and improve access to benefits on release”.

Several women’s prisons have processes in place to help women set up a bank account prior to their release, either through probation staff based in the prison or the prison’s own resettlement department.

- HMP Low Newton promote the opening of bank accounts to women during their first few days in custody and have helped 108 women open bank accounts since 2016. The prison also offers women the opportunity to open savings accounts which they can pay into whilst in prison in preparation for release.

- At HMP Send women are made aware of the opportunity to open a bank account on induction and application forms are processed by the prison’s resettlement department. Since January 2019, 34 bank accounts have been opened. HMP Send also offer women the opportunity to acquire ID cards, to facilitate accessing bank accounts and employment.

Opening a bank account from prison takes around three - four weeks, so for those on very short sentences it is not possible. However, some prisons say they will arrange for documents to be forwarded to a home address. Support for women to open a bank account whilst in prison should be promoted across the women’s estate.

Going Forward into Employment (GFIE) is currently being piloted in North West England, including at HMP Styal. The project is a Civil Service initiative which supports women into employment with the Civil Service on release from prison. The prison education department helps women to apply for specific Civil Service positions, with contracts lasting from 12 to 24 months. A GFIE project worker supports successful applications both prior to and following the recruitment stage. While completing their contract a workplace mentor supports the women. In its first 18 months 14 women have secured jobs within the Civil Service via the programme.

The Ban the Box campaign, led by Business in the Community, encourages ‘fair chance recruitment’ and asks employers to remove the tick box asking about criminal records from job application forms. Leaving this question until a later stage in the recruitment process gives people with a criminal record a fairer chance. About 135 employers have signed up, mainly large employers including the Civil Service. Release Scotland is a similar network with members from private, public and third sector organisations.
Childcare support
Women are much more likely than men to be primary or sole carers of children, and the cost and availability of childcare is a barrier limiting women’s access to employment which urgently needs to be addressed.\(^42\)

In its Education and Employment Strategy the Ministry of Justice said they would be addressing “…how women can manage childcare responsibilities alongside rehabilitation programmes and working commitments.”\(^43\)

The Women’s Policy Framework states as an objective that:

> Women are not disproportionately disadvantaged or unable to access services due to diversity circumstances, childcare, personal circumstances etc.\(^\text{p.4}\)

However, the only commitment in the Female Offender Strategy is:

> Updating instructions to probation staff on Offender Childcare so they can support female offenders to complete the requirements imposed upon them where childcare issues were previously a barrier.\(^\text{p.25}\)

Insecure accommodation
We believe that everyone leaving custody should have a safe and suitable home to go to on release; having somewhere to live gives people a stable platform from which to access health services, hold down a job and reduces the likelihood of them reoffending.

Parliamentary under Secretary of State, the Ministry of Justice 2018\(^44\)

The Ministry of Justice recognise that a lack of housing contributes to poor employment outcomes for women being released from prison.\(^45\) However in the year 2017/18 only 55.8% of women were released from custody with stable accommodation.\(^46\) Only two thirds of women given a community sentence were in settled accommodation at the start of their sentence.\(^47\) Further findings and recommendations on this issue are in our briefing Home Truths: housing for women in the criminal justice system.\(^48\)

> Being out is hard. I left prison with £46 and nowhere to live. The first thing you want to do is shoplift just to get off the streets for the night.

Woman in Wales

Education, skills and learning difficulties
In 2016/17, 90% of women who registered with Working Chance had UK qualifications and 21% were university graduates. This is not a representative sample of the women’s prison population, but it is a reminder of the range of qualifications and work readiness amongst women in the criminal justice system who struggle to find employment on release.

A survey of prisoners’ education in England and Wales found that 47% of women entering prison had no qualifications.\(^49\) A Scottish Prison Service survey carried out in 2017 found that 12% of women in prison had problems reading, 10% had difficulty with writing and 21% with numbers.\(^50\)

> I have tried but I don’t like it as you get different teachers and not one on one help. The time between classes is also too long; I forget everything in a week.

Woman in Prison, No One Knows, PRT (2008)\(^51\)
In 2018 the Ministry of Justice reported that 40% of women (compared to 35% of men) in custody were identified as ‘having a learning difficulty/challenge’. Learning difficulty/challenge is the term used by HMPPS for individuals who may not have a learning disability but who may find the criminal justice system hard to cope with. There is still no routine screening for learning disabilities when an individual enters the criminal justice system, meaning that a person’s needs are at best unrecognised and unmet. There is limited support for people with learning disabilities which can significantly affect their ability to engage with employment and education whilst in prison. One prisoner explained that the library did not have many books for individuals with dyslexia and that “there should be more to help people who struggle like I do”. The report concluded that education for those both in the community and in prison should meet special educational needs and incorporate learning support from appropriate staff.

People with learning disabilities are over-represented in the criminal justice system (7%) compared to the general population (2%) and women in prison are more likely to have a learning disability than men whilst the reverse is true in the general population.

Women in prison (49%) are twice as likely as men (23%) to be identified as suffering from anxiety and depression. Low confidence levels, a lack of self-esteem, and histories of drug and alcohol dependency, also affect women’s take-up of education opportunities.

**Release on Temporary Licence**

Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) is the temporary release of individuals from prison to help prepare for resuming life in the community. This offers invaluable opportunities for employment, voluntary work or child and family contact. In general, women are more likely to be granted ROTL than men because they are usually assessed as low-risk and are more likely to be sole or primary carers so eligible for childcare ROTL. However, the fact that women are often imprisoned far from their home area adds to the cost and complexity of ROTL and limits women’s ability to obtain employment or voluntary work that they can continue on release.

Women at the Muslim Women in Prison Project discussed the benefits of ROTL during our focus group. They valued the opportunity to improve their prospects of employment on release but felt better use could be made of ROTL with placements more suited to a woman’s individual circumstances, skills, personal interests or previous experience. ROTL placements did not always contribute to their progression. Inspectorate reports support this view, finding for example that the range of work women could undertake on ROTL from HMP New Hall was limited. Women also explained that once the 40% Victims Levy on wages for Victim Support was deducted, and after covering travel costs there is little financial benefit to doing paid work on ROTL, so little scope for saving.

