Supporting clients into learning and skills and work
8. Supporting clients into learning and skills

What this section covers:

- How to identify client need
- What techniques can be used to tackle low motivation?
- What is pro-social modelling?
- What is motivational dialogue?
- What specialist support is available to help ex-offenders into learning and skills?
- What provision is available?
- What funding is available?

“Encouraging prisoners into education and training can be pivotal to their crime free future.”

Frances Crook, the Howard League for Penal Reform.

How to identify client need

Starting points

Ex-offenders will have a wide range of learning and skills needs. Some will already have degrees, others may have no qualifications. However, as can be seen from the table below, offenders as a group have fewer qualifications than the wider population, and may have had more negative experiences at school or of education subsequently.
Supporting the learner’s journey

There are two inter-related aspects that may affect individuals who have received a sentence, either in custody or in the community:

- There is the journey in learning, from the individual’s starting point to achievement and new plans.
- On release, ex-offenders may have a range of issues to deal with. Ex-offenders often have chaotic lifestyles with many problems and may associate with people who have negative values. It can be a difficult process to identify and unravel appropriate support. There is unlikely to be a quick fix solution. For many offenders/ex-offenders with these multiple issues, specialist support will be needed. Section 5 of this guide provides resources to help you support clients with complex needs.

Of course, there are also many offenders will not be in this situation. They may have been convicted of a single offence and be anxious not to experience the consequences again, and their lives might otherwise be relatively stable. Supporting them into learning or employment may be a more straightforward process.

Assessing your client’s multiple needs

The issue of motivation and readiness to learn is complex. There will be occasions when it is not appropriate for your client to pursue learning and skills or employment until other issues have been resolved, for example mental health needs, housing needs and support with substance misuse. There is a danger of setting up ex-offenders to fail. Section 3 of this guide includes further details on identifying and addressing multiple needs.

Assessing the needs of ex-offenders

Lack of continuity has been identified as the single most frustrating factor in relation to learning and work interventions. Section 4 of this guide looks at the IAG support and
learning and skills provision offenders may have received while either in prison or serving their sentence within the community.

The Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) aims to offer a seamless journey for offenders in prison, on probation and on release. The aim is to provide information, advice and guidance throughout an offender’s sentence together with an individual record and learning plan which will accompany people as they move around and beyond the criminal justice system. At the time of publication, the development of an electronic system to facilitate the transfer of records between offender establishments and providers is being evaluated.

You will need to check directly with your client what previous information, advice and guidance they have received, and whether they have a learning plan. The process of identifying needs of ex-offenders will be broadly similar to that used with any other client. The metaphor of the learning journey introduces and promotes the idea of continuity and a positive approach to change.

You will need to work with clients to consider:

- their preferred ways of learning, including pace, self study, part time;
- what funding is available;
- their study skills, including writing, reading, communication and maths skills;
- any particular support required, including crèche, translator, physical learning aids;
- the distance they are willing to travel.

In the ‘Toolkit’

The action plan template and learning line (with guidance on how to use the learning line) included in the Toolkit section of this guide are possible tools to assist you to support clients identify their learning needs and plan their journey.

What techniques can be used to tackle low motivation?

Since many offenders have previously had negative experiences of education that have left them disaffected, low levels of motivation can present significant barriers to learning. The role of the adviser is key in supporting offenders into learning, through engaging and sustaining their interest.

You will support clients’ motivation by offering clear information, advice and feedback and through supporting learners to identify goals and targets. In addition it will be important to:

- communicate your interest in understanding their needs;
- support their determination or increase their desire to change;
- explore ambivalence in relation to decision-making;
- help learners remove the obstacles to change.
It may be a particular challenge to support such clients into being receptive learners. Mental health and drug misuse may also mean that supporting potential learners can be a roller-coaster experience for advisers. You will always need to refer clients to sources of additional support as appropriate.

Two techniques that are recognised as being particularly useful for assisting ex-offenders to think about change and directly tackling the issue of motivation are:

- pro-social modelling;
- motivational dialogue.

 Providing these kinds of support requires specialist skills. If you are not trained in using these approaches it will be appropriate for you to refer clients on. Maintaining a directory of local organisations who can offer these more specialist services is important.

**What is pro-social modelling?**

This technique is based on the view that agencies and organisations working within the criminal justice system can influence the attitudes and behaviours of the people with whom they work, and has become a core element of work with offenders and ex-offenders. It is not suggested that this approach has all the answers. It is recognised that the environment and other factors also impinge on clients’ behaviour, but the focus is on changing attitudes and behaviour.

Pro-social behaviour is not just the opposite of anti-social behaviour (including non-criminal behaviour). Pro-social modelling refers to the process by which workers act as good motivating role models in order to bring out the best in people, and identifies strategies for supporting changed behaviour.

Aspects of good practice for advisers include:

- setting the parameters of what is feasible;
- demonstrating optimism that the client can make positive changes;
- using positive and solution-focused language;
- discouraging, by challenging and confronting, undesired values and behaviour;
- being clear with the client about your role;
- seeking out and using opportunities to praise or affirm efforts to engage with change;
- avoiding stereotyping;
- using language and concepts the client can understand and working with different thinking and learning styles.

