

This toolkit is designed to help you build a successful relationship with a prison as a source of future employees. There are many examples of employers who have found that former prisoners make excellent colleagues. But there are some additional complexities to recruiting from prison, and this toolkit should assist you in that worthwhile task.

Background information

1 Prisoners are divided into four security categories:

Category A: Those whose escape would be highly dangerous to the public or national security.

Category B: Those who do not require maximum security, but for whom escape still needs to be made very difficult.

Category C: Those who cannot be trusted in open conditions (i.e. a prison without a secure perimeter) but who are unlikely to try to escape

Category D: Those who can be reasonably trusted not to try to escape, and are given the privilege of an open prison.

Most prisoners approaching release will be in either category C or category D.

Prisons holding prisoners coming up to release are called resettlement prisons. But they vary a great deal in terms of who they hold and what they can offer. There is no substitute for getting to know the local prison you want to deal with.

2 Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL)

Release on Temporary Licence, or as it is usually shortened to ROTL, allows prisoners to leave the prison for short periods of time.

One reason that a prisoner would be allowed ROTL would be for resettlement into the community including the opportunity to take up paid or voluntary work.

ROTL prisoners are carefully risk assessed and monitored and this allows the employer a greater degree of confidence. It also allows the employer to assess the prisoner's work and attitude before potentially offering them a more permanent position on release from prison.

For the prisoner ROTL is advantageous as it allows them to gain work experience and save money before being permanently released and therefore makes for a smoother transition to the community.

If an employer wants to employ a prisoner on ROTL, the place of work will need to be risk-assessed by the prison. There are also some restrictions to ROTL so, for example, the prisoner will need to be back at the prison by a certain time each day. Finally if the prisoner does something wrong within the prison they may be stopped from going out of ROTL with little notice to the employer.

Support from like-minded employers

An increasing number of employers have programmes to take on ex-offenders and it is definitely worth speaking to employers such as [Timpson](#), [Virgin Rail](#) or [Keltbray](#) who have established pathways into employment.

Business in the Community

Business in the Community (BITC) is the Prince's Responsible Business Network. Members work together to tackle a wide range of issues that are essential to creating a fairer society and a more sustainable future including helping people overcome disadvantage by increasing access to sustainable, good employment.

BITC work with participating employers to remove the barriers to ex-offenders gaining employment including the **Ban the Box** campaign which calls on UK employers to give ex-offenders a fair chance to compete for jobs by removing the tick box from application forms and asking about criminal convictions later in the recruitment process.

BITC also run a networking group of employers who are actively recruiting ex-offenders.

Establishing a good relationship with the prison

The key to a good partnership between an employer and a prison is for there to be a named contact point on both sides who has the time to invest and the passion to make it work.

It is vital that there is buy-in from both sides at a senior level and that the partnership is given the full support of both the prison governor and employer's senior staff.

Establish clear pathways of communication: mobiles are not allowed in prison and prison staff often do not spend that much time at their desks so may not be able to answer emails as quickly as employers are used to.

Ask to visit the prison to understand better how it works and the pressures and constraints that staff and prisoners work under. If possible offer a return visit to prison staff for them to better understand your business priorities.

Recruiting/ on-boarding procedures

Most employers will have recruitment procedures that may make it difficult for an ex-offender to gain employment. It is important to go through your recruitment and on-boarding procedures with the prison to ensure that there is nothing that will make it impossible for an ex-offender to succeed.

- **Previous offences:** discuss with the prison which offences would be unacceptable for employment in your organisation. Some offences may be role specific rather than a blanket ban.
- **Identification paperwork:** what paperwork will your HR department need to complete the on-boarding procedure? Some forms of ID, such as proof of address, may be very difficult for prisoners to obtain and if possible this should be taken out of the process. Other forms of ID, such as right to work documentation, are mandatory and you will need to explain to the prison that you can only accept candidates that are able to provide this documentation.
- **Bank accounts:** is it imperative that a prisoner has a bank account when they start to work for you? If this is the case you need to make this clear to the prison.
- **References:** do you require references as part of the recruitment process? Would you accept a reference from a prison tutor in lieu of an employment or personal reference?
- **Requirements of the role:** are there any mandatory requirements of the role such as a prerequisite standard literacy or numeracy or a qualification?
- Do you require a **CV** and **disclosure letter** (explaining the circumstances around a prisoner's offence and what he has done to change)?

The aim of these discussions is to make sure that gaining employment with your organisation is achievable for an ex-offender and that any requirements which would be impossible for most ex-offenders to provide are identified early in the process.

How will the employer select prisoners?

There are different ways for employers to meet prisoners and identify whom they might like to employ:

Job Fairs

Job fairs held in the prison, usually include a number of different employers, sometimes within the same sector, or sometimes across a range of sectors, who will each have a stand and interested prisoners can approach employers to find out more about the roles they have available.

Workshops

It may be possible for the prison to convene smaller groups of prisoners who have been identified as motivated to work and interested in being employed by your company. This is a good opportunity for you to explain what your business does; the key attributes you are looking for in an employee; the recruitment process. This also gives prisoners the chance to ask questions and work out if a role in your business is suitable for them. It is often an excellent idea to run a workshop in the prison before coming in to interview prisoners.

Interviews

The employer comes to interview a group of prisoners identified by the prison as being eligible and offers a role, either on ROTL or on release, to candidates that meet the required standard. It is important to clarify whether you will expect prisoners to sit a formal competency-based interview or whether it will be more of an informal chat. Either way, many prisoners are likely to have had little or no experience of interviewing for a job and interview practice sessions can be very useful.

Support on Release

Ideally the employer will have been able to interview the prisoner prior to release and offer them a provisional position on their release.

However even for a prisoner who has been provisionally offered a post on release and has all the practical arrangements in place, it is likely that there may be initial complications that could derail an otherwise successful employment placement.

These may include:

- other appointments (probation, housing etc) which will take them away from work
- issues with identification documents
- problems with housing

Leaving prison can be the most stressful time for a prisoner and it is vital that they are offered support through this transition period. Unfortunately, most agencies working in the prison cease both contact and support on release and even within the same organisation responsibility for the prisoner is usually handed over to a community-based worker.

Therefore it is crucial that the employer discusses this with the prison before the prisoner is released and sets up a system for communication and support for both the ex-prisoner and the employer so that any issues can be resolved quickly.

The solution to this will need to be worked out on a local level but the ideal is an integrated support package which begins before release and continues post-release. As a minimum post-release support should include:

- a named-contact point for both the employer and ex-offender to get in touch with should any problems arise
- the opportunity for the prisoner to meet and set up a first appointment before release
- ongoing monitoring and feedback from both the ex-offender and employer which is fed back to the prison.

Celebrating success

Prisoners and prison staff rarely hear about what happens after release unless it is bad news. So if you are pleased with the employee or employees you have recruited, please let the prison know!