Compounding their disadvantage, women were adversely affected by national ROTL restrictions which have seen a 40% decline in this leave for women compared to an 18% decline for men since 2007.
Decline in the number of women released on ROTL annually since 2011.61

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of women released on ROTL</td>
<td>828</td>
<td>875</td>
<td>819</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>613</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>643</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recognising the beneficial impact ROTL has on employment and other resettlement outcomes, the Ministry of Justice published a new policy framework in May 2019 with the stated intention of increasing its use. There is much to welcome in the Framework, including the removal of unnecessary barriers and reduction in repetitive assessments, which are intended to reduce delays and increase the productive use of ROTL. Other welcome improvements include:

- The removal of guidance that people should undertake unpaid work before paid work, and that paid work can only be taken in the last 12 months before release – so paid work to be taken as soon as someone becomes eligible for Resettlement Day Release (RDR).
- Change in eligibility for RDR so that people become eligible as soon as they enter open conditions – and most women’s prisons are open.

Women in prison have raised concerns with PRT’s advice and information service including:

- Only receiving support with one travel fare per month for ROTL for social or childcare purposes regardless of whether they are in paid work or not.
- Unpaid work opportunities no longer being supported by the prison.
- Reduced time being allowed on Resettlement Overnight Release.
- Following a prison transfer significant delays in processing approval for the continuation of women’s existing ROTL arrangements, despite there being no longer a ‘minimum stay’ or ‘lay down period’ required before eligibility, leading to missed opportunities for child contact.
- Lengthy delays in women receiving approval to go out to work, leading to withdrawal of job offers.

In October 2019 PRT made a Freedom of Information request seeking details of all prison ROTL policies. This revealed inconsistencies in implementation and, in some cases, perverse interpretation of the new framework resulting in restrictions in women’s access to ROTL. Although local policies appear to be within the parameters of the Framework, they are not all in line with its intention to increase access to ROTL and make it more meaningful. This suggests more specific guidance may be required.62

The removal of the three month residence or ‘lay down period’ following transfer to open conditions removes an unnecessary barrier, but it should be replaced with a mandatory time-limit within which assessment should be completed.

Changing the criteria for Childcare Resettlement Licence (CRL) to include primary as well as sole carers is an important step in ensuring this provision meets its intended aim. It is right that the age of the child for which you can be given CRL to visit has been increased from 16 years to 18 years.
**Working Chance: Katrina**

Katrina was released on 1 August 2018. Having been registered by us while in HMP Downview she was already cleared to place into work on ROTL. Katrina came to the office the day after release. She had no home and no money, something that she had not disclosed to us previously. Her friend had agreed that she could stay at her place for three months. The clock was ticking to get Katrina into work and start saving money to find a home of her own, as the instability of her situation could lead to her reoffending.

By the end of our meeting we had arranged for her to be interviewed with Sourced Market on the 3rd August. She performed very well at her interview and started work on the 4th August. Three days after release we had placed her into work and within three months prevented her from becoming homeless by signposting her to specialist housing support.

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**Muslim Women in Prison Project, Khidmat Centres, Bradford**

*It’s like being kicked in the teeth every time you try to move forward.*  
Muslim Woman in Bradford

The Muslim Women in Prison Project is a community led resettlement project in Bradford, providing Through the Gate support services to Muslim women in HMP New Hall and HMP Askham Grange and on release. A focus group was held with six women attending the project.

Four of the women we spoke to had degrees, five had studied to at least college level and the majority had been employed before going to prison. Nonetheless, they all faced challenges in finding employment after release. Women told us they lacked confidence and felt anxious and demotivated. They felt that there was much less support available to them from their local community after being in prison.

*Your confidence is on the floor.*  
Muslim Woman in Bradford

Research has shown that Muslim women with experience of prison can feel abandoned and “cast aside for bringing shame and dishonour” to the community, leading them to feel the need to move away and start again.63

With culturally relevant support from the project, four of the women secured employment and another enrolled on a college course. One woman had returned to her previous career, another was a self-employed personal trainer and a third woman was now working with a mental health charity that had not previously considered employing someone with a criminal record.

The project demonstrates that with the right support, women found the resilience and motivation to rebuild their lives and obtain employment which in turn secures their financial independence and reduces their vulnerability to exploitation.
Universal Credit
Universal Credit (UC) is the new benefits system being rolled out across the UK with full implementation expected by 2023. It is a single sum paid monthly in arrears and applications must be made online. Assistance is available on a UC helpline and in local Jobcentres. The helpline became free of charge in November 2017 after it was revealed that it cost callers up to 55p per minute with an average waiting time of 39 minutes.⁶⁴

A Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) report identified the difficulties individuals face in claiming UC, noting that “prisoners cannot apply for Universal Credit until they are released. Where a person is released homeless, the process for applying for Universal Credit becomes even more challenging. The process is complicated, and time-consuming for those who lack identification documentation, a bank account, an email address and the skills to apply for benefits online.” ⁶⁵ The Inspectorate recommends that the government Reducing Reoffending Board should reduce barriers to accessing UC for prisoners nearing release.

UC has been criticised for its adverse impact on women, especially those experiencing or at risk of financial abuse.⁶⁶ The single monthly payment to one member of the household who then effectively controls the finances increases women’s vulnerability. Claimants can now nominate the bank account of the main carer, but there are no safeguards in place to ensure that this is done. If a joint claim is made the monthly payment can be split. The five-week waiting period for the first UC payment can severely disadvantage women leaving prison, and increase their risk of homelessness. An advance can be applied for, but the applicant has to endure reduced payments as this is paid back, over a maximum of 12 months. While there is some flexibility with UC payments for ex-offenders — such as the ability to claim without a bank account, to receive payments more than once a month, and for payment to be made directly to landlords — there is a lack of awareness of these options and they only apply in limited circumstances.

The impact of delayed UC payment tends to fall on women who act as ‘shock absorbers’ of poverty for their children.⁶⁷ Due to low pay and part-time working, women in paid work are more likely than men to be also claiming UC: 38% of women compared to 29% of men in February 2019.⁶⁸

The women we spoke to complained that strict conditions attached to UC often led to sanctions with harsh financial consequences, and they criticised the lack of government support they received when searching and applying for jobs. This was attributed to the shift from more personalised Job centre services to a digital platform.