The complex emotional and behavioural dynamic which exists between clients and advisers is represented by the diagram below\(^1\) which builds on cognitive behavioural therapy.

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\(^1\) From Transforming Behaviour; Sally Cherry; 2005, p17 Fig 1.2

Guide for IAG practitioners
Produced for advice-resources by NIACE and SOVA
What is motivational dialogue?

Motivational dialogue is based on the view that people are more convinced by arguments they have thought about themselves than by arguments that have been presented to them by others.  

Motivational dialogue tries to elicit statements from clients that acknowledge:

- they have some difficulties;
- they are anxious about the way things are and want to change;
- that life will be better in some way if they do change.

An important role for advisers is in assisting clients to:

- recognise the nature of their problem;
- show concern about the effects of their problem on themselves and others;
- explore the strength of their intention to change;
- express their optimism about the possibility of change and work towards this.

This can be done through a combination of:

- open questions;
- reflections;

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2 This section draws on information from the DfES Standards Unit: “Introduction and background to motivational dialogue”. The work was developed as part of Success for all and is available on the internet at: [http://www.sflqi.org.uk/online/materials/02%20Embedding%20SIL/07%20Engaging%20and%20Motivating%20Learners%20(2.7)/06%20Eng%20Mot%20Lrnrs%20-%20Resource%20Motivate%20Dialogue.pdf](http://www.sflqi.org.uk/online/materials/02%20Embedding%20SIL/07%20Engaging%20and%20Motivating%20Learners%20(2.7)/06%20Eng%20Mot%20Lrnrs%20-%20Resource%20Motivate%20Dialogue.pdf)
summaries;
summaries with bias;
losses and gains analysis to explore ambivalence;
scaling tool to explore optimism.

Useful Questions
(Based on motivational dialogue³.)

Problem Recognition
How has this been a problem?
What difficulties has this caused you?
How has not being able to write well caused you problems?
In what ways do you think others have been harmed by your behaviour?

Concern
What do you think will happen if you do not change your behaviour?
What can you imagine happening if you stay at home?
What worries do you have about not being able to control your temper?

Intention to Change
What would be the benefits of improving your spelling?
What would make you go to the interview this time?
I can see you still feel unsure. What could make you feel more positive about this move?

Optimism
What makes you think things will be different this time?
What do you think will work for you if you decide to try and change?
What would make you attend your interview this time compared to last time?

Traps that reduce the likelihood of change
(Based on motivational dialogue⁴.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trap</th>
<th>Antidote</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attempting to persuade through argument</td>
<td>Use questioning skills and reflective listening to encourage learners to articulate their own reasons for change.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Premature focus**

When advisers believe that they know what a learner needs in order to able to change, they may be tempted to focus on this before the learner is ready to do so. This is likely to trigger resistance.

**Antidote**

Spend time listening to the learner, asking well-chosen questions and reflecting back and checking that the issues have been identified correctly.

**Further information**

- **Pro-social modelling**
  Sally Cherry (2005) *Transforming Behaviour*

- **Motivational dialogue**

**What specialist support is available to help ex-offenders into learning and skills?**

Most current official schemes to support offender learning and skills stop short when a sentence expires. However in addition to the general support available from the Careers Advice Service, local IAG advisers, job centres and local libraries, a number of national and local organisations support ex-offenders into education, training (and employment). A first port of call to find out about specialist local organisations could be Jobcentre Plus.

A list of national organisations who provide specialist support can be found in Section 13 of this guide. You should also develop your own directory of local agencies.

**Key contact**

**NACRO**
169 Clapham Road London, SW9 0PU
**Tel:** 020 7840 6464 (Resettlement Helpline)
**Email:** helpline@nacro.org.uk
**Website:** [www.nacro.org.uk](http://www.nacro.org.uk)

Resettlement Plus Helpline 020 7840 6464 provides details of local education and training schemes. NACRO’s website: [www.nacro.org.uk](http://www.nacro.org.uk) gives access to advice leaflets.
What provision is available?

The purposes of education for offenders and ex-offenders are the same as for all learners: to equip people with the skills, knowledge and understanding they will need to lead life as workers, as citizens and to be fulfilled in their personal and family life.

As a result of the new OLASS contracts, some providers in your area will be developing specialist knowledge and understanding around the provision of learning and skills to offenders. You will be able to obtain details of who these providers are from your regional Learning and Skills Council. Contact details can be found at www.lsc.gov.uk.

You may want to take account of the following specific types of provision, depending on the particular needs and interests of your client.

First Steps Learning

A skills and qualifications focus is not necessarily the appropriate starting point for all people. Activities that can give people a sense of self esteem can often be the way into learning and skills. Many ex-offenders may not have accessed learning during their sentence. Drama, music, dance, art, personal development, health and wellbeing, community development and family learning can be important springboards into further personal development and learning, as well as being complete learning pathways in their own right.

