

## **Briefing: Offender Employment**

Despite overwhelming evidence that employment reduces reoffending rates by as much as 50%, three quarters of prisoners leave prison without a job to go to (Social Exclusion Unit 2002). Indeed, almost one in eight prisoners says they have never had a job.

Offenders can face multiple barriers including a lack of skills and qualifications, lack of adequate housing, substance abuse issues, damaged social ties, and employers' negative perceptions. Without adequate preparation for life outside custody, an offender will often return to the behaviour that led them to prison. By contrast, participants who receive mentoring, coaching and supported job searching are far more likely to progress into sustainable employment and a crime-free future life.

There are a variety of resettlement projects and initiatives engaging with offenders and former offenders. Yet overall the picture on provision is mixed. Prison service resettlement is limited with less than a third of those returning from prison receiving support from a statutory agency in some cases. While third sector organisations such as St Giles Trust ably support pilot in several areas, there is a vital need to develop and diffuse a sustainable approach, particularly for those with medium employability skills and medium risk. The challenge is to make the most of existing provision, taking the best ideas on board and ensuring that the vital transition points are covered.

With the incoming coalition administration, we believe that now is an opportune time for a reconsideration of the policy framework surrounding offender employment. Important issues to consider include segmenting the offender population, gaps in co-ordination at local level, reforming the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (1974) and models of funding.

Our aim is to identify what works and what doesn't, and use that to highlight a range of potential solutions - from building on existing arrangements to developing new initiatives.