_I go online, tell them I have applied for a couple of jobs and they communicate through email. They don’t help you apply for jobs._

Woman in London

_Many claimants also feel that they are forced to jump through hoops for the sake of it, fill out pointless job applications for positions that do not match their qualifications, and take inappropriate low-paid, temporary work just to avoid debilitating sanctions._

United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights⁶⁹
The House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee inquiry into Universal Credit heard testimony from women who have been forced into ‘survival sex’, that is exchanging sex for basic amenities such as cash, food or shelter. They attributed this to the impact of UC — the online applications, delayed payments and difficulties in meeting the criteria. If they had children at home, or a potentially violent partner, they would do whatever it took to obtain money to live on.

The organisation Changing Lives supports nearly 700 women who are involved in survival sex, with high numbers of women seeing selling sex as their ‘only option’. A third of the women report that they do not submit UC claims due to the complexities involved in the administration process.

Universal Credit Sanctions:

**Lowest Level Sanctions** — Claimants who fail to attend “a work-focussed interview” have benefits reduced.

**Low Level Sanctions** — benefit reduced until an individual completes the requirement - plus seven days for the first sanction, 14 days for the second, 28 days for the third. This may be for failure to attend or take part in a work-focused interview, employment programme or training course.

**Medium Level Sanctions** — benefit reduced for 28 days for an individual's first medium level sanction, 91 days for the second and subsequent sanctions. This can be for failing to take reasonable action to find paid work or increase earnings, or not being available to start work or attend interviews.

**Higher Level Sanctions** — benefits reduced for 91 days for the first higher level sanction, 182 for the second, and subsequent sanctions. These sanctions can be imposed for failure to meet set ‘work preparation/search/availability requirements’, which may include failure to take part in mandatory work activity or apply for a specific job when told to, refusal to take a job offer, leaving a job, or reducing the number of hours worked.

**Recoverable Hardship Payments** may be available for claimants whose benefits are reduced by a sanction.

The DWP and the Ministry of Justice have not enabled UC claims to be made from within prison for commencement on a person’s release date. On release an individual can submit an Advance Payment claim but this must be repaid over a 12-month period. Women without knowledge of Advance Payments, the necessary documents or support to make a claim may be without benefits for several weeks, with only the discharge grant of £46 to survive on. Those leaving prison after a period of recall do not even receive this amount.

The DWP has placed Prison Work Coaches (PWCs) in all women’s prisons in England and the five prisons housing women in Scotland. These Coaches establish if individuals who are due for release have the necessary ID and bank account and if not refer them for help. PWCs can
arrange an individual’s UC appointment on release and provide information on how to make a claim. DWP monitoring in HMP Cornton Vale in Scotland found that on average women who engaged with a PWC made their UC claim within two days of release and received their advance payment within three days. This was much speedier compared with individuals who did not engage (over three days and six days respectively).

**Women on community sentences**

*You could have given me a community sentence that would have benefited me more.*  
Woman in London

Women given community sentences are much less likely to reoffend than those who are sent to prison (26% compared to 55.8%). However, the number of women in England and Wales receiving community sentences decreased by over a third between 2008 and 2018.

Community sentence orders are non-custodial sentences which include at least one ‘rehabilitation activity requirement’ tailored to the individual and the offence. They are much less disruptive than imprisonment, enabling women to maintain housing, employment and family responsibilities.

### Northern Ireland Women’s Centres

There is a network of 14 women’s centres across Northern Ireland, providing a community resource for all women including those involved in the criminal justice system. Women’s centres have a dedicated focus on employability and personal development, with most offering a range of accredited and non-accredited courses. Women can access advice and guidance on barriers they often face when trying to access education and employment in the community.

Shankill Women’s Centre in West Belfast provides a safe and friendly space for women where they are able to access education and other support services. Among many other projects the centre runs an Education, Training and Employability project. The project offers women the opportunity to complete both accredited and non-accredited courses including personal development, GCSEs, accounting and computer courses. The programme supports women with job searches, CV writing, application forms and interview techniques. There are childcare facilities at the centre which women can access for free if they are participating in education, which increases the ability of women to engage in the courses.

### The Beth Centre in south London

run by Women in Prison provides a safe and homely space for gender-specific support services including education and employment. A career advisor attends twice a month and meets with women individually to provide support around writing and developing their CV, referring them onto courses, teaching interview skills, conducting job searches and working with them to find employment. Working Chance arrange free workshops at the centre, helping women develop their skills, confidence and work readiness.

Community orders cost an average of £2,800 per women per year, compared to an average yearly cost of a prison place, £45,619.
Unpaid work requirements

Unpaid work or community payback can be ordered by the court as part of a community sentence. An individual can be required to complete between 40 and 300 hours of unpaid work to benefit the local community, supervised by probation staff. Successful unpaid work programmes offer support and can help women move on to paid work.

The Good Loaf women’s centre in Northampton runs a community payback project where women can complete their unpaid work order at the bakery and café, and may then be offered paid employment. The project provides holistic support including help with childcare.

*Unpaid work is good if it stops you going to prison.*

They should make sure men and women do community service separately. It’s so intimidating doing it with the men.

Woman in Wales

Probation supervisors should not place a woman in ‘male-only environments’ for unpaid work. This was one of three specific requirements included in the contracts for probation services, as a result of s.10 Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 that obliges the Secretary of State for Justice to identify and address the needs of women offenders. An inspection of services in the community for women who offend reported that while none of the community payback schemes they inspected had placed a woman in an all-male group, they were often lone placements in charity shops. Women who are ordered to complete unpaid work hours may need childcare, but this is not routinely acknowledged or provided.

The proposed new model of probation promises that in arranging unpaid work placements “Where a woman has childcare responsibilities, we will ask how they will ensure that she is provided with local employment options that do not involve excessive travel time.”

Women-only unpaid work opportunities

**Kent, Surrey and Sussex CRC** run a women-only unpaid work project, in partnership with Waverley Borough Council. Women tend to the gardens of vulnerable residents who live in social housing in the local area. KSS CRC recognise the importance of women-only settings, and the need to ensure that women are able to complete their court order in a safe environment.

**Cheshire and Greater Manchester CRC** run a women-only community payback project where women cook for other vulnerable and homeless women in the local area. CGM CRC reported on the positive impact the project had on women required to be there and those choosing to engage with the service. Some women continue volunteering in the kitchen after their sentence has finished.

www.cgmcrc.co.uk/womens-community-payback-team-recipe-success/
Community Payback Orders (CPOs) – Scotland
CPOs were introduced by the Scottish Government in 2011, replacing a number of community disposals. Over the past five years the number of women given CPOs decreased by 6% to 2,706 in 2017/18.