The Arts

The Arts can enable people, make powerful personal statements, increase confidence and re-direct energies in a non-harmful way. They can also provide stepping-stones to employability through the development of transferable skills such as team working, problem-solving and the ability to experiment and innovate as well as the development of practical skills.

Further information

Further information on arts education for offenders and ex-offenders can be found at:

**Arts on the Out**  
Website: [www.artsontheout.co.uk](http://www.artsontheout.co.uk)  
A web-based resource.

**Koestler Trust**  
Joss Blake, Steve Porter or Ceri Williams  
The Koestler Arts Centre  
168a Du Cane Road  
London W12 0TX  
Tel: 020 8740 0333  
Email: [info@koestlertrust.org.uk](mailto:info@koestlertrust.org.uk)  
Website: [www.koestlertrust.org.uk](http://www.koestlertrust.org.uk)
Writing, Reading, Speaking and Listening, Numeracy and ESOL

The development of these skills is only one part of any learner’s journey. All too often basic skills learning can dominate the opportunities offered to ex-offenders. Nevertheless they are an important part of that journey. They can be studied in their own right or embedded as part of a vocational or other course. Over 138,000 people achieving a first literacy or numeracy or language qualification by July 2005 were offenders in prison.

Life skills

Ex-offenders may benefit from courses to support people in everyday living, provided by adult and community learning providers, credit unions and Citizens Advice Bureaux. Such courses can include money management, claiming benefits, understanding your pay packet, what to do if you get into debt, cooking, parenting and supporting your child’s learning. Currently, the number of these courses is limited, so you will need to check local availability.

Work experience, learning and skills: New Deal

The Government New Deal scheme offers learning and skills and work experience. Some schemes are voluntary and some mandatory and will affect benefits if refused. They are available to people:

- age 18-24 and have been claiming Job Seeker’s Allowance (JSA) for 6 months or more;
- 25 years+ claiming JSA for 18 out of the last 21 months;
- age 50+ and out of work for 6 months or more;
- lone parents and their youngest child is less than 16 years and the parent is not working or working less than 16 hours per week;
- in receipt of disability/health-related benefits;
- who are the partner of someone claiming a working age benefit on their behalf for 6 months or more.

Further information

Further information on work-related training opportunities can be found at:

Jobcentre Plus
Tel: 0845 6060234
Website: www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk
Apprenticeships

These are available in most industries and give people a chance to get a recognised certificate at NVQ level 2 and in key skills. Advanced apprenticeships offer technical certificates at NVQ level 3 and above.

Further information

Further information on apprenticeships is available at:

www.apprenticeships.org.uk
0800 015 0600

Different ways of learning

People learn in a variety of ways. As with all learners, ex-offenders need to be encouraged to think about how best they learn. For example distance learning can be very demanding in terms of self-discipline and does not suit everyone. It requires students to organise their own time and to take responsibility for their own learning. Ex-offenders may not have had access to the internet and may need a blended learning approach which includes tutor support as well as access to learning programmes.

Key contact

The learndirect website www.learndirect.co.uk, or the learning traveller in the Toolkit section of this guide will help you to support clients to think through their range of options.

Learndirect
Tel: 0800 101 901
Website: www.learndirect.co.uk

What funding is available?

Ex-offenders will be subject to the same fees and costs as other learners.

The Funding Directory, developed by advice-resources, is a fully searchable database of funding opportunities from non-charitable sources (e.g. adult learning grants and career development loans). It includes a deadline prompt and news updates. The service can be accessed free at www.advice-resources.co.uk/adviceresources/general/dir/fun_dir
A number of charities and organisations offer support to offenders and ex-offenders to cover their learning and skills expenses. Look into your local networks and add any relevant contact details to your directory of further support.

The Funder Finder database is a key source of information regarding possible organisations supporting ex-offenders.
9. Supporting clients into paid work

What this section covers:
- What are the employment issues for ex-offenders?
- Supporting access to employment and assessing need
- Job search
- Advocating for clients with employers and intermediaries
- Do particular groups have distinctive employment needs?

The challenges of supporting ex-offenders into work are high but the value is immense:

“No one should be under any illusion that providing offenders with the skills they need to seek, secure and sustain decent jobs is a cure-all. None the less there is widespread recognition that having a regular income can help ex-offenders to establish stability in their housing and family situations, two significant elements in reducing re-offending.”

Adult Learning Inspectorate, Talisman October 2006

The Government believes that employment is one of the key factors in reducing the risk of re-offending, and breaking the cycle of crime.

Government statistics show that if a person with a criminal record finds settled employment or receives training with secured employment at the end, the chances of re-offending are cut by two thirds.6

The current Government strategy on supporting offenders into work is outlined in section 4 of this guide.

What are the employment issues for ex-offenders?

The particular needs of ex-offenders vary considerably. Individually tailored support is key to an ex-offender’s resettlement. Some clients need little support to find work. This may be particularly the case if they had a job before their conviction. Others may need more help, with an introduction to work through volunteering, social enterprise, training programmes, mentoring, or work experience.

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5 Apply Within - DVD produced by the SOVA ‘Women into Work’ project.

Guide for IAG practitioners
Produced for advice-resources by NIACE and SOVA
Barriers

Barriers to ex-offenders getting work may include the following:

- low skills;
- poor previous experience of schooling;
- a history of drug or alcohol abuse;
- limited work experience or specific job-related skills;
- housing problems;
- a criminal record can restrict some areas of employment available;
- limited interest from some employers in taking on ex-offenders.

Barriers to employment: some statistics

Over a third of employers would exclude all ex-offenders from their recruitment process.

A third of the 90,000 or so people released from prison in England and Wales have nowhere to live on release.

It is estimated that over two thirds of people released from prison have no job to go to and ex-offenders are eight times more likely to be unemployed than anyone else in the community.

What jobs can ex-offenders not do?

Under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, certain offences are considered as ‘spent’ after a period of time. This varies according to the length of sentence and age of offender at the time of conviction. However the provisions of this act are not widely understood by many employers. For more information about restricted areas of work and spent convictions see section 6 of this guide.

Who are the ‘friendly’ employers?

Given suitable support, proper risk assessment and carefully chosen placements some employers will be prepared to give offenders and ex-offenders a chance.

Business in the Community is a network of over 750 UK companies committed to improving their positive impact on society. Their website www.bitc.org.uk contains a list of members and provides help and guidance on employing ex-offenders including:

- risk assessment;
- award-winning examples of good practice;
- legal framework about employing ex-offenders;
- research;
- creating employment policy related to the employment of ex-offenders.
You should develop your own local directory of employers who have a good track record of providing employment opportunities for ex-offenders.

Supporting access to employment and assessing need

What support may clients have already received?

Section 4 outlines the support offenders may have received if they were in prison. Although the quality of training in prisons has improved markedly over recent years there remains much to be done to prepare offenders for the world of work.⁶ Work opportunities for offenders currently rely heavily on the enthusiasm and commitment of individual prison staff and their contacts with local employers. Prison staff, who are specialist resettlement officers, often pre-screen candidates before putting forward offenders for a personal interview with an employer, and employers are advised by the personal recommendations from prison staff who have an understanding of the needs of employers they have contact with.

Motivating and engaging clients

Issues around motivation and motivational techniques are outlined in section 8 of this guide. Two key approaches to tackling low motivation that you could consider using with clients – pro-social modelling and motivational interviewing – are described in detail.

Effective guidance into work for ex-offenders

Effective guidance into work would consider the following areas:

- preferred employment;
- work history;
- educational history;
- qualifications and training;
- offending history;
- restricted areas of work;
- risk assessment;
- transferable skills;
- personal qualities and skills;
- reading, writing language and numeracy skills;
- personal barriers to employment education and training.

In the ‘Toolkit’

An example of an action plan for supporting access to work is included in the Toolkit.

⁶ ALI Talisman Oct 2006 p2
Job Search

Job Search Skills

Jobcentre Plus is a good starting point for advice about local support. You should also be aware of local projects which ex-offenders may be eligible to join.

A range of organisations provide job search skills courses. Elements include:

- places to look for work;
- researching the job;
- researching the company;
- filling in application forms;
- CVs;
- interview skills: appearance, attitude, first impressions, travel to interview.

There are many practical guides on aspects of job search skills. Some present particular advice for ex-offenders on filling in CVs and job application letters. NACRO’s Sorting yourself out guide to applying for work (with a criminal record) is a good example. (See also the companion guide to this one.)

Filling in application forms and CVs

Section 6 of this guide discusses disclosure of criminal records in detail.

Although some employers will turn ex-offenders down if they disclose their criminal record, many employers will still consider applicants if they do not think their conviction is relevant. It is important to be as positive as possible when disclosing, whether by letter or at interview.

The following approaches are likely to prove most effective.

- Keep discussion of the offence(s) to a minimum. Do not go into great detail. Keep the explanation brief, mentioning only the type of conviction, the date and the sentence given or time served.
- Mention briefly any personal problems which contributed to the offending behaviour, but have since been successfully overcome, e.g. drugs, debt, relationship difficulties. Express regret, and explain that these issues are in the past.
- Accept responsibility for what happened, stress that the offence was a mistake and display regret.
- Try to give reasons why the employer should discount the conviction, for example because the crime was committed some time ago, because it is not relevant to the job being applied for, or because the crime sounds more serious than it was.
- Do not criticise the criminal justice system or suggest that you were unfairly treated.
- Emphasise real keenness to find work and a determination not to re-offend.

The important thing is to reassure employers that there is no longer a risk, and to show that the applicant has the right skills to do the job.
Where application forms ask about convictions or criminal records, it may be best to enclose a separate letter explaining the situation, and write ‘see letter’ on the form. In the letter clients should give a short account of the offence and their attitude to it. They should seal the envelope and mark it as ‘private and confidential’.

Chronological gaps in work history due to a prison sentence could be identified by writing ‘Not in employment’. Details could then be provided in the covering letter or at interview.

When clients are applying for a job by sending a CV, gaps in employment (or learning) history could be identified by writing either ‘Not in employment’ or ‘Unavailable for work – due to personal circumstances’. Again, these could be expanded upon in a covering letter or at interview. Alternatively, gaps in employment could be made less conspicuous by creating a skills-based CV, rather than one which is chronological.