A criminal justice social worker is assigned to supervise individuals on their CPO and is responsible for liaising with all agencies involved. A CPO consists of at least one of nine requirements including ‘Unpaid Work or Other Activity’. The ‘other activity’ element allows individuals to allocate some of their CPO hours to activities which will benefit their future employment prospects. Time can be spent on computing and IT skills, numeracy and literacy skills, interview skills, CV writing and communication skills.

Scottish Government research on CPOs found that the lack of flexibility in placement opportunities offered was problematic for women, and there were no women-only evening or weekend options.

Shine Mentoring (Scotland)
Samantha began engaging with Shine Mentoring in 2017 when still in prison for her first offence. After completing nine months of a two-year sentence, Samantha was released on Home Detention Curfew (HDC). She was allocated a mentor through Shine and was supported in searching for volunteering roles and developing her computer skills, looking to pursue a new career. Samantha was referred to the Access to Industry EnCompass service and through them engaged in IT and creative writing. Samantha gained voluntary work with a church and this became sessional paid employment, doing basic administrative tasks.

In April 2018 Samantha was offered paid employment as an administrator. Unfortunately, the charity was unable to provide funding for travel and as a result Samantha was unable to take the job. Samantha continues to work with a caseworker and is focusing on gaining IT and creative writing qualifications.

Wales CRC have worked to ensure women have suitable unpaid work provisions including:
- Women-only induction sessions – following feedback from women who found attending sites with groups of men intimidating.
- Asking women specifically whether they would like a women-only placement and a woman supervisor.
- Addressing individual needs and (where possible) individual placements are found. If not, women should have the opportunity to participate in workshops alongside women staff members.
- Allowing flexibility for women with children to ensure that they can complete their required unpaid work hours around childcare responsibilities.
Although employment is an important element of successful resettlement, women often have other needs to address first. During focus groups women told us that if they were homeless or struggling with mental ill health, finding a job was unlikely to be their top priority. An inspection of Through the Gate services found that both men and women were a long way from being ready for employment on their release and for many the prospect of immediately entering employment was unrealistic. In 2019 Her Majesty’s Inspector of Prisons (HMIP) found that a third of the individuals they assessed were not available for work, often related to mental ill health, which was more evident in women.

Support in prison for resettlement

Employment, training and education opportunities, activities and services in prison should increase women’s chances of successful resettlement on release.

- In HMP Eastwood Park (2019) women were asked whether they believed the activities they engaged in whilst in prison would have a positive impact on their resettlement. Of the women who responded:
  - 64% had a paid job at some point while in custody, 60% of these women believed it would help them on their release.
  - 41% had received vocational or skills training, 66% of whom thought it would help on release.
  - 79% had been involved in education at some point while in prison, most of whom thought it would help them on release.

- In HMP Low Newton (2018) 71% of women said they needed help securing employment on release, 59% needed support with education or training and 86% needed help arranging benefits. The proportion of women who said they were receiving support in the areas they needed was low: 21% of women received support with employment, 20% with education or training and 48% received support with arranging benefits.

- In HMP Peterborough (2017) 33% of sentenced women reported needing help finding employment on release from custody, 27% needed support with education or training and 61% needed support arranging benefits. However, the percentage of women who reported receiving the help they required was low: 40% of sentenced women were receiving support to find employment, 50% were receiving support with education and training and 32% were receiving support arranging benefits.

Not only did many women report that they were not receiving the support they needed but about half who responded did not know who in the prison was able to provide this support.

- In HMP Bronzefield (2015) 56% of women did not know who in the prison could help them with employment or education on release.

- In HMP Downview (2017) 45% of women did not know who in the prison could help with employment and 50% did not know who could help them with education on release.
Recent figures published in response to a Scottish Freedom of Information request found that 100% of women in HMP Corton Vale undertook at least one education class, a much higher percentage than in Scottish prisons for men, which in some prisons was as low as 25%. The Scottish Prison Service survey found that 80% of women thought the work they had done in prison had helped them learn new skills and 53% thought the work would help them find a job on release.

The Good Loaf, Northampton

Everything has changed for me. Because I come here, I am stronger and stronger.
Women at the Good Loaf

The Good Loaf in Northampton is a commercial bakery and cafe, now with three branches, that works closely with vulnerable women to enable them to move forward with their lives. The Good Loaf is open six days a week to members of the public, whilst also providing fresh bread to around 30 stockists in Northamptonshire. Women are referred through various criminal justice pathways, including self-referral. The bakery is a social enterprise that works closely with multiple agencies including probation services, mental health teams, and local courts, providing a holistic service to the women and offering a safe and convenient space for women to use for appointments.

The Good Loaf run courses and programmes for women, including anger management, confidence building, language courses and their employability programme. Engagement is flexible, staff members are aware of the complex and sometimes unpredictable lives of the women and work to ensure women can participate. The centre is a child friendly space, and women can bring their children with them when attending a course. The Good Loaf also provide clothing and offer meals for women in the local area.

The employability programme offers women a structured work placement where they gain practical skills, work experience and qualifications. The course takes place over six weeks and on completion the women receive a Level 1 AIM Award in Employability, a Level 1 AIM Award in Volunteering and a Level 2 certificate in Food Safety. Whilst completing the programme women volunteer in the café, where they can build their confidence, develop their social and communication skills, and gain work experience. There is no time limit on volunteering at the Good Loaf and some women have been volunteering for up to four years. The Good Loaf has often employed women who have completed the programme and for some women this will be their first paid job.

In a sense it’s made me the person I am today, because I know I’ve hit beyond rock bottom and I’ve made my way back up. I’m here hopefully to show other people it can be done, you’ve just got to have some faith.

Woman in Birmingham focus group
**Working Chance: Riana**

*Riana has very little in the way of qualifications and no formal education as everything she obtained was from prison – numeracy and literacy level 3 and business studies level 2. She also suffered with anxiety driven by her many years being brought up in care. Previously we had had to place her in entry-level catering and cleaning roles because of her lack of education and skills. However, she wasn’t happy in any of these industries as she could not see a career for herself in either of them. She was desperate to gain work with an employer who would allow her to take on responsibility in a role in which she could be proud, yet she had little idea what this role was and lacked the confidence to build effective relationships essential in the workplace.*

*Over a seven-month period we provided mentoring to Riana, supported her with interviewing skills and teaching her to present the best version of herself when meeting employers. Further to this we had to coach her on work place etiquette, employers’ expectations, and explored the variety of industries available to her. It may seem trivial, but when your only time-keeping commitments are meeting friends or attending the Job Centre, some women do not understand how important it is.*

*Seven months on Riana is now a trainee guide at a national art gallery, a role she is proud of.*

*Of all the candidates I have placed I am most proud of Riana because she worked with us and trusted the process. She listened to our advice and didn’t take the first job that came along.*

Working Chance Recruitment Consultant

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**Education and training**

*If they catered to all types that go into prison, it’s not just one type of person that has no GCSEs — I was in there with girls who had degrees. But there is nothing available for us. We don’t want to go to knitting, or art, we don’t want to do that. We want to go things that will actually benefit us when we come out.*

Woman in London

*It is very noticeable that when women in prison are given the right opportunities to learn and progress, they often thrive and are highly optimistic about what they could achieve in the future.*

Francesca Cooney, Head of Policy, Prisoners’ Education Trust

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93
Individuals are required to do education assessments on entry to prison. The assessment records Maths and English standard up to level 2, equivalent to GCSE. The most recent assessment (2017/18) found that only 2% of women compared to 8% of men entering prison, were assessed as having Level 2 Maths, with 11% of women compared to 8% of men having Level 2 English.

The recommendation for a more women-centred approach to prison education was made over a decade ago by the Corston Report in 2007. Women we spoke to believed that tailoring education courses and opportunities to individuals and their ambitions would significantly increase women's engagement. There should be more discussion with women about their aims and long-term plans, with a re-evaluation of the focus on stereotypical courses such as hairdressing and beauty.

Following Dame Sally Coates’ independent review of prison education in 2016, some significant changes were implemented in prisons. The Education and Employment Strategy launched a new system of commissioning for prison education in April 2019, giving governors increased autonomy over their own education budgets and curriculum. An inspectorate report of HMP New Hall spoke positively of the proposed new curriculum which was informed by women's needs and local labour market information.

This means that governors in the Women’s Estate will be able to decide an education curriculum that meets the specific needs of the women prisoners, determine how it is organised and delivered, and choose who delivers it.

Ministry of Justice Female Offender Strategy, 2018

Research and inspectorate reports have found deficiencies in education and training provisions for women in prison. Opportunities are often too basic, with limited chances for relevant further and vocational education. Welsh women in prison in England also face the disadvantage of a lack
of Welsh language materials. Recommendations have been made to encourage the Welsh Government and the Ministry of Justice to review access to Welsh language material in women’s prisons. Working with other agencies could help to expand provision, including partnering with universities.

Women with experience of prison courses told us about getting “no-use certificates”, doing courses “just to kill time” and having “nothing constructive” to do.

*The first thing they do is put you on Maths/English and I’m like, ‘I don’t need it.’*

*Woman in London*

Often women feel frustrated by the emphasis placed on basic skills and low level education, with limited higher education opportunities. Inspections of HMP Bronzefield (2015) and HMP Downview (2017) found there were ‘insufficient opportunities’ beyond Levels 1 and 2 and reported a lack of understanding and not enough effort being made to meet the needs of women who were serving longer sentences. Research has found that in some instances women who had completed Level 2 qualifications were offered no further opportunities to progress and instead were asked to be classroom assistants. Women told us that the low-level education they engaged with in prison was of little use to them, and that they sometimes attended courses in which they already had higher qualifications because there were no alternatives.

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**Prisoners’ Education Trust (PET)**

The PET offers funding for individuals in prison who may not be able to access certain courses and higher levels through existing prison education. PET funded over 170 women in 2018 to take distance learning courses, including Open University Access Modules, Business AS and A Levels, Bookkeeping and Gym Instructing and Nutritional Physical Activity.

The opportunities offered by PET for distance learning allow women and men to achieve qualifications that they would be able to in school, college or university, choose from a wide range of subjects, be sent course material and feedback from a personal tutor, study independently in their own time and to take their course with them if they move prison.

*You can see out of the corner of your eye there’s a bridge leading to the outside world. You think, with what I’m learning I can get to that bridge – I can even cross it one day.*

*Women studying through HMP Styal*
A HMIP inspection of HMP Downview in 2017 reported that teaching, learning and assessments in the prison required improvements. Too often women were attending mundane sessions and having to use poor quality workbooks.

Women told us that a lack of encouragement and support from teachers often made it difficult to remain motivated and interested, although they appreciated that limited funding, lack of resources and other factors were beyond the control of prison staff. Women we spoke to highlighted the importance of being inspired by education, being made to feel it is worthwhile and that there is something to be achieved through participating.

**Making Positive Changes programme, Grace Chocolates, Scotland**

Grace Chocolates works with women who have been in contact with the Scottish criminal justice system and supports them to move towards employment through making and selling chocolates. Grace Chocolates works with women in the community who have either been released from prison or who received a non-custodial sentence, also offering placements to women from HMP Cornton Vale who are on ROTL.

The programme called Making Positive Changes takes place across a seven-week period, providing the women with work experience and skills whilst learning to make chocolates and engage in personal development. During the course the women work on their CV and learn about the disclosure and barring service in Scotland. The project looks to support women into employment through; meeting new people, learning new skills and developing confidence. Women who have completed the course said they felt ‘they now had something of value to offer potential employers.’

**Timpson’s Academy, HMP New Hall**

The Timpson training academy at HMP New Hall offers women a full introduction and practical training to prepare them for employment at a Timpson store on release. The training academy in the prison replicates Timpson high street stores and provides women with the same training and new starter process as employees in the community receive. Since April 2016, 18 women at the prison have completed the training programme including five women who were on paid ROTL placements. Nine of the women are still employed by Timpson branches.

Whilst in prison the women are trained on all aspects of working at a Timpson branch including; how to use machinery and equipment, completing paperwork and cashing up shop tills. Towards their release date women participating in the training academy meet with their local area manager, where they are given a date to begin work.