Examples of CVs can also be found on the Jobcentre Plus website. The advice-resources website (www.advice-resources.co.uk) and Careers Advice Service website www.direct.gov.uk/careersadvice also have CV builders. These resources are free. It is worth noting that some websites offer a paid service to develop a CV.

In the ‘Toolkit’

A template for a skills based CV can be found in the ‘Toolkit’ section of this guide.

Examples of covering letters can be found in the NACRO resettlement practitioner guide: Applying for work with a criminal record and are also obtainable through the NACRO website: www.nacro.org.uk

All the general rules about making strong job applications apply. Clients need to:
- make sure they show they can do the job;
- ensure that the application looks good;
- focus on applying for the jobs they are most likely to get;
- follow the application procedures specified for each job – e.g. don’t send a CV if the post requires an application form;
- avoid giving employers any reason to reject them at the initial sift phase.

If clients still cannot get jobs...

If, despite the support of an adviser, clients still are unable to find employment, it may be because their record is so serious that an employer cannot accept it. Or it may be a combination of a criminal record and aspects of their current lifestyle or long bouts of unemployment. In this case, clients may wish to consider training or voluntary work.

Before accepting a job....

Jobcentre Plus has a number of services for clients who are thinking about starting work or have been offered a job and are:
- worried about making ends meet until their first pay packet arrives, or
- unsure if it is the right job.
**Better Off Calculation**
Clients can ask for an interview with their personal adviser at Jobcentre Plus to request an estimate of how they may be better off receiving their wage as opposed to benefits.

**Rapid Reclaim**
Clients can use this service to claim benefit again within 12 weeks of a previous claim ending. It aims to give confidence to start a new job if they are not sure it will last and they are concerned it will be difficult to claim benefit again.

**Work Trial**
A chance to try out a job for up to 15 working days to test if it is the right job for clients and to show employers they are the right person for the job. It is a volunteer programme and benefits are not affected. Access depends on claimants’ circumstances.

**Job Grant**
A non-taxable payment to those who have been receiving benefits continuously for 26 weeks or more and are moving into full time (16 hours plus) work.
£100 for single people and couple without children
£250 for lone parents and couple with children

**Mortgage Support**
It may be possible to claim for a mortgage interest run on payment in the first weeks after starting work, if clients have been receiving previous support with mortgage and house loan payments.

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**Advocating for clients with employers and intermediaries**

You may be able to play an important role in supporting clients into work by advocating with local employers and their intermediaries. Developing your skills, knowledge and understanding around how to approach employers and work with them can widen opportunities for clients.

Research undertaken by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2007) suggests that the majority of employers would consider employing ex-offenders if:

- applicants were shown to have the relevant skills;
- information about the support available to employers taking on ex-offenders were more widely disseminated.

You will need to show that your client has the skills needed to do the job, and this is likely to include ‘soft’ skills that employers value, such as honesty, reliability, team-working and communication.

There is a range of material available which explains the potential benefits to employers of recruiting ex-offenders and addresses any concerns they might have. Materials include case studies, frequently asked questions and advice on recruitment practices.
Some myths about employing ex-offenders

Ex-offenders are high risk and untrustworthy
- Most people with a criminal record have never been to prison. Most offences are carried out by young men between 18 and 25 years. They often have to declare their conviction long after it ceases to be relevant to their lives.

Ex-offenders will not stay long in employment
- Research shows that there is no significant difference between the length of time individuals with a criminal record stay with an organisation compared to those individuals who do not have a criminal record.

Other employees will feel uncomfortable working with ex-offenders
- With 1 in 5 adults having a criminal record most people are already working alongside an ex-offender – they just don’t know it.

Ex-offenders are inexperienced, unskilled and unmotivated
- 1 in 5 adults have a criminal record. They cover the range of skills experiences and attitudes that organisations need.

Ex-offenders are likely to re-offend
- Home Office statistics show that if a person with a criminal record finds settled employment or receives training with secured employment at the end, the chances of their re-offending are cut by two thirds.

Ex-offenders require more supervision
- Applicants should be appointed on merit and on this basis should not need any more support than other employees.

What is the business case for employing ex-offenders?

- Recruitment costs to businesses can be reduced if linked to a rehabilitation scheme.
- Recruitment difficulties can be resolved: skills gaps filled.
- Retention: research has shown that 47% of employees with a criminal record stayed at the same organisation for over 3 years.
- Many employers have found ex-offenders just as hard working, reliable and loyal as any other employee.
- Many businesses recognise that it is cheaper to the economy to help put someone into a job than back into prison.

Opportunities with large scale employers

Many public sector and large companies have human resource policies concerning the employment of ex-offenders. Some will have clearly articulated the business case for delivering safe and fair recruitment policies.

In public sector and large-scale employers with good practice in employing ex-offenders, recruitment staff are likely to have been trained in their organisations policy for employing ex-offenders.
ex-offenders and in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act. HR staff should be aware of the issues surrounding employing ex-offenders, and managers and employees should have access to training on understanding the organisation’s policy and their own responsibilities with regard to ex-offenders.