There are 12 Timpson Academy spaces available for women on the minimum 16-week training programme at HMP New Hall. However, the academy operates at an average 50% capacity, a problem that is not unique to the Timpson workshop. Staff working at the academy in HMP New Hall often find it difficult to register women onto the course, primarily due to the large number of women who are serving short custodial sentences.
Employment in prison

Working while in prison is known to have a positive impact on an individual’s chances of employment on release.\textsuperscript{107} The Chief Inspector of Prisons reported that overall prisoner survey responses showed 81\% of women reported having had a prison job at some point during their sentence and 65\% of women had engaged with vocational or skills training.\textsuperscript{108}

Jobs offered may include wing cleaners, working in the kitchen, classroom assistants, or laundry workers. In some prisons there are opportunities in workshops run by external organisations such as Timpson, Halfords, The Clink and the London College of Fashion.

\textbf{Halfords Academy, HMP Drake Hall}

In January 2017 Halfords opened an academy at HMP Drake Hall. The programme enables women to train as cycle mechanics. According to the Halfords 2018 annual report, there are currently nine women working on completing the course, with two women already graduating and working as full-time cycle mechanics in the community and two further women soon to start employment on ROTL.

\textit{It changed my life, my future and how other people see me.}

Halfords employee and ex-offender\textsuperscript{109}

\textbf{The Clink restaurant, HMP Styal}

The Clink charity runs restaurants and training programmes in partnership with HMPPS across several prisons in England and Wales, including one women’s prison, HMP Styal. The Clink is a restaurant open to the public where women work and train for up to 40 hours per week while working towards City & Guilds NVQs in Food Service and Food Preparation. The programme continues to mentor women on release to help them find employment in the hospitality industry. A Justice Data Lab analysis found that the proven reoffending rate for those who had engaged with The Clink was 16\%, significantly lower than the 25\% for those who had not.\textsuperscript{110} This data was not gender disaggregated.

\textbf{Virgin Trains, HMP Styal}

In October 2018 Virgin Trains began piloting an employability training programme at HMP Styal, working in partnership with the prisons education provider to deliver training to women around skills such as: building confidence, timekeeping and managing workplace relationships. After completing the programme women are guaranteed an interview with Virgin Trains. 16 women completed the first two courses at HMP Styal and of these nearly half were offered permanent positions.
Projects like these demonstrate how practical training and support can improve women’s chances of employment on release from custody. Providing valuable and relevant training means that women can gain skills which will specifically enable them to move into certain areas of work.

Information and communications technology (ICT) in prison

In the future we want to see all prisoners have the chance to access increased education opportunities through digital technology.

Ministry of Justice Education and Employment Strategy 2018

Access to ICT in prison continues to be limited. The Education and Employment Strategy includes a commitment to continue testing how laptops and tablets could be made more readily available and how the use of in-cell technology could support prisoner learning and employment, but progress is very slow. Some women told us that they had created a CV at least once during their time in prison, but it was either lost when they moved between prisons or they were unable to access it once released.

The Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) for HMP Foston Hall in 2019 spoke positively of the use of in-cell learning via TV in the prison. The prison offer funding and provide the materials required for women to complete a range of courses such as creative design, food hygiene, fitness for life and customer service. Currently there are only 16 women participating in these courses and the IMB has asked prison to promote this provision and increase the number of women participating.

HMP Send, Business Administration Workshop

HMP Send have a Business Administration workshop within their Administration department where women are able to work and gain National Vocational Qualifications up to Level 3. Where appropriate this can be extended to Level 4.

There are up to eight women working in the administration department who learn on the job, producing documents on Microsoft Office, designing and printing brochures and leaflets, creating posters, photocopying and using general office equipment. The women also learn important skills for the work place such as prioritising work, meeting deadlines, effective communication skills and managing customer relationships.

Women who complete the training can then be found ROTL placements using the business administration skills they have learnt, including working at Surrey Community Action and Guildford Council.
External employer relationships

Women who participated in the focus groups thought prisons could better support individuals into jobs if prisons did more to develop relationships with potential employers. They thought they would have a better chance of securing employment through a pre-existing connection with an already engaged employer. This is a key objective of the New Futures Network (NFN), to act as an ‘honest broker between prisons and all potential partners’. There is a commitment in the Female Offender Strategy to ensure that the NFN takes into account the specific needs of women, which includes meeting the challenge of women being held far from home — on average, 64 miles from home and with about 650 women imprisoned over 100 miles from home. For the NFN to deliver successful employment outcomes for women, a national approach is needed to brokering relationships with employers.

Women in our focus groups proposed that prisons should facilitate careers days, inviting external employers into the prison to discuss the types of jobs they could apply for with a criminal conviction, the types of jobs that are available and advice on how to apply and prepare for them. Women also suggested that prisons could organise mock interviews and practice assessments with potential employers.

Working Chance: Zinab

We met Zinab in HMP Downview in January 2018. During her face-to-face registration meeting, Zinab disclosed that she had been convicted of ‘Arson’ and ‘Threat to kill’. Zinab received a custodial sentence of 4½ years and had served almost 2½ years when we met her. Her mother and father had been 13 and 16 years of age when they had her. She lived with her grandmother and mother until she was eight years of age and was the oldest of three siblings. At the age of eight, Zinab and her siblings were taken into care following physical abuse by their mother. At age 14, Zinab was arrested, the first of many arrests between the age of 14 and 18. She reflected on her situation throughout her childhood and into her early teens, describing herself as ‘desperate’ and feeling ‘hopeless’. On one occasion Zinab set herself on fire whilst in custody.

When asked, ‘What makes you feel happy Zinab?’ she replied: ‘Food. Being creative … I love baking!’ Despite her long and complex personal history and the obvious pain she had endured, her eyes had immediately lit up. She came alive when she spoke about food. The way forward for Zinab became obvious. We needed to find her a job where she could pursue her interest in food and develop her culinary skills! The week of her release, Zinab interviewed for and accepted a job offer with Honest Burgers. Six months on, she has been accepted onto their Head Chef Management Training programme.
Most Welsh women in prison are held at either HMP Styal or HMP Eastwood Park, and are an average of 101 miles from their home. This creates a number of challenges, including limitations on education and employment opportunities which will assist them on their release.

A recent review of offender education in Wales, found that HMPPS do not use LMI from Wales in prisons that hold Welsh women. LMI data is useful to help prisons target specific labour needs of their local area, so this omission limits the scope for targeting the local market for Welsh women. The report recommends that the Welsh Government and HMPPS should ensure that English prisons have access to LMI for Wales.

Recommendations

The examples of good practice profiled throughout this briefing show what can be achieved when women in contact with the criminal justice system are given support to access education, training and sustain employment. However, a continuing failure to tackle the barriers set out in this briefing mean that overall employment outcomes for women in contact with the criminal justice system remain poor. More effort across government is required to ensure that all women with a criminal record have access to the support and opportunities they need to gain and sustain employment. We recommend that:

- The government should act swiftly to make the necessary changes to the disclosure and barring system to comply with the recent Supreme Court judgment, and undertake a comprehensive review of the proportionality of the present system, including its impact on women.

- Employers, employer organisations, recruitment agencies and human resources specialist should be proactive in ensuring there are no unnecessary or disproportionate barriers to employing women with criminal convictions, and should regard this an integral part of fair employment practices.
• HM Prison and Probation Service should increase the availability and quality of unpaid work placements for women and provision should be appropriate for those with dependent children, including support with childcare arrangements.

• HM Prison and Probation Service and the Ministry of Justice must make a concerted effort to increase the use of ROTL for women in prison and put measures in place to make sure ROTL placements are accessible and beneficial to individuals. Any barriers to ROTL should be promptly addressed.

• The availability and take up of ROTL for both paid and unpaid work from all women’s prisons must be monitored on a quarterly basis and all barriers to its use urgently addressed – including travel time and costs of travel.

• The impact of the Victims Levy on women’s earnings should be assessed and the policy reviewed.

• The Education and Employment Strategy committed to testing how digital access could be increased within women’s prisons and a clear implementation plan and timescale for this should be provided.

• The Department of Work and Pensions should work with the Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service to ensure that individuals can set up Universal Credit claims prior to their release from prison and to address other barriers to this income support.

• Central government, local councils and others should invest in women’s centres to provide a ‘one-stop shop’ where women can access training, education and education support in a women-only environment, delivering well-evidenced benefits. Funding needs to be long-term on the basis this is necessary community infrastructure.

• Prison governors should ensure that when working with the New Futures Network the specific employment needs, skills and aspirations of women are taken into account, as well as their caring responsibilities. Employment conditions and opportunities in a woman’s resettlement area need to be well-understood.

• The Ministry of Justice must work with governors of women’s prisons to ensure they have the right training, support and data when handling their education budgets to tailor individual provision.

• The provision of affordable childcare as an integral part of initiatives aimed at supporting women in contact with the criminal justice system to engage in employment, training and education urgently needs to be improved.
Relevant organisations

England and Wales

A Fairer Chance
A Fairer Chance provides specialist employment and skills interventions for ex-offenders, current serving prisoners as well as care leavers long term unemployed and older workers.
www.afairerchance.com/

Adelaide House Women’s Centre
Adelaide House is a Women’s Approved Premises in Liverpool, which provides residential support and interventions for up to 20 adult women. They run groups and activities to support women’s resettlement including partnership courses with agencies that help women back into employment. Adelaide House works with Achieve Northwest Connect to provide women with individualised pathways that address their barriers to work.
www.adelaidehouse.org

The Beth Centre
The Beth Centre is a women-only, safe and confidential space in south London providing expert support for women at risk of entering, or affected by the criminal justice system. The centre offers support with access to education, employment and finances. Working Chance runs employment workshops at the centre. www.womeninprison.org.uk/services/in-the-community.php?s=1970-01-01-the-beth-centre

Cambridge Women’s Resources Centre
The Cambridge Women’s Resource Centre is a women’s community space, where women can find practical support on day to day issues including career development and support and advice on finance and debt. The Dawn Project offers a one-stop shop for women who are or have been involved in the criminal justice system or are at risk of offending.
www.cwrc.org.uk

Clean Break
Clean Break’s Members programme is available to women aged 17 and above who have lived experience of the criminal justice system or are at risk of entering it. It offers Members a foundation of learning and skills in theatre performance, creativity and wellbeing, and opportunities to engage in professional, public facing performance projects.
www.cleanbreak.org.uk

The Clink
The Clink restaurant at HMP Styal works to transform the lives of women in prison through work-based training and education. The women working in the restaurant can achieve City & Guilds NVQs in Food Service and Food Preparation and are mentored on release to help them find employment in the UK hospitality industry. www.theclinkcharity.org
**Coaching Inside and Out**
Coaching Inside and Out (CIAO) uses life coaching to challenge and support people convicted of offences or at risk of offending. CIAO began in HMP Styal and now works in HMP Drake Hall and other locations. The coaching supports women to realise their strengths, find their own solutions, and improve their lives and the lives of others with techniques used by business leaders. www.coachinginsideandout.org.uk

**Dress for Success**
Dress for Success helps women to get back into the workplace by preparing them for upcoming job interviews. They deliver one-to-one styling sessions and provide clothing to help women feel confident and boost self-esteem. They also offer interview preparation with interview coaches. www.dressforsuccessgl.org

**The Good Loaf**
The Good Loaf is a social business which aims to provide real employment opportunities to vulnerable and local women, to break the cycle of poverty, unemployment and offending. www.thegoodloaf.co.uk

**Luminary Bakery**
The Luminary Bakery is a social enterprise offering opportunities for women to build a future for themselves, in a safe and professional environment. They offer employability programmes for women who have experienced the criminal justice system, homelessness, domestic violence or prostitution/sexual exploitation. www.luminarybakery.com

**Nacro**
Nacro delivers interventions for marginalised people across England and Wales, with a specific focus on those with experience of the criminal justice system. Nacro offers support with education, employment, finance, benefits and debt, resettlement, training, volunteering, and also provides a range of vocational courses. www.nacro.org.uk

**The Nelson Trust**
The Nelson Trust has two women’s community centres in Gloucester and Swindon, providing a women only space where support needs can be addressed in a safe and supportive environment. The women receive a detailed individual needs assessment including employment, education and training. www.nelsontrust.com/community-based-services/womens-community-services/

**Muslim Women in Prison Project**
The Muslim Women in Prison Project is a community led resettlement project in Bradford, supporting women whilst in prison and on release in the community. muslimhands.org.uk/_ui/uploads/kqe5a9/MWIP_Report.pdf