Opportunities of work with small and medium sized businesses:

There are advantages and disadvantages for ex-offenders seeking work with small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).  

Advantages

- SMEs together account for more than half of the employment in the UK so offer a sizeable potential opportunity.
- Many ex-offenders find it difficult to cope with the size, protocols and structures of large organisations and working in less formalised environments may feel preferable.
- There are a growing number of case studies of small and medium sized businesses that have had positive experiences of employing ex-offenders related to competence, reliability and lack of risk to colleagues or clients.

Disadvantages

- SMEs often have little knowledge or understanding of offenders and the nature of their offences and little support and advice from official quarters.
- Many SMEs do not have written policies on recruiting people with criminal records.
- In small businesses employees may be expected to ‘hit the ground running’; take responsibility for their own development; adapt quickly and take on wide ranging responsibilities. Many ex-offenders may not yet be ready to take on these kinds of challenges.
- The contribution of individuals can have a direct impact on the performance of an SME and many employers can find strong reasons for not taking on the risk of employing ex-offenders.

Further information

Business in the Community
137 Shepherdess Walk, London N1 7RQ
Tel: 0870 600 2482
Email: information@bitc.org.uk
Website: www.bitc.org.uk

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)
151 The Broadway, London, SW19 1JQ
Tel: 020 8612 6200
Website: www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/dvsequ/exoffenders

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8 The Adult Learning Inspectorate; Talisman; page2, October 2006
Do particular groups have distinctive employment needs?

Women

There is now a body of research evidence which points to women prisoners having lower education levels and less stable housing than men in prison. They are also much more likely to be the sole carers of children and responsible for the maintenance of a home. At least 70% have some kind of mental health problem and their rates of substance misuse are higher than among male offenders.

It is therefore the case that while many women who are offenders aspire to having a job, some may not be able to benefit from job search or move into a job placement in the week they are released, if their priorities at this stage are accommodation and their children. As with all advice and support, it needs to be appropriate to need. Some organisations support the specific needs of women who are ex-offenders.

Persistent offenders

A number of probation services are beginning to pilot ways of working with prolific and persistent offenders (PPOs). There is intensive supervision from the police after release and very close working between the police and the PPO team. Often the focus is on bringing structure into the lives of persistent offenders and offering a range and depth of support.
Further information

The following organisations and charitable trusts can provide further information and support.

National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO)
169 Clapham Road, London, SW9 0PU
Tel: 020 7840 6464 (Resettlement Helpline)
Tel: 0800 0181 259 (freephone for ex-offenders and families)
Email: helpline@nacro.org.uk
Website: http://www.nacro.org.uk

The crime reduction charity provides education, training and employment opportunities, including work tasters and placements, to some 10,000 prisoners, ex-offenders and unemployed people in partnership with employers, government agencies and voluntary bodies.

Red Kite Learning
5-13 Trinity Street, London, SE1 1DB
Tel: 020 7378 9400
Email: info@rkl.org.uk
Website: www.rkl.org.uk

A social enterprise that believes in helping people, including ex-offenders, achieve their full potential. They provide online resources free to all and face-to-face support for people in the London area. Online resources related to employment include:

- Interview Assistant, including: researching the job, researching the company, appearance, planning your journey to interview, attitude, first impressions, the interview itself.
- Basic Skills Worksheets, including job search-related worksheets.
- CV wizard.

St Giles Trust
64-68 Camberwell Church Street, Camberwell, London SE5 8JB
Tel: 020 7703 7000
Email: info@stgilestrust.org.uk
Website: www.stgilestrust.org.uk

Based in the south east of England. This trust helps offenders find a home and a job.

Apex Charitable Trust Ltd
St Alphage House, Wingate Annexe, 2 Fore Street, London, EC2Y 5DA
Tel: 020 7638 5931
E-mail: jobcheck@apextrust.com
Website: www.apextrust.com

Seeks to help people with criminal records to obtain appropriate jobs or self employment by providing them with the skills they need in the labour market and by working with employers.
to break down barriers. They have 21 projects around the country.

**The Prince’s Trust**  
18 Park Square East, London NW1 4LH  
**Tel:** 020 7543 1234  
**Website:** [www.princes-trust.org.uk](http://www.princes-trust.org.uk)

Provides a range of support to help young people between the ages of 14-30 change their lives.

**Women in Prison**  
1a Aberdeen Studios, 22 Highbury Grove, London, N5 2EA  
**Tel:** 020 7226 5879  
**Website:** [www.womeninprison.org.uk](http://www.womeninprison.org.uk)

Delivers a range of education and resettlement services to women in and leaving prison. They provide housing and resettlement advice; fund open learning and educational materials; provide advice and guidance on education training and employment in most women’s prisons.

**Rainer**  
Rectory Lodge, High Street, Brasted, Kent TN16 1JF  
**Tel:** 01959 578 200  
**Email:** mail@raineronline.org  
**Website:** [www.raineronline.org](http://www.raineronline.org)

Offers under-supported young people a range of services designed to give them the emotional and practical support to lead successful and fulfilled lives.
10. Supporting clients into voluntary work

What this section covers:
- What are the advantages of volunteering?
- Do volunteers need to disclose a criminal record?
- Does voluntary work affect benefit claims?
- Finding out about voluntary work opportunities

What are the advantages of volunteering?

Many ex-offenders will have little history of legitimate employment and may have experienced long term unemployment. This will be particularly so for younger people, and for women with dependent children. Lack of work experience compounds the difficulties which ex-offenders face in entering the labour market.

Voluntary work is attractive and beneficial for ex-offenders because, besides being interesting and rewarding in itself, it provides an opportunity to gain work experience.

By undertaking voluntary work your client can:
- gain experience to include on their CV and talk about at job interviews;
- develop new skills that will enhance their employability, such as team working, communication, self-reliance and problem-solving;
- demonstrate to employers that they are committed and reliable and have moved on from offending behaviour;
- gain references from after the time of conviction;
- develop existing skills;
- keep in touch with the routine and world of work;
- build self-confidence and self-esteem by making a positive contribution to the community and society and meeting new people;
- develop and maintain motivation whilst looking for work;
- explore new and different areas of employment;
- meet people and develop a network of new contacts.
Do volunteers need to disclose a criminal record?

One of the attractions of volunteering for ex-offenders is that it provides an opportunity to enter the workplace and make a good impression without the need to disclose a criminal record.

However, your clients need to be aware that if they are seeking to volunteer in an area of work that is exempted from the terms of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 — for example work that will involve substantial contact with children or vulnerable adults — they may be asked to undergo a Criminal Records Bureau check and their conviction will be disclosed. You should ensure that they understand these restrictions when supporting them to consider volunteering as an option.

Further information

Volunteering England has produced a range of materials to support organisations that take on volunteers to adopt fair, appropriate and equitable recruitment practices in relation to ex-offenders, for example, Involving Ex-offenders in Volunteering, produced in association with NACRO. These are available via their website.

Volunteering England
Regents Wharf, 8 All Saints Street, London N1 9RL
Tel: 0845 305 9379
Email: volunteering@volunteeringengland.org
Website: www.volunteering.org.uk

How does voluntary work affect benefit claims?

You should always check with Jobcentre Plus before advising clients about the impact on benefits of undertaking voluntary work. Failure to give correct information could jeopardise your client’s financial stability.

Jobseeker’s Allowance

There is no limit to the number of hours of voluntary work a claimant can undertake. However, they must continue to meet the rules on actively seeking work, and be willing and able to attend a job interview at 48 hours’ notice and to take up paid employment at a week’s notice.

You should advise clients to tell Jobcentre Plus about any voluntary work they undertake. They are also required to tell JCP about any payments they receive, including payments in kind such as meal vouchers, as these may affect entitlement to benefits. Payments for expenses incurred, including travel expenses, will not affect benefits.
Incapacity Benefit

There is no limit to the number of hours of voluntary work that a claimant can undertake. However, they need to inform Jobcentre Plus that they intend to start volunteering, and receive confirmation that they will be allowed to do the work.

New Deal

Voluntary work can be undertaken as an option under the New Deal for 18-24 year olds. Clients will receive £400 in addition to their usual benefits.

Key contact

| Jobcentre Plus: | Tel: 0845 6060234 |
| Website: www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk |

For local contact details and specific advice on benefits.

Finding out about voluntary work opportunities

Further Information

Local information

Local press, libraries and community centres are likely to have information about volunteering opportunities available in the area.

Local Volunteer Bureau or Volunteer Information Centre

Local centres offer informal discussions or in-depth interviews to prospective volunteers.

Volunteering England

Regents Wharf, 8 All Saints Street
London N1 9RL
Tel: 0845 305 9379
Email: volunteering@volunteeringengland.org
Website: www.volunteering.org.uk

www.do-it.org.uk
This website covers all aspects of volunteering. It includes a database of over 500,000 opportunities to volunteer across the UK, regularly updated with data from 350 volunteer bureaux and 250 national and regional charities.

Guardian

Wednesday’s newspaper contains details of national volunteering opportunities.
Direct contact with organisations
Where a client knows which organisation they would like to work for, a direct approach can be made.
11. Self-employment

What this section covers:
- What are the attractions of self-employment for ex-offenders?
- What about insurance?
- Where can clients go for advice and support on becoming self-employed?

What are the attractions of self-employment for ex-offenders?

Many ex-offenders are attracted to self-employment because it is seen as a way of overcoming the significant and distinctive disadvantage that they face in the labour market. It offers a way of getting into employment without having to disclose their criminal record to a prospective employer or explain gaps in employment history. However, clients need to be prepared for the fact that self-employment is also a very tough option, and their criminal record will still need to be disclosed to obtain insurance.

Some other features of self-employment that may make it attractive include:

- flexibility to work at home or around other commitments such as childcare;
- independence and a chance to reap the rewards of work;
- the choice of what work to do and when and how to do it;
- no boss, company hierarchy or office politics;
- fewer worries about becoming unemployed.