**Smart Works**
Smart Works provide interview clothes, styling advice and interview training to out-of-work women across the UK. Once a client gains a job, she is linked to a network of women who have recently returned to work. Referrals are accepted from prisons and probation services and voluntary organisations working with women who have offended. www.smartworks.org.uk
**St Giles Trust**
St Giles Trust runs projects across England for vulnerable adults, including those who have had contact with the criminal justice system. Projects specifically for women include a focus on support around employment, training and education. St Giles Trust provides peer led support and works with women individually to help them access employment, volunteering and training opportunities. [www.stgilestrust.org.uk](http://www.stgilestrust.org.uk/)

**Stockport Women’s Centre**
Stockport Women’s Centre offers preventative and holistic support for women in the area, offering a full range of services and activities that have been developed in the response to women’s needs. The centre aims to improve self-esteem and confidence to promote good mental health. [www.stockportwomenscentre.co.uk](http://www.stockportwomenscentre.co.uk/)

**Sue Ryder Prison Volunteer Programme**
Sue Ryder supports the rehabilitation of currently serving prisoners through offering volunteering placements in their shops and central offices. [www.sueryder.org/support-us/volunteer/prison-volunteer-programme](http://www.sueryder.org/support-us/volunteer/prison-volunteer-programme)

**Tomorrow’s Women Wirral**
Tomorrow’s Women Wirral (TWW) is for women aged 18+ in the community and is committed to reducing women’s imprisonment. TWW run a diverse programme of courses to address women’s needs in a safe women-only environment with partner agencies, including Wirral Met College and Novus Education Provider. [www.tomorrowswomen.org.uk](http://www.tomorrowswomen.org.uk)

**Young Mum’s Support Network**
Young Mum’s Support Network (YMSN) is a social enterprise offering support to single and young mothers. YMSN offer access to educational support, mediation and counselling services. Three specific programmes are: Ready Steady Work, Ladies Lunch and their Information Coffee Mornings and offer a pathway to free training courses through their partnerships with local communities and charities. [www.ymsn.co.uk](http://www.ymsn.co.uk)

**Scotland**

**Access to Industry**
Access to Industry works with excluded people to support them move into education and employment in Scotland, including running projects for those who have been involved in the criminal justice system. Access to Industry do this through effective education and training programmes to encourage and support individuals to access employment and higher education opportunities. [www.accesstoindustry.co.uk](http://www.accesstoindustry.co.uk/)

**Apex**
Apex works with individuals who are at risk of offending or reoffending by providing education, support and the opportunities they need to change their behaviour and become effective citizens to lead fulfilling lives. [www.apexscotland.org.uk](http://www.apexscotland.org.uk)
Recruit with Conviction
Recruit with Conviction promotes the employment of individuals with convictions through: working with employers to develop good practice, supporting employability organisations to apply their ‘Apply With Conviction’ approach which is a work shop designed to support organisations to overcome stereotypes, and by influencing political and society changes. www.recruitwithconviction.org.uk/

Shine Women’s Mentoring Service
Shine is a mentoring service that provides women with practical and emotional support and assistance for a minimum of six-months. The mentoring programme aims to meet the needs of women involved in the criminal justice system, including improving opportunities to access employment, training and voluntary work. www.shinementoring.org

Tomorrow’s Women
Tomorrow’s Women in Glasgow is a multi-agency Scottish Government funded centre working with women with complex needs who are involved in the criminal justice system. They provide support around a range of resettlement needs, including job and training advice run through a weekly drop-in where women can receive advice about benefits, work, education and training. www.womenssupportproject.co.uk/content/home/1/

Venture Trust, Next Steps programme
The Next Steps programme is for women whose backgrounds have led to their involvement in offending, or to homelessness or misuse of drugs or alcohol. The programme provides support for up to nine months helping individuals to make and sustain connections to services and employment, education, training or volunteering opportunities within their communities. www.venturetrust.org.uk/programmes/

The Wise Group
The Wise Group’s community justice services provide mentoring and guidance to people serving short prison sentences, supporting their transition back into the community. The Wise Group is a partner in SHINE Women’s Mentoring programme across Glasgow and the West. It provides intensive support to women who are leaving custody and those serving a community payback order. www.thewisegroup.co.uk

Northern Ireland

Falls Women’s Centre
The Falls Women’s Centre in West Belfast aims to empower and support women in the local community by providing education, training and services within a safe and welcoming environment. The centre offers support across a range of needs including drug and alcohol addiction, debt, mental health, accommodation as well as education and employment. The centre offers a childcare facility which is available for mothers receiving support from the centre or who have returned to education or work. fallswomenscentre
Shankill Women’s Centre
Shankill Women’s Centre in North Belfast provides accessible education, support and guidance, including accredited and non-accredited courses as well as assisting women overcome the barriers they may face returning to employment or education. The centre provides classes and courses ranging from Personal Development, GCSEs, Accounts, History, Driving Theory, Computers as well as cultural diversity programmes and a range of health and well-being classes. www.shankillwomenscentre.org.uk

Working Well, NIACRO
Working Well is an employment support programme for individuals in Northern Ireland who have had contact with the criminal justice system. The programme offers specialist services in both the community and prison, providing employability support and disclosure advice for those who may face or have faced discrimination. The programme is available for both men and women although there are specific workers for women and where possible and required a women specific caseworker is allocated. www.niacro.co.uk/working-well-0
End notes

6 Ministry of Justice (2012) Prisoners’ children and family backgrounds Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners, London: MoJ Analytical Services. The figures for men: 65% had been suspended or temporarily excluded, 43% had been expelled or permanently excluded.
36 House of Commons written question 263857, 24 June 2019
Circumstance table (April 2017 to March 2019), London: MoJ


Table 1, Ministry of Justice (2018) Costs per place and costs per prisoner by individual prison, HM Prison and Probation Service Annual Report and Accounts 2017-18 Management Information Addendum, London: MoJ


Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation (2016) A thematic inspection of the provision and quality of services in the community for women who offend: An inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation, London: HMIP


HM Inspectorate of Probation (2016) An Inspection of Through the Gate Resettlement Services for Short-Term Prisoners. A joint inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation and HM Inspectorate of Prisons, London: HMIP


O’Keefe (2003) Moving Mountains: Identifying and addressing barriers to employment, training and education from the voices of women (ex) offenders, Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University.