Research confirms that, especially during the early stages, hours are long and pay is low and new businesses are vulnerable. In addition some of the characteristics that have been linked to successful self-employment are not typically associated with ex-offenders, for example:

- high levels of self-motivation and self-discipline;
- self-confidence to take responsibility for making decisions;
- high levels of qualification;
- a good employment history, or previous experience of self-employment.

To succeed, clients will need access to high quality advice and support, to enable them to develop their business and enterprise skills and to access funding. Financial and non-financial support is vital to start up a business and ensure sustainability.
Ideally, clients who are serious about self-employment will have begun to explore this option whilst serving their sentence. There are a number of projects, agencies and initiatives working with offenders, both in prison and in the community, which aim to equip them for subsequent self-employment. Further details can be found at the end of this section.

The advantages and disadvantages of self-employment can be summarised as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No need to disclose convictions to prospective employers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>No need to explain gaps in employment history.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choice of what to do and when and how to do it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flexibility to work at a place and time to suit.</td>
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<tr>
<td>No boss or company hierarchy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No office politics.</td>
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<tr>
<td>No worries about being sacked or made redundant.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need to disclose conviction to obtain insurance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for knowledge and skills to set up and run a business.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Need for funds for initial outlay.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long working hours.</td>
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<td>Low pay, especially during the early stages of the business.</td>
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<tr>
<td>New businesses are vulnerable until established.</td>
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<tr>
<td>No job security.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of contact with work colleagues.</td>
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**In the ‘Toolkit’**

The above table is also included in the ‘Toolkit’ section of this guide.
What about insurance?

Depending on the nature of their business and how they intend to trade, self-employed people are required by law to take out certain types of insurance. The need to obtain insurance poses a particular difficulty for ex-offenders. While an ex-offender does not need to mention any spent convictions when buying insurance, they are required to declare any unspent convictions. The disclosure periods for insurance are the same as those for employment, and are set out in Section 6 of this guide.

When ex-offenders reveal their conviction to an insurance company it may mean that they are refused cover or that they have to pay extra for that cover. It is not only offenders themselves who have problems with insurance – their families and partners are often affected as well, for instance often having to pay extra for household insurance.

However it is absolutely essential that an ex-offender declares any unspent conviction when purchasing insurance. If they do not do so and then have to make a claim, the insurer would not have to pay out on the claim. In addition, the person would be breaking the law and could be prosecuted for fraud.

Further information

Specific advice on obtaining insurance can be obtained from the following:

NACRO
169 Clapham Road, London SW9 0PU
Tel: 020 7840 6464 (Resettlement Helpline)
Tel: 0800 0181 259 (freephone for ex-offenders and families)
Email: helpline@nacro.org.uk
Website: www.nacro.org.uk

Unlock
34a High Street, Snodled, Kent ME6 5AG
Tel: 01634 247350
Email: enquiries@unlock.org.uk
Website: www.unlock.org.uk
unlock.org.uk/xoffenders.aspx?id=4

Where can clients go for advice and support on becoming self-employed?

BEAT (Business, Enterprise, Advice and Training)

This initiative helps prisoners in a number of establishments to develop business plans and provides advice and ongoing support during the first two years of trading.

Tel. 0207 7934294

Guide for IAG practitioners
Produced for advice-resources by NIACE and SOVA 90
Business Link
Tel: 0845 600 9006
Website: www.businesslink.gov.uk
Check website for local offices.

Business advice and a range of other services are available to help people who want to set up their own business. Business Link also helps small businesses that have recently started up. Advisers can offer in-depth help with business planning. It operates through a network of local offices.

Citizen’s Advice Bureau
Website: www.adviceguide.org.uk
www.adviceguide.org.uk/index/life/employment/self-employment_checklist.htm

Check website for local offices.

The CAB’s online advice resource, Adviceguide, provides a comprehensive checklist for those considering self-employment.

Jobcentre Plus
Tel: 0845 6060234
Website: www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk

Check website for local offices.

Advice is available for people wanting to start up their own business. Business start-up grants of between £20 and £90 a week for between 26 and 66 weeks may be available. Some programmes offer a three-stage training course, delivered by specialists in self-employment.

Prince’s Trust
18 Park Square East, London NW1 4LH
Tel: 0800 842 842
Website: www.princes-trust.org.uk

Financial support and a range of business support services are available to unemployed people aged between 18 and 30. This includes ongoing advice and support from a volunteer business broker for three years from start-up.

The ACORN project works specifically with offenders and ex-offenders.

PRIME
Astral House, 1268 London Rd, London SW16 4ER
Tel: 0800 783 1904
Website: www.primeinitiative.org.uk
Business support, advice and training as well as financial support is available to help people aged 50 and over to set up their own business.

Shell LIVEWIRE
Design Works Unit 15, William Street, Felling, Gateshead, Tyne & Wear NE10 0JP
Tel: 0845 757 3252.
Email: enquiries@shell-livewire.org
Website: www.shell-livewire.org

Through a network of local offices, advice and support are offered to people aged 16 to 30 wishing to set up their own